



How social entrepreneurs tackle gender inequality following COVID-19

Insights from Ashoka's collective impact initiative



October, 2022.

Published under a Creative Commons
Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International
(CC BY-SA 4.0) License

www.ashoka.org



Table of Contents

About Ashoka	2
About This Report	2
Acknowledgments	3
Introduction	5
Methods	6
Findings	7
Conclusion	43
Appendix	44
Outputs of Sessions	48

About Ashoka

For the last 40 years, Ashoka has pioneered the field of social entrepreneurship, showing that there is no more powerful force for societal transformation than a systems-changing idea in the hands of a social entrepreneur. Ashoka has built the largest global network of social entrepreneurs, with 4,500 working across 93 countries. These entrepreneurs address the world's most pernicious problems and engage those around them to do the same. In doing so, they help others to recognize their capacity to bring about better realities, advancing Ashoka's vision—a world in which *everyone* is a giver, *everyone* is powerful, and *everyone* is a changemaker.

About This Report

The COVID-19 pandemic took a significant toll on the world's progress toward gender equality. To understand how to best respond to this setback, Ashoka turned to the world's leading innovators: social entrepreneurs. We deployed a survey, conducted interviews, and brought social entrepreneurs together for discussion sessions, knowing that collective wisdom often outwits singular efforts. This report presents our learnings from these 40+ social entrepreneurs and includes case studies that exemplify their innovative approaches to creating a more equitable world for women and girls.

The project and report were made possible thanks to Beiersdorf and the company's commitment to foster a more inclusive society.

Acknowledgments

First, we would like to thank Beiersdorf for its steadfast partnership in our pursuit of gender equality. We also want to express our deepest gratitude to the social entrepreneurs who participated in our research—thank you for being a constant source of knowledge and inspiration.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the team who made this work possible. This team was comprised of contributors from Ashoka’s Venture Fellowship and Global Impact & Evidence teams.

Researcher and Author

Meghana Parik

Editors

Alyssa Matteucci

Léna Borsoi

Gender Equality Initiative Leads

Giulia Sergi

Ada Andreoni

Léna Borsoi

Partnership Manager

Katharina Hinze

In conversation with:

Agata Teutsch

David Kerr

Justine Devillaine

Sylwia Chutnik

Athina Marmorat

Gabriela Imbert

Luisa Josa

Thorsten Kiefer

Alexandra Machado

Gemma Galdón

Maria Angeles León

Ute Latzel

Alexandra Niztalader

Halime Güner

Marie Eloy

Zuzana Stromerova

Alkistis Petropaki

Hana Malinova

Petra Masopust-Šachová

Ana Bella Estévez

Helena Guardans

Pierre Foldes

André Watzenberg

Isabella Lenarduzzi

Riccarda Zezza

Carmen Gheorghe

Jana Kavkova

Sonja Betschart



CREATE a FRAME
THAT BRINGS OUR
STORIES
TOGETHER
→ TO LEARN
FROM EACH
OTHER

Introduction

Women and young girls face a wide range of systemic inequalities in our global society. The evidence has been shared time and time again—women making only 77 cents for every dollar men earn and holding government positions in only 11% of countries are just two of many statistics that illustrate this point ^{1,2}.

Many organisations have worked to create a fair playing systems for women and girls but even these models have their limits: any single organisation will struggle to counteract complex and deeply ingrained problems like gender inequality. To make lasting progress against this intractable issue, society needs to foster and cultivate changes that are both systemic and adopted by a collective.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for collaborative changemaking (i.e., a collaboration between individuals and organisations who are committed to bringing about positive social change and shifting a system together) is a key enabling process to tackle root causes of gender inequality and advance the path of a gender equal world. The pandemic has brought devastating loss and has highlighted stark racial, social, and economic inequities. It has made our shared reality unquestionably clear; namely, that the prosperity of society, now and in the future, hinges on our ability to operate as a global community that builds better outcomes for all. This is especially true for the work of social entrepreneurs focused on gender equality, whose progress has been setback by an estimated 40 years because of the COVID-19 pandemic ³.

