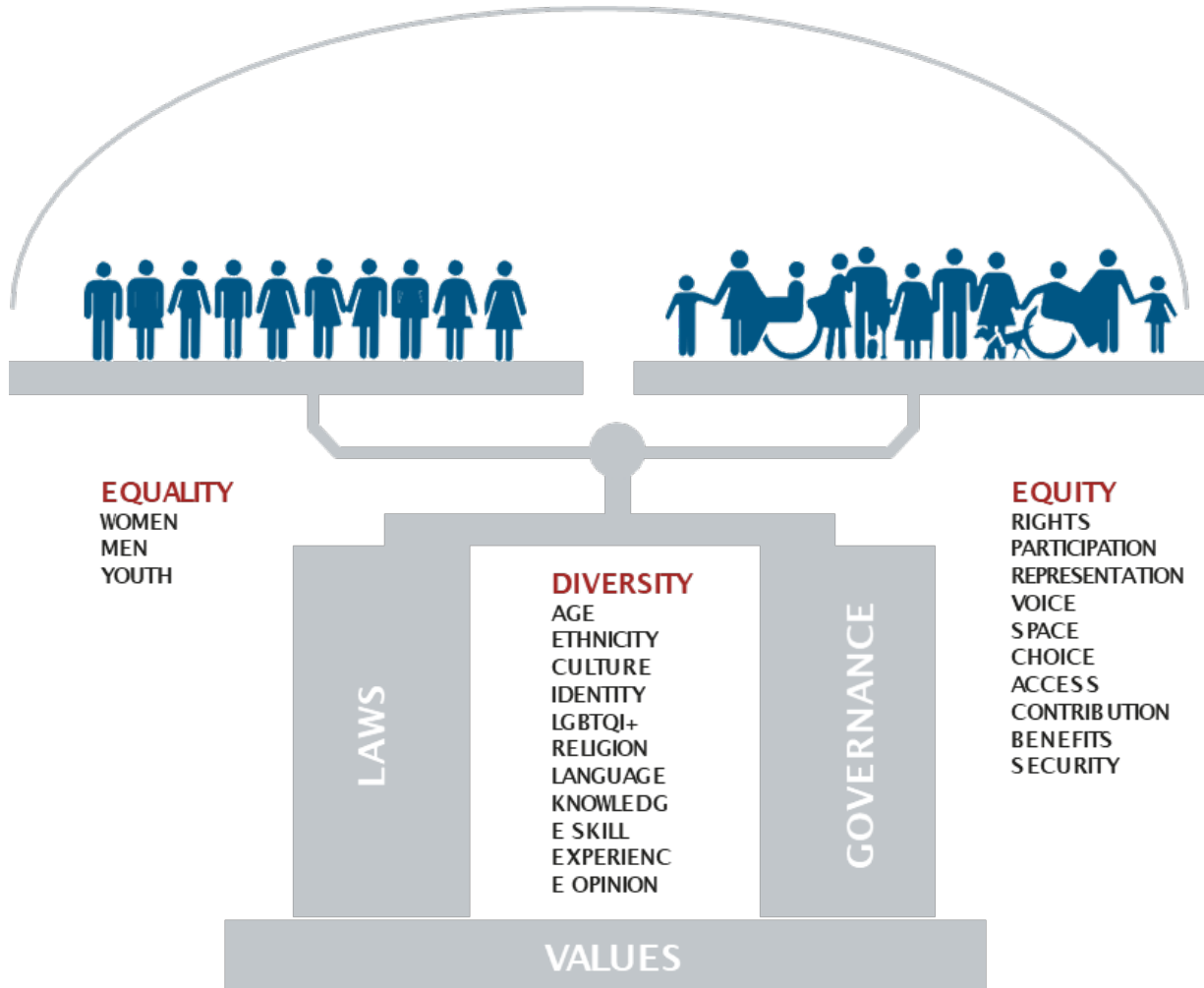


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## GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL EQUITY (GSE) POLICY

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Bern, Switzerland - April 2022

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## Positioning

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This policy document was updated to enhance and reflect more the HELVETAS organizational and GSE strategies 2021-2024. Its principles reflect our working areas, approaches, and transversal priorities. It also draws from, and builds upon the global collective experience, and consolidation of good practices, lessons learnt and trends impacting gender equality and social equity across the regions and in the countries, we work in.

This policy complements our organizational Code of conduct, our GSE Diamonds, which aim at upholding high standards in our human resources management and development strategy, policy, regulations, and practices.

This updated GSE policy reflects the vision and values of HELVETAS, and it sets out the ways in which we can better focus our work in contributing to a more just world, in which all people can determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner. Our previous GSE policies were elaborated in 2012 and 2018.

