

**equitas**

educate. empower. change.

# **GENDER EQUALITY POLICY**

2022



## Acknowledgements

Equitas was founded and operates in Tiohtià:ke, colonially known as Montreal, the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka People. Equitas also operates an office in colonially named Vancouver, the unceded and unsurrendered ancestral territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Equitas acknowledges the power and privilege that Canadian organizations directly gain from the historical and contemporary displacement and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples as part of the settler-colonial project that is Canada and from North-South global power dynamics.

Equitas is committed to a process of unlearning, relearning, questioning, and deconstructing the work that Equitas does, being accountable for our actions and reducing the harms and vulnerabilities caused by the international cooperation sector both historically and contemporarily.

Equitas acknowledges the invaluable support of partners in the development of this policy, notably KOURAJ, Women's Empowerment Link, TUSONGE Community Development Organization, Dignity Network Canada and Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière, for providing critical feedback in the review of the policy. Equitas thanks Equitas' Gender Advisor and the Gender Intern for leading this process and the members of the Gender and the Inclusion Communities of Practice and the Racial Justice Committee for their vital support. Equitas also acknowledges the help of the Knowledge Manager, the Management Team, the Board Program Committee, and the Board of Directors.

Finally, Equitas recognizes the important support of the members of the Gender Community of Practice of the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI) - La Société de coopération pour le développement international (SOCODEVI), Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, Oxfam-Quebec, Développement international Desjardins (DID), Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI). Equitas also acknowledges the learnings we have had from different gender equality policies such as those from Cooperation Canada, Care, Oxfam, Inter-Pares, Carrefour, CECI, Lawyers Without Borders, Dignity Network Canada, TUSONGE, Women's Empowerment Link, AQOCI and Plan International, which informed this policy.

## Methodology

From the outset, the reviewing and renewing of the Gender Equality Policy prioritized inclusive, horizontal and participatory approaches to ensure the meaningful and actionable co-creation of a policy that integrates and promotes a transformative and intersectional approach to gender equality.

The process included: research and analysis of various gender equality movements, theories and policies from the cooperation and solidarity sector and multiple consultations with staff, the Board and partners.

The references used in this policy draw mainly from international bodies and NGOs, with notably less sources from activists, organizations and academics in the Global South<sup>1</sup>. As such, future revisions of the policy as well as the implementation process will include a focus on sources and best practices from the Global South to inform the evolution of this policy.

## Introduction

Equitas works to advance equality, social justice and respect for human dignity through transformative human rights education programs in Canada and around the world. Human rights standards and instruments are tools to protect and advance the rights of all people Human rights education (HRE) is all learning that builds human rights knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours. HRE aims to build a universal culture of human rights and is intended to lead to positive social change. It is a social action that has a fundamental role to play in the realization of human rights.

Gender equality is a critical component of social change that HRE strives to achieve. For 55 years, Equitas has developed educational materials, delivered, training, workshops and conferences and supported and engaged with feminists and women's rights and 2SLGBTQI+<sup>2</sup> rights defenders and decision-makers contributing to the advancement of gender equality.

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<sup>1</sup> Global South refers to the nations of the world which are regarded as having a relatively low level of economic and industrial development, and are typically located to the south of more industrialized nations who are generally located in the North. Terms that attempt to encompass numerous countries and realities are fundamentally flawed.

<sup>2</sup> 2SLGBTQI+ is the proposed acronym for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex people. As a Canadian-based organization, Equitas includes the '2S' at the beginning of the acronym to recognize the Two-Spirit people of Turtle Island, the First People whose spiritual, gender and sexual identities were targeted

While significant progress has been made in Canada and many parts of the world since Equitas was established in 1967, much remains to be achieved to ensure equality among women and men, girls and boys, and Two-Spirit(2S) and non-binary people<sup>3</sup> in Canada and globally. Equitas is committed to working with gender equality movements, decision-makers, and frontline activists and rights defenders to challenge patriarchal systems that create conditions of exclusion, erasure, marginalization, discrimination and violence in order to rebuild more inclusive and just systems.