Compelled by this regression, Ashoka facilitated a collaboration across social entrepreneurs' organisations. Specifically, we interviewed and convened social entrepreneurs to allow them to exchange ideas and to build a collective vision that unfolds the steps society needs to take to advance gender equity and thus enable gender equality.

-
1. UN Women. 2021. "Women in Politics."
Available from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/women-in-politics-map-2021>
 2. ILO. 2022. "The gender gap in employment: What's holding women back?"
Available from <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women#intro>
 3. World Economic Forum (2021). Global Gender Gap Report 2021

Methods

We learned from social entrepreneurs by deploying a survey, conducting interviews, and facilitating collective sessions. Specifically, we conducted 30 interviews with social entrepreneurs from across the world. In these interviews we explored the following questions:

1. What **strategies** do they deploy to advance gender equity and thus enable gender equality?
2. What **systemic barriers** do they face in their work advancing gender equality?
3. What can be done to **address these barriers** and further advance the field of gender equality?

We engaged 11 Europe-based social entrepreneurs in five collective sessions. We asked the questions noted above. Additionally, we asked social entrepreneurs to articulate their vision of gender equality in Europe. The structure of the sessions was as follows:

We started our sessions with unstructured time to get settled and followed by ice-breaker activities. The purpose of these more informal activities was to facilitate introductions and to establish a baseline level of trust.

We then clearly set the intentions for the discussion sessions and Beiersdorf and Ashoka's hopes for the field of gender equity and thus enable gender equality.

Subsequently, social entrepreneurs shared their experiences and their responses to the questions above. In these exchanges, social entrepreneurs shared their systemic approaches to advancing gender equality.

Lastly, social entrepreneurs worked together to learn from each other's expertises and visions in hopes to create a collective vision and approach to equal opportunities for women and girls.

Additionally, we distributed a survey to these same eleven social entrepreneurs. A total of 8 social entrepreneurs completed the survey, yielding a 72% response rate. The purpose of this survey was to learn from their experiences collaborating within and across sectors to address gender equality, to understand the impact of COVID-19 on their organisations, and to gauge their satisfaction with the collective sessions.

Findings

The research and program activities outlined above yielded **five recommendations** changemakers can take to advance gender equity and thus enable gender equality.

#1 Help society understand the roots of gender inequality

#2: Dismantle patriarchal narratives

#3: Use an intersectional lens to address gender inequality

#4 Frame gender inequality as a cross-cutting issue

#5 Collaborate across sectors to advance gender equality



#1 Help society understand the roots of gender inequality

While many individuals grasp the gravity of gender inequality, few understand what perpetuates it. **Gender inequality stems from harmful narratives about gender roles, among other factors. Shaping minds as early as childhood, these narratives have become entrenched in society, creating a lens with which to view—or more aptly put, limit—the role of women and girls.**

Social entrepreneurs gave multiple examples of where this lens, or bias, translates to missed opportunities for women in the workplace. Colleagues are often unwelcoming toward women in the workplace, assigning them menial tasks because of these deeply ingrained beliefs about what a woman is *really* meant to do: household chores and childcare. Conscious or unconscious bias frequently prevents women's advancement that they have stopped applying for leadership positions. Women face discrimination when pregnant or for having taken maternity leave. With many companies' policies providing little or no paternity leave, they are further reinforcing gender role narratives⁴.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, these narratives have gained a stronger foothold. The pandemic has ignited a 'patriarchal reset,' i.e., our progress toward gender equity and thus enable gender equality backtracked, where women lost their economic power, their autonomy, their education, and in a lot of instances, their safety. Indeed, incidents of gender-based violence have increased between 25% to 111% in some countries, and

⁴ Baumann, H. Stories of women at the top: narratives and counternarratives of women's (non-)representation in executive leadership. *Palgrave Commun* 3, 17009 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.9>

domestic abuse killings tripled during early lockdowns⁵. Women experienced an income loss of \$800 billion over the course of the pandemic and according to UNESCO, 11 million girls have not returned to school^{6,7,8}.

Fellows believe that helping others to understand what motivates this regression, i.e., pervasive narratives is the first step toward fixing it. Without having a deep, nuanced, and accurate understanding of a problem, few will be instinctually compelled to act in accordance with changes that create a more equitable society. Below we present several case studies that exemplify how social entrepreneurs call attention to and begin to unravel patriarchal narratives.

“Every Survivor a Changemaker: Changing Societal Narratives about Survivors of Abuse”

—Perspectives from Ana Bella Estévez, Ana Bella Foundation

Ashoka Fellow, Ana Bella Estévez, founded the [Ana Bella Foundation](#) to address gender-based violence (GBV). Her work on empowerment of victims of GBV leads to exercise their agency to remove themselves from the systems that perpetuate these horrific acts. Being a survivor of domestic violence herself, Ana Bella is deeply committed to grounding her organisation’s vision in empathy and cocreation, involving survivors, the media and companies to act as changemakers to end violence against women.

5 Oxfam International, Nov 2021, “The Ignored Pandemic The Dual Crises of Gender-Based Violence and COVID-19”

6 Melissa Johnston, Sara E. Davies, Jacqui True & Yolanda Riveros-Morales (2021) “Patriarchal reset” in the asia pacific during COVID-19: the impacts on women’s security and rights, The Pacific Review, DOI: [10.1080/09512748.2021.2005123](https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2021.2005123)

7 CNBC (2022) “In 1 year, women globally lost \$800 billion in income due to Covid-19, new report finds” Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/30/women-globally-lost-800-billion-dollars-in-income-due-to-covid-19.html>

8 UNESCO (2021) “Keeping Girls in the Picture” Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/girlseducation>

Ana Bella Foundation takes a three-pronged approach to its work:

- 1. It challenges the way society views survivors of abuse.** It does so by partnering with media, companies and other entities with wide audiences to run campaigns that showcase the power of survivors, demonstrating their strength as opposed to powerlessness. She changes narratives, e.g., instead of talking about women being 'victims of violence' she focuses on the perpetrators: 'men are killing these women.' Instead of using images showing the physical consequences of abuses such as bruises, Ana Bella Foundation shows the positive testimonies of survivors to encourage others to break the silence.
- 2. On empowerment of survivors to take control of their lives and to live without stigma.** Survivors are not the problem but the crucial part of the solution. Ana Bella Foundation trains survivors to transform their suffering into expertise and empathy to act as changemakers: they detect and support the invisible victims and accompany them to the official resources, working in coordination with them. As a consequence, public resources become more effective and available to invisible victims, especially those who are not normally monitored by social services because of their prevalent economic, social and professional situation. Victims receive immediate response and customised support by a peer-to-peer network of survivors. Victims do not return with their abuser and do not withdraw the filed cases. Victims become empowered survivors who help others to overcome abuse. They transform their trauma into empathy, acting as changemakers who are part of the solution.
- 3. It educates others on how to best support survivors and co-creates with companies and the media effective solutions to generate systemic changes addressing violence against women effectively.** The Foundation supports government agencies in designing programs and policies that detect, protect, and employ survivors. It trains social workers that build their capacity in empathy and empowerment-based approaches. It also provides training to teenagers to foster healthy relationships and recognize early signs of violence. Teenagers then lead the change in educational communities and support their peers. Partnering with companies, Ana Bella Foundation offers a systemic change training to their staff to qualify as changemakers to address violence against women and develops protocols to detect and support the invisible victims. This accelerates social change to provide a safe space at work to Break the Silence, find help and speed up their recovery.

I never thought
of myself as a
**VICTIM OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Women feel
INVISIBLE and
ALONE
When they
Face VIOLENCE

When I ESCAPED,
he **KEPT
EVERYTHING**

BUT I FELT
STRONG
For SURVIVING
The ABUSE

EVERY SURVIVOR
can be A
CHANGEMAKER

I had **SKILLS**
I could **PUT IN
USE FOR
MYSELF**

I was **ABUSED
BY MY HUSBAND**
For eleven years

**ANA
BELLA
ESTÉVEZ**
ANA BELLA FOUNDATION

I WAS
THE **FIRST
SURVIVOR OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
WHO SHOWED HER
FACE ON SPANISH TV.**
I DID IT
TO **ENCOURAGE
OTHER WOMEN**

We deserve to
have **AMBITIONS!**

I BUILT A
**NETWORK
OF
WOMEN**



Ana Bella Foundation women survivors' network includes 27,200 women acting in 82 countries. In Spain only, it has already served 42,000 survivors. Her work continued on this scale even during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Foundation reached many women who were forced to live in close quarters with their abusers because of the shelter-in-place orders. During this time, Ana Bella Foundation launched a video campaign to encourage women to get out of their homes if they are being abused. They partnered with the media to spread this message and urged governments to come up with exceptions and accommodations for women who are at domestic violence risk.

“The main problem is that most victims are invisible. There is a need to recognise that they are not victims but survivors, and men are killing women. More media and programmes need to demonstrate their resilience and broadcast that there is a way to survive and challenge the narrative.”

For more information on Ana Bella Estévez's organisation, please go [here](#).



“Caregiving, including maternity leave, should be seen as a time of profound learning and not as a time off”

—Perspectives from Riccarda Zezza, Founder LIFEED

Ashoka Fellow, Riccarda Zezza, established [LIFEED](#) to challenge patriarchal narratives about maternity leave. Maternity leave is often thought of as “time away,” a perception that Riccarda believes has been created from a patriarchal perspective that does not value care, and for men. Riccarda says a more accurate perception or reframing is that it is a time of growth. It is a time for learning and identity formation. LIFEED allows men to take an active role in adopting and spreading this narrative.

Riccarda envisions a world where tending to the family is considered a “value generator” for professional life. To realize this vision, Riccarda advises companies’ human resources departments on how to incorporate these values into their organisational culture and business practices. She has also created a digital tool, LIFEED, to foster community and shared learning among mothers on maternity leave.

Riccarda also delivers a program called ‘Men as Allies’. This program encourages men to take on greater familial responsibility to contribute equally at home as much as they contribute at work, and to improve their soft skills at work. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this work has become particularly salient. The pandemic forced families to wrestle with the distribution of familial responsibility. Families were sheltering in place together and learning to balance work, household chores, and childcare. Riccarda believes this reality ushered in changes in mindset, one that helped people to see that men and women should share in the work it takes to maintain a healthy family.

“You cannot just work with mothers and not with fathers, you need to have a systemic view.”

For more details on Riccarda Zezza’s work, please go [here](#)



When I got pregnant with my second child, my boss said he was going to replace me

With two children a woman CAN'T WORK ANYMORE



I worked as a LAWYER

I CHANGED PROFESSION TO WORK FOR

MOTHERS' CENTRES



LOBBYING

NETWORKING

RIGHTS!



WE PRESENT & DEFEND POLITICAL DEMANDS OF MOTHERS



UTE LATZEL

FEDERAL ASSOCIATION OF MOTHERS' CENTRES

The pandemic highlighted SYSTEMIC GENDER ISSUES

“I was told with two children, a woman can’t work anymore”

—Perspectives from Ute Latzel, Chairman of
Federal Association of Mothers’ Centres

Ashoka Fellow, Ute Latzel, leads the Federal Association of Mothers’ Centres based in Germany. The Association creates safe spaces, namely centers and multi-generational housing, for women and mothers. This work fosters solidarity and safety among mothers who experience marginalisation or who are without adequate resources to care for their children.

Further, this work affords mothers the opportunity to expand their agency by choosing the way they live, bucking patriarchal narratives. For example, in Germany, many young mothers are led to believe they should take low-wage jobs to avoid high taxes. This, of course, equates to low income and little independence, and for those who want to divorce, poverty. Mothers’ centres correct these misconceptions so women can secure fair-wage jobs and live lives consistent with their own beliefs.

“ Women should have the agency to take decisions for themselves. They should be able to decide what they want to do, not men and not the society”.

For more information on Ute Latzel’s work, please go [here](#).





#2: Dismantle patriarchal narratives

Many social entrepreneurs have designed interventions to weaken or counter patriarchal narratives. One social entrepreneur is placing strong women role models in the lives of school-aged girls; a close and constant reminder that women's potential is at odds with the patriarchy. Another social entrepreneur is equipping organisations with tools to battle stigma in the workplace, fostering a culture where women can excel despite bias. While we only showcase two approaches below, these are merely scratching the surface of interventions underway. Interviews and sessions surfaced many promising solutions.



“A lack of strong role models is the main barrier to gender equality”

—Perspectives from Alexandra Machado, Founder of Girl Move

Ashoka Fellow, Alexandra Machado, established [Girl Move Academy](#) to build young girls' changemaker competencies and equip them with the knowledge, resources, and networks to develop as leaders. Alexandra saw the throughline from patriarchal narratives to girls' poor access to education and later life outcomes (e.g., poverty, and scant leadership opportunities). To address this issue, she built mentorship, internship and capacity-building programs, which place women role models in the lives of young girls. Girl Move's programming has been recognized by UNESCO as one of the best education programs in the world.

GirlMove Academy methodology is based on sisterhood circles for impact. Different generation of young women/girls supporting each other, learning from each other, activating each other to become change makers of society. In powering women is the key, activate inner light, She for She. COVID-19 posed a new challenge for Girl Move. To meet the needs of young girls, many of whom were no longer attending school, Girl Move pivoted to deliver its programming online. Alexandra and her team built a digital platform, Movhers, so that mentors and girls could continue to discuss key issues around gender and their future aspirations. Roughly 4,000 girls worldwide register for this platform annually.

“We must humanise leadership paradigms, and change the model of references. The lack of role models is the main barrier to gender equity. It is important to show young girls that different (equitable) models exist.”

For more details on Alexandra Machado's work, please go [here](#).

MY FAITH IS IMPORTANT TO ME



During my PREGNANCY I was told my baby was INVIABLE

BUT I DECIDED NOT TO ABORT !!!



HE IS NOW A HEALTHY ADULT!

A MIRACLE! I NEEDED to GIVE BACK

I went to a CATHOLIC GIRLS SCHOOL in LISBON



an EXPERIENCE of FEMALE COMMUNITY

MOTHER OF 3



ALEXANDRA MACHADO

GIRL MOVE

FOUNDER OF GIRL MOVE

TO FIGHT POVERTY WE NEED TO GRANT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO GIRLS

WE ARE ADDRESSING CHILD PREGNANCY & ACCESS TO EDUCATION in MOZAMBIQUE

My Father and mother had different VIEWS ABOUT BEING a WOMAN

You CAN BE what you WANT TO BE!

You have TO BE the BEST in SCHOOL

Girls need to BEHAVE



OPEN MINDED



MORE TRADITIONAL

TO MAKE MY FATHER I went to BUSINESS SCHOOL and made a career



BUT something was MISSING



MY VALUES



SO I QUIT MY JOB

NOW I HELP GIRLS FIND and FULFILL THEIR AMBITIONS



FIGHT SOCIAL & GENDER DETERMINISM

INSPIRE! Have OTHER WOMEN SHARE THEIR STORIES



ATHINA MARMORAT

REV'ELLES

My Father left TUNISIA FOR POLITICAL REASONS

MIGRATION BACKGROUND



“There should be no ceiling for dreams for young girls”

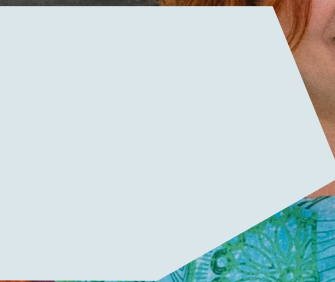
—Perspectives from Athina Marmorat, Founder of Rêv’elles

Athina Marmorat, Founder of [Rêv’elles](#), serves young women ages 14 to 22 who come from vulnerable backgrounds. Her organisation provides programming that helps women to challenge patterns of determinism associated with gender and socioeconomic status. At a high level, their workshops and capacity-building programs encourage women to challenge paradigms that deny their agency and big dreams. To support them, Rêv’elles offers access to a network of personal coaches, self-confidence trainers, art experts, psychologists, and role models.

“Young girls from disadvantaged communities don’t have the same conditions to make equal choices about their future (as their counterparts from privileged communities). They need role models and mentorship that can inspire them”

For more information on Athina Marmorat’s work, go [here](#).





#3: Use an intersectional lens to address gender inequality

‘Intersectionality,’ a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, is a lens for **understanding how forms of inequality (e.g., race, class, gender) “intersect” and exacerbate one another**⁹. This lens shines a light on the related, and often compounding effects, of multiple inequalities and the structural, societal barriers holding these inequalities in place. It is hard to imagine social entrepreneurs, or any social actor, designing an effective intervention without this lens¹⁰.

Not surprisingly, social entrepreneurs spent much of their interviews and session discussions emphasizing the importance of this lens. They have used an intersectional approach to understand the experiences of women at the individual-level, community-level, and systems level. One could say this approach *leaves no one behind*, resulting in a deep understanding of the constituents being served.

⁹ Crenshaw, Kimberlé, “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait,” Washington Post, September 24, 2015.

¹⁰ UNDP (2022). “Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025”

“Girls and Women are change agents and not victims”

—Perspectives from Agata Teutsch, Founder of Autonomia Foundation

Through her organisation, [Autonomia Foundation](#), Ashoka Fellow, Agata Teutsch, is building a network of women* to mainstream empowerment, GBV primary prevention and anti-discrimination guidelines and practices across Poland and Central-Eastern Europe. This work rejects the notion that girls* and women* are victims, as opposed to change agents. (*Agata does not refer to biological categories, rather to people with experience of socialization into those roles, thus identifying themselves as women or girls).

With an intersectional lens, Agata together with national and international partners has created operational and training modules about girl*'s and women*'s empowerment, gender-based violence prevention resources, and self-defense courses for women* with disabilities, migrant and refugees. Agata invites participation from community members, families, educational institutions, and more.

Like many Ashoka Fellows, Agata saw the opportunity the pandemic presented to reach more women* with disabilities. Indeed, she modified her content so it could be delivered via digital platforms.

“The problem is that we have a world built upon inequities and exploitation. We do not have perspectives and voices of excluded and marginalized in creating strategies, policies, laws and solutions. We focus on accessibility and intersectionality in our workstreams. In our empowerment work, it is very important to see women and young girls* from marginalized backgrounds as experts and leaders on their rights, problems, and issues.”*

For more details on Agata Teutsch's work, please go [here](#).

I met many DIVERSE ways of BEING WOMEN



I participated to a SELF-DEFENCE WORKSHOP



ONCE I replaced her in a FEMINIST SUMMER CAMP

My WAY OF FIGHTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS BY BEING a TRAINER

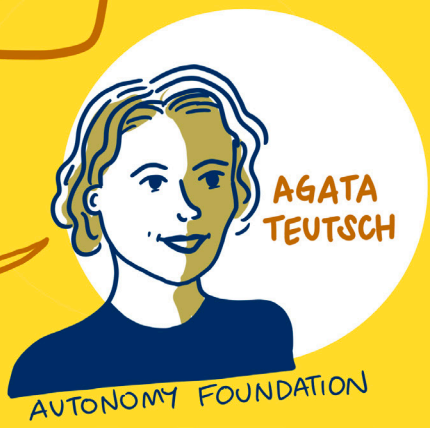