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## Context

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It is a fact that we live and work in a world where inequality, instability and insecurity are on the rise, and are as much a cause and/or an effect of in/visible bias, discrimination, segregation and exclusion between genders, people, groups, in society, in institutions, in laws and system structures.

As a result, you are more likely to be disadvantaged if you are a woman/girl and/or an indigenous person/member of an ethnic group, practice a minority religion and/or language, identify as LGBTQ+, reside in an isolated, climate vulnerable, and/or conflict prone area, are born into a low social status (caste, bonded labour, etc), or live with impaired health and more. Culture, identity, location, and other innate and circumstantial characteristics can exacerbate different forms of discrimination and therefore access to, and benefit from opportunities.

Those finding themselves in such a disadvantaged situation are often unable to exercise their rights or develop their full potential as human beings; this is not only a human tragedy at the individual level but also represents a significant loss in terms of overall social and economic development. Moreover, impacts of climate change, natural disaster, conflict, and crises can compound existing gender and societal inequalities, thereby increasing burdens and risks for women and vulnerable groups.

The greater vulnerability of women and other disadvantaged social groups stems from imbalanced power dynamics, gender norms, social structures, and legal systems, resulting on one hand in inequitable division of labour, jobs, incomes, access to services, land, and other productive assets, and on the other hand enhanced exposure to violence, rights violations; controlled mobility, economic and political exclusion.

**Systemic change** relies on analyzing and integrating three key areas, be they in an organization or program context. These are the organization or country's policies/ laws, the organization or country's governance system, and finally the organization or country's values and culture.

Gender equality needs to be **included, protected, and accounted for, in and before the law**, for all people, all genders ([SDG 5](#))

Social Equity relies on **good governance principles and practices**, which invite participation and inclusion, safeguard rights, create spaces where all people have access, voice, choice, and enhance opportunities for all, to contribute and benefit, safely and securely, leaving no one behind. ([SDG 10](#) and [SDG 11](#)).

How laws and governance are shaped and influenced by both duty bearers and rights holders, relies on **individual, societal and institutional values**, and culture which either include or exclude diversity, dignity, and basic human rights. ([SDG 16](#))

Although the way and degree to which we work on gender and with the socially disadvantaged in different country and/or local contexts varies, support for **gender equality is in all cases an important aspect of social equity**. Despite many international declarations on the importance of rights and equality, and the existence of supportive international, regional, and national legislation, the social reality is that gender and social inequalities persist, and in many parts of the world, gaps are widening.<sup>1</sup>

HELVETAS adopts a combined approach in striving for gender equality and social equity. The reasons for us doing so are two-fold:

- Gender discrimination is an integral part of social inequity; furthermore, where major social inequalities exist, these are often borne to a greater degree by women.
- An understanding of gender relations in a country or more local project context, requires a wider understanding of the social, economic, and political context and power relations, and the way that different cultural beliefs and practices impact on genders according to their class, caste, ethnicity, religion, age, and other relevant social groupings which entrench inequalities.

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## Definitions

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### Gender equality

Gender is a socially constructed definition of roles, behaviours and power relations between women and men, not to be confused with sex (the biological characteristics of women and men). Our organisational stance in support of gender equality is based on the recognition that all people, no matter their sex, or gender identity, or sexual orientation, have equal rights and should also have equal opportunities and equal responsibilities in realising their potential. This often entails changed power relations within households, working places, communities, and society at large. However, gender equality does not always mean striving for equal numbers in all activities or treating the different gender groups in the same way. These groups and genders are not homogenous, and often have different needs and priorities, face different constraints, have different aspirations, and contribute to development in different ways. It is important to recognise, respect and work with both feminine and masculine and other gender perceptions. Furthermore, gender relations are often strongly interlinked with other power relations based on difference, such as ethnicity, age, and education, and need to be addressed in a holistic, context-specific manner: in our programme activities, in our collaboration with partners, and in our engagement with system actors.

### Social equity

Social equity can be understood in different ways in different contexts, but we take it to encompass the upholding of human rights and the promotion of social justice. We seek to reduce or remove the unequal life chances that prevent discriminated and/or disadvantaged individuals and groups from playing an active role in their individual, communal and societal development. Such inequalities may relate to the individuals themselves, in terms of their health, education and skills; to social practices that discriminate ethnic groups, castes or religions, women, girls or LGBTQ+ persons; and to ways of community organisation and political systems that are dominated by elites and allow little or no room for the voice of others. Another important aspect of social equity is supporting the socially marginalised in gaining secure access to essential services, and benefit from natural, physical, financial, and other resources.