Equitas acknowledges that working on advancing gender equality may create resistance and backlash and generate violence, exclusion and marginalization for people involved in programs, particularly for women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people. Equitas collaborates with partners and participants to identify potential gender risks and develop mitigation strategies to reduce or eliminate any potential harm. The principle of “Do no harm” guides our gender equality work and it is supported by Equitas' Security Guidelines (2020) and partners' guidelines, policies and tools.

## Vision

Equitas aspires through its human rights education programs to contribute to building a world where human dignity is respected, where non-discrimination and equality are prevalent principles and realities for all people. Equitas aspires to collectively build a world where gender equality for all is realized.

## Purpose

Equitas seeks to contribute to global efforts to promote gender equality through its human rights education programming, knowledge building and sharing, and

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and persecuted throughout colonization. Coined in 1990 by Elder Myra Lamee, the term Two-Spirit has been widely used by Indigenous queer and trans people of Turtle Island. Not all Indigenous people who identify as LGBTQI+ are 2S. Furthermore, 2S does not apply to all Indigenous people worldwide. For more information, see: [Two-Spirit Migration, Mobility and Health Research Project \(rainbowhealthontario.ca\)](https://rainbowhealthontario.ca/two-spirit-migration-mobility-and-health-research-project)

The '+' symbol includes all other expressions of gender and sexual orientation, recognizing that these identities are fluid and ever-changing throughout time and across regions. The intention with this acronym is to be the most flexible and inclusive as possible, given the different contexts in which Equitas works. Equitas will consult with partners and 2SLGBTQI+ communities to use the acronyms that best suit the working contexts.

<sup>3</sup> Equitas refers here to 'non-binary' gender identities as an inclusive umbrella term for all identities along (or beyond) the gender spectrum that are outside of the gender binary. We acknowledge that this term is not used by all the people that do not fit in the gender binary. We will make intentional efforts to consult with staff members, partners and participants in Canada and abroad to use the terms that reflect their identities.

collaboration with partners in Canada and around the world. To achieve the goal of advancing gender equality, Equitas recognizes the importance of promoting and protecting the human rights of women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people.

**The purpose of this Gender Equality Policy is to:**

- Ensure a common organizational understanding of what gender equality means and to define the organization’s gender approach.
- Strengthen organizational commitments towards gender equality by creating and ensuring respectful, equitable, inclusive, safe and supportive environments internally and in Equitas programs, for all, particularly for marginalized women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people<sup>4</sup>.
- Ensure that governance, programming, partnerships and organizational practices reflect the principles and values of gender equality.

This policy is a living document that sets a standard and vision for gender equality work internally and programmatically at Equitas. This policy is an aspiration that we hope to achieve through processes of critical reflection, unlearning and relearning to ultimately create tangible transformative change in all aspects of our organization and our work.

**This policy emphasizes a localized approach and aims to support existing movements embedded in communities within which Equitas works.**



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<sup>4</sup> Equitas refers to women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people who experience various forms of marginalization caused by the impacts of different systems of oppression, including but not limited to young, racialized, rural, poor women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people and women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people living with disabilities.

## Scope

The responsibility to advance gender equality belongs to all people. At Equitas, this policy applies to every person who works with the organization, including but not limited to all staff, interns, consultants, the board of directors, and volunteers. This policy will guide the integration of gender equality into all Equitas programs, activities, materials, overall organizational culture and partnerships in Canada and around the world.

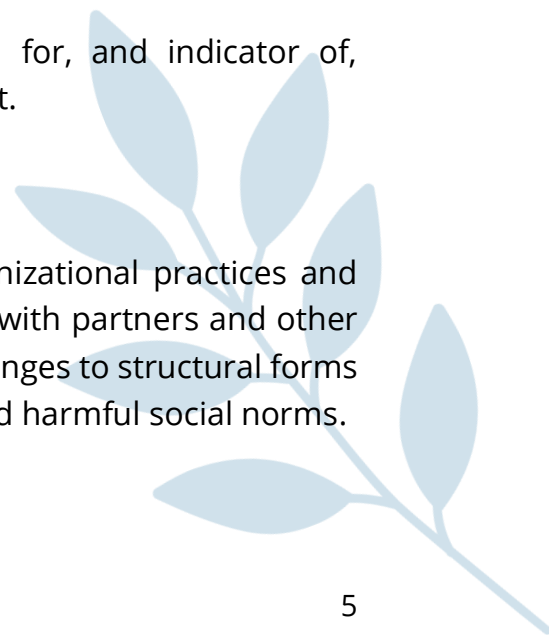
## Definition of Gender Equality

Equitas believes that a holistic, intersectional, and inclusive vision of gender equality is necessary to eradicate gender inequalities. Equitas acknowledges that to achieve gender equality, gender equity is key. However, Equitas also recognizes that gender equity is not enough to achieve gender equality: the transformation of patriarchal systems and gender power relations is also necessary. Gender equality:

- Is a key element of non-discrimination and equality, and it is essential to realizing human rights.
- Refers to the equal and equitable realization of rights, responsibilities and opportunities irrespective of one's gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual characteristics or sexual orientation.
- Aims to transform gender power relations and to share and redistribute power more equitably.
- Means fair and just gender systems at all levels including but not limited to social, economic and political levels.
- Is not just a women's issue.
- Is both a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people and nature-centered development.

## Commitments

Equitas commits to advancing gender equality in its organizational practices and governance, as well as in all its HRE programs, by working with partners and other relevant groups to address gender inequalities, advance changes to structural forms of oppression, and transforming gender power relations and harmful social norms.



Equitas acknowledges that 2SLGBTQI+ people face different levels of hostility in diverse contexts, but these hostile environments should not mean inaction to advance 2SLGBTQI+ rights. Equitas will intentionally identify and develop strategies to protect 2SLGBTQI+ rights through collaboration with partners and 2SLGBTQI+ people and rights defenders.

The following is a non-exhaustive series of actions Equitas commits to:



### **A) Programming**

Equitas will ensure that all of its programs integrate a gender transformative/feminist approach that addresses gender inequalities and targets root causes to advance gender equality, social justice and human rights through co-construction with partners. Equitas will:

- Apply a gender transformative/feminist approach systematically to the project cycle, including participatory, gender and intersectional analysis.
- Propose gender-transformative solutions in programs through gender-transformative/feminist, participatory and decolonial processes in co-construction with partners and with communities.
- Integrate gender equality in the goals, outcomes and activities of its programs and projects in co-construction with partners.
- Ensure the effective participation, engagement, and leadership of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people, particularly marginalized women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people, in its programs.
- Take into consideration and address the barriers, issues, priorities and needs of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people, particularly marginalized women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people, during the entire project cycle.
- Respectfully and inclusively collect gender disaggregated data to ensure that a gender-based analysis is carried out through the program cycle to address any possible gender gaps. Equitas will encourage self-identification and not force people to identify.
- Record and share lessons learned and good practices on gender equality in co-construction with partners.
- Develop educational content on gender equality to strengthen capacity with participants, partners and staff.



- Put in place the necessary measures to prevent and respond to any incident of gender-based violence, including gender discrimination and sexual violence<sup>5</sup>, to create safe and respectful spaces for women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ participants and partners, particularly for marginalized women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people.
  - Some measures include: international coordination for the co-management of incidents with partners, sharing Equitas policies and procedures, identifying focal points, supporting resources for survivors or victims, assigning a budget, etc.
- Apply a participatory, decolonial and gender transformative/feminist approach to monitoring and evaluation systems and processes in co-construction with partners.
- Ensure inclusive communications (orally, visually and written) that make gender inequalities visible as well as deconstruct and transform harmful gender norms and power dynamics.
- Use Equitas' privileged position to reduce and/or eliminate the barriers women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people face in trying to access and participate in decision making spaces and in being valued as experts.
- Influence decision-makers to advance gender equality by bringing awareness and strengthening capacity on gender equality issues.
- Include in project and program design the necessary human, technical and financial resources to guarantee the expertise, skills, and experiences to advance gender equality in Equitas programs.



## B) Partnerships

Equitas will ensure that partnerships are sustainable, equitable and based on shared responsibility. Equitas acknowledges the power and privilege it holds as a Canadian organization and the historical power dynamics between human rights organizations

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<sup>5</sup> Sex work is not the same as sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking. Sex work is work. Sex workers are women, men and non-binary adults (over 18 years of age) who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally and do so consensually, free from exploitation or coercion. However, Sex Workers can also be victims or survivors of sexual violence. Staff, interns, volunteers, consultants, partners, and Board Members cannot solicit services from Sex Workers in the communities where programs are implemented. The relation of power between communities and the organizations compromises any notion of consent (Procedure on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence in the ACTIF Fund, 2018).



and marginalized communities in and between the Global North and the Global South. Equitas is committed to actively questioning its role and responsibilities, to keep unlearning, learning and transforming itself to build more inclusive, equitable, and just partnerships. Women and girls, feminist and 2SLGBTQI+ organizations and movements, particularly those working with the most marginalized communities in their respective contexts, tend to have less access to funding opportunities, capacity-strengthening efforts and other supports. This trend is global, and requires careful and focused attention in all partnership work. Therefore, Equitas will support:

- Women and girls and feminist organizations and movements in the Global North and the Global South, particularly those representing marginalized women and girls.
- 2SLGBTQI+ organizations and movements in the Global North and the Global South, particularly those representing marginalized 2SLGBTQI+ communities.
- South-South, North-South and North-North collaboration and alliances between women and girls, feminist and 2SLGBTQI+ organizations and movements, particularly those who experience marginalization.
- Human rights organizations to integrate a gender transformative/feminist approach to advance gender equality.
- Organizations working on the exploration of harmful and positive traits of masculinities.
- Collaboration and alliances between women and girls, feminist and 2SLGBTQI+ organizations and movements with a) human rights organizations and b) decision-makers or duty bearers<sup>6</sup>.
- Decision-makers to address and eradicate gender inequalities.
- Actors not yet actively working on gender equality, as they begin their work to address and eradicate gender inequalities.



### **C) Governance**

Equitas will ensure that its governance culture and structures reflect its commitment to gender equality and create the optimal conditions for an inclusive, safe, respectful

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<sup>6</sup> Legal duty bearers are individuals or groups who have the authority to make decisions and influence policy (elected officials, (mayors, city councillors, ministers, senior officials, etc.) and moral duty bearers are traditional, community, opinion leaders, businesses or unions etc.)

and supportive environment for women and 2SLGBTQI+ people, particularly marginalized women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people.

Equitas will:

- Ensure and support the full participation, engagement, and leadership of marginalized women and 2SLGBTQI+ people on the board and board leadership roles, including by addressing relevant barriers, needs and perspectives.
- Ensure the capacity strengthening of board members on gender equality issues.
- Ensure that organizational policies and procedures integrate a gender transformative/feminist approach.



#### **D) Organizational Practices**

Equitas will ensure an inclusive, respectful, supportive, and safe work environment for all and pay close attention to the specific barriers to participation of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people. Equitas will:

- Ensure policies and procedures integrate a gender transformative/feminist approach.
- Ensure the capacity strengthening of staff, interns, consultants and volunteers to ensure their awareness and competency on gender equality issues.
- Systematize and share good practices and lessons learned to advance gender equality.
- Develop and share gender equality tools and information on gender equality with staff, interns, consultants and volunteers.
- Ensure the diversity of the staff, interns, board members, volunteers and consultants, removing barriers and responding to the needs of women and 2SLGBTQI+ people, particularly those who are marginalized.
- Ensure gender equality during recruitment and hiring processes, considering gender inequalities such as specific barriers for women and 2SLGBTQI+ people, particularly those who are marginalized.
- Integrate gender equality requirements in job descriptions, interviews, performance appraisals and annual work plans.

- Make efforts to reduce and eliminate potential gender salary gaps that may occur, particularly for marginalized women and 2SLGBTQI+ people.
- Ensure that women and 2SLGBTQI+ people, particularly those who are marginalized, benefit equitably from different opportunities, such as internal mobility and external learning and representation.
- Conduct a power analysis to identify who holds power in the organization and ensure that marginalized women and 2SLGBTQI+ people are valued as decision-makers.
- Implement measures and services to promote personal and professional life balance and support mental, physical, social, and community wellbeing for staff, volunteers and interns, particularly marginalized women and 2SLGBTQI+ people. Some measures include flexible working hours, hybrid work and inclusive mental health resources.
- Protect anyone who discloses and reports a breach of the present Policy against retaliation.
- Share the present Gender Equality Policy and the Policy on Preventing Sexual Violence, Harassment and Discrimination, and ensure that each person understands the content before they sign it.
- Implement and strengthen measures to prevent and respond to any incident of gender-based violence, including gender discrimination and sexual violence, to create a safe and respectful space for women and 2SLGBTQI+ people, particularly those who are marginalized. Some measures include developing policies and procedures and providing training to bring awareness to staff, interns, board members, volunteers and consultants.
- Budget appropriately to ensure the human and technical gender equality expertise and financial resources to implement the Gender Equality Policy.
- Ensure inclusive communications (orally, visually and written) that make gender inequalities visible as well as deconstruct and transform harmful gender norms and power dynamics<sup>7</sup>.

## Responsibilities & Accountability<sup>8</sup>

All staff, interns, volunteers and consultants have a responsibility to adhere to the vision, scope and purpose and contribute to the commitments outlined in this policy.

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<sup>7</sup> Inclusive communication is supported at Equitas through organizational tools such as the [Guidelines for ethical use of images](#) and the [Guidelines for Inclusive Language](#).

<sup>8</sup> Detailed list of [Roles and responsibilities](#).

Ultimately, the Board of Directors is responsible for the oversight of the policy and Executive Director is responsible for the implementation of this policy.

## **Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Review of the Policy**

### **Monitoring, evaluation and learning**

- The implementation of the Gender Equality Policy will be monitored and evaluated once per year; particular emphasis will be put on the follow-up of the commitments and mutual learning through the year, including but not limited to lessons learned and good practices.
- The Gender Advisor will lead and coordinate the monitoring, evaluation and learning of the implementation of Gender Equality Policy with the support of the Management Team, the Program Officers and the Evaluation, Monitoring and Learning Advisor.
- An action plan will be developed to ensure the implementation of the Policy.

### **Review**

- The Policy will be reviewed every five years. The process will be led by the Gender Advisor or any other professional with the necessary expertise in a participatory and inclusive way.

## **Procedure for incidents of gender-based violence, including gender discrimination and sexual violence (support, disclose, report and investigation)**

The procedure for disclosing, reporting, investigating and providing support to survivors or victims of an incident of gender-based violence, including gender discrimination and sexual violence, is defined in the Policy on Preventing Sexual Violence, Harassment and Discrimination.

## **Some Context: Understanding Gender Inequalities**

Gender inequality is a global phenomenon, varying in form based on historical, political and regional contexts. In substance, gender inequalities are rooted in patriarchal systems, and can be informed by other oppressive systems, such as, but

not limited to, exploitative economic systems, white supremacy<sup>9</sup>, racism, colonialism, ableism, and ageism.

**Equitas understands patriarchies** as oppressive social, political and economic systems that:

- Establish rigid gender norms and hierarchies which produce gender power imbalances and gender inequalities<sup>10</sup>.
- Privilege and prioritize men and specific types of masculinity.
- Maintain relations of power and/or control that disadvantage women and 2SLGBTQI+ people, and create conditions of domination, discrimination, violence.
- Dictate what 'proper' gender performance is, discriminate, and sometimes lead to violence against those who do not conform to socially constructed gender norms, while rewarding those who follow them.
- Establish gender binary systems that deny gender identities that do not fit within or conform to the binary and generate the conditions for violence and marginalization of non-binary and Two-Spirit people to force conformity or total exclusion.<sup>11</sup>
- Assume heteronormativity as the standard, which enables conditions of discrimination, exclusion, and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people.
- Impose the sex/gender system that denies people the freedom to choose their gender identity and creating violence and marginalization for trans people.
- Establish the sex binary as the norm, ignoring the existence of people who do not fit in the female and male sex categories, which generates violence and exclusion for intersex people<sup>12</sup>.
- Convey and enforce these gender norms and power dynamics through legal and social standards, institutions, decision-makers, and societies.