### Leave no one behind

In the context of how and with whom we work, based on our expertise and resources, leave no one behind (LNOB) means facilitating adaptive solutions and affirmative actions to bridge inclusion, participation, opportunity, and benefit gaps among our identified primary stakeholder group, to reach the objectives of our program or a particular project.

For example, if our primary stakeholder group are migrant women, we leave no one behind by ensuring that the more disadvantaged and vulnerable among them are identified, reached and included with special measures and affirmative actions e.g. single migrant mothers; women living with a disease or disability; illiterate etc.

Working in partnership and coordinating with system and development actors in the contexts we work in is essential. (**SDG 17**) It allows us to work in complement, and add value, by focusing our investments and interventions to meet our program/project objectives and support the more disadvantaged and vulnerable inside our prioritized target group, whilst contributing to broader country and development objectives of leaving no one behind. This way we can be relevant, efficient, effective, in our commitment to quality and sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021> ; <https://inequality.org/facts/global-inequality/> ; <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year> ; <https://fragilestatesindex.org/> ; <https://monitor.civicus.org/> ; [https://www.ohchr.org/en/ohchr\\_homepage](https://www.ohchr.org/en/ohchr_homepage) ; <https://www.legislationline.org/topics/topic/7>

**9 Key principles**



1

We intervene in an inclusive and systemic manner, practicing conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm



2

We involve the disadvantaged and marginalized and consider the needs and opinions of all genders

3

We address violence, harmful practices and promote human rights



4

We value unpaid care work, informal work whilst promoting decent employment



5

We promote inclusive leadership and socially diverse representation in our projects

6

We integrate GSE in social protection, considering social, economic and environmental safeguards and climate change



7

We highlight and advocate for GSE in development policies and strategies



8

We consider and integrate GSE in our partnership processes, agreements, and codes of conduct

9

We integrate GSE and participatory MEaL in our quality assurance



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## Implications for our work

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1. We intervene in an inclusive and systemic manner and practice do no harm.  
*We anchor GSE in our context and stakeholder analyses. Based on results, we design our programs to strengthen system actors, service providers as duty bearers, and primary stakeholders as rights holders to enhance more inclusive and equitable access to, participation in, and benefit from essential services, and local economic development for all.*
2. We involve the disadvantaged and marginalized and consider the needs and opinions of all genders.  
*We identify our priority primary stakeholder group (women, men, and/or youth). Recognizing that these groups are not homogenous, we identify the more advantaged and disadvantaged among them, considering their practical and strategic needs, as part of our commitment to GSE e.g. young people; and commitment to leave no one behind e.g. young women who are disabled, are single mothers, young men drop-outs, young men un/der employed. We work with the more advantaged to the benefit of the disadvantaged enhancing social cohesion, and social equity with win-win solutions.*
3. We address violence, harmful practices and promote human rights.  
*We practice conflict sensitive program management, contribute to conflict transformation, whilst enhancing awareness of and capacity to exercise and defend rights, duties, and justice for all.*
4. We value unpaid care work and informal work whilst enhancing decent employment opportunities  
*While we recognize, value, and consider unpaid care and informal work, we also work with the public and private sector to be more responsible, and promote safer, cleaner, fairer, more secure and rewarding employment, with growth potential for all, in green and circular economies.*
5. We promote inclusive leadership and socially diverse representation in our projects.  
*We promote women's leadership and political participation, alongside increased representation of minority voices and disadvantaged groups in decision making from local to national level. We work with men as change agents in the promotion of inclusive leadership, gender equality and social equity.*
6. We integrate GSE in social protection, considering social, economic, and environmental safeguards and climate change.  
*We enhance the prevention, adaptation, and resilience to shocks and crises of the most vulnerable, whilst mitigating new risks and inequalities. We bridge our development and humanitarian work, especially in climate change, disaster risk management, and crises response interventions, strengthening local and national social protection instruments.*
7. We highlight gender equality and social equity in development policy and strategies.  
*Based on documented GSE experiences, and solid GSE evidence, we strengthen our stakeholders to self-advocate, and enhance their voices and outreach in our own advocacy and multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral policy dialogue.*
8. We consider and integrate GSE in our partnership processes, agreements, and codes of conduct.  
*We seek to collaborate with GSE 'open'(or "minded" ? partners, whose own capacities, networks, and resources can complement ours and in turn we can strengthen each other in GSE organizationally and on GSE matters programmatically, over the course of the collaboration.*
9. We integrate GSE and participatory monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEaL) in our quality assurance.  
*In our commitment to self-determination and sustainable development, we actively involve and support our stakeholders to contribute to monitoring and assessing progress, results, and outcomes, facilitating access to information, technology, and interactive spaces, which strengthen. accountability, and transparency with and between duty bearers, rights holders, and service providers.*