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<sup>9</sup> In her book *Me & White Supremacy* (2020), Layla F. Saad describes white supremacy as, "the historic and modern legislating, societal conditioning, and systemic institutionalizing of the construction of whiteness as inherently superior to people of other races." In "What Does It Mean to Be White?" Robin DiAngelo emphasizes: "White supremacy does not refer to individual white people per se and their individual intentions, but to a political-economic social system of domination. This system is based on the historical and current accumulation of structural power that privileges, centralizes, and elevates white people as a group."

<sup>10</sup> [gender norms and lgbtqi issues 0.pdf \(alignplatform.org\)](#) p11.

<sup>11</sup> [27-29 ARCHANA VERMA SINGH.pdf \(ijelr.in\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [gender norms and lgbtqi issues 0.pdf \(alignplatform.org\)](#) p14.

## **Equitas' Gender Approach: A Gender Transformative/Feminist Approach**

Equitas aspires to apply a gender transformative/feminist approach to its programs, organizational practices and governance.

The decision to include both “gender transformative” and “feminist” in the Gender Equality Policy came after the analysis of different gender equality policies and consultations with Equitas staff and partners. Both terms capture our understanding and vision of an inclusive and transformative gender approach. These two terms also offer the opportunity to adapt the term based on the contexts and partners' perspectives. Equitas will consult and decide with partners on what term is more adapted to their contexts.

**Equitas understands that a gender transformative/feminist approach** is a conceptual framework that:

- Examines gender norms, power imbalances, roles, stereotypes, dynamics, and the different impacts of these on women, men, girls, boys, and 2S and non-binary people, with special attention given to impacts on women and girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people.
- Considers and addresses the different issues, barriers, conditions, priorities and needs of women, girls and boys, men and 2S and non-binary people, with special consideration given to the specific issues, barriers, conditions, priorities and needs of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people.
- Tackles the root causes of gender inequalities, including patriarchal systems, to deconstruct and transform gender power imbalances and harmful gender norms.

### **Equitas' gender-transformative/feminist approach:**

- Includes the gender inequalities affecting women and girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people.
- Is trans-inclusive.
- Integrates a non-binary understanding of gender.
- Acknowledges the diversity of intersecting identities, and does not consider women and girls or 2SLGBTQI+ communities as homogenous groups.
- Acknowledges that patriarchal systems can look different in different communities, cultures, contexts and times and that societies across the world have long history of gender norms and structures.

- Recognizes how colonial and settler-state gender norms have contributed to the reproduction of specific forms of patriarchy in settler states (such as in Canada) and around the world.
- Includes work on harmful and positive traits of masculinities.
- Integrates and is grounded in an analysis stemming from:
  - a human rights-based approach
  - an intersectional approach
  - a decolonial approach
  - an anti-racist approach

## **Some strategies to address gender inequalities and challenge patriarchal systems in HRE programs**

### **Support and collaborate with different groups/actors:**

- Support the agency and leadership of women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people, including but not limited to learning about, claiming, exercising and enjoying their rights.
- Contribute to the rethinking and questioning of masculinities under patriarchy, particularly with men and boys.
- Support gender equality movements and organizations, such as feminist, women's, 2SLGBTQI+ and human rights organizations.
- Support decision-makers and institutions to better understand, address and eradicate gender inequalities and to be accountable to their obligations to fulfill, promote, and protect the rights of women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people.
- Support communities to understand, address and eliminate gender inequalities.

### **Work on social and legal norms:**

- Questioning and transforming harmful or discriminatory legal norms and developing more just legal frameworks that address and eradicate gender inequalities.
- Raise awareness, understanding and acceptance of existing human rights standards and instruments that protect and advance the rights of women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people.
- Challenging, deconstructing and changing harmful gender social norms as defined by partners and community members, particularly women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people.



## Bibliography

To consult the full bibliography, [click here](#).

## Signature

Before you sign the Gender Equality Policy, please reflect on these questions:

- What have I learned from reading this policy?
- How will I implement this policy in my role (please, look at the annex on roles and responsibilities to help you think about this question)?

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to consult the Gender Advisor and your supervisor.

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understood Equitas' Gender Equality Policy and will uphold to the Policy.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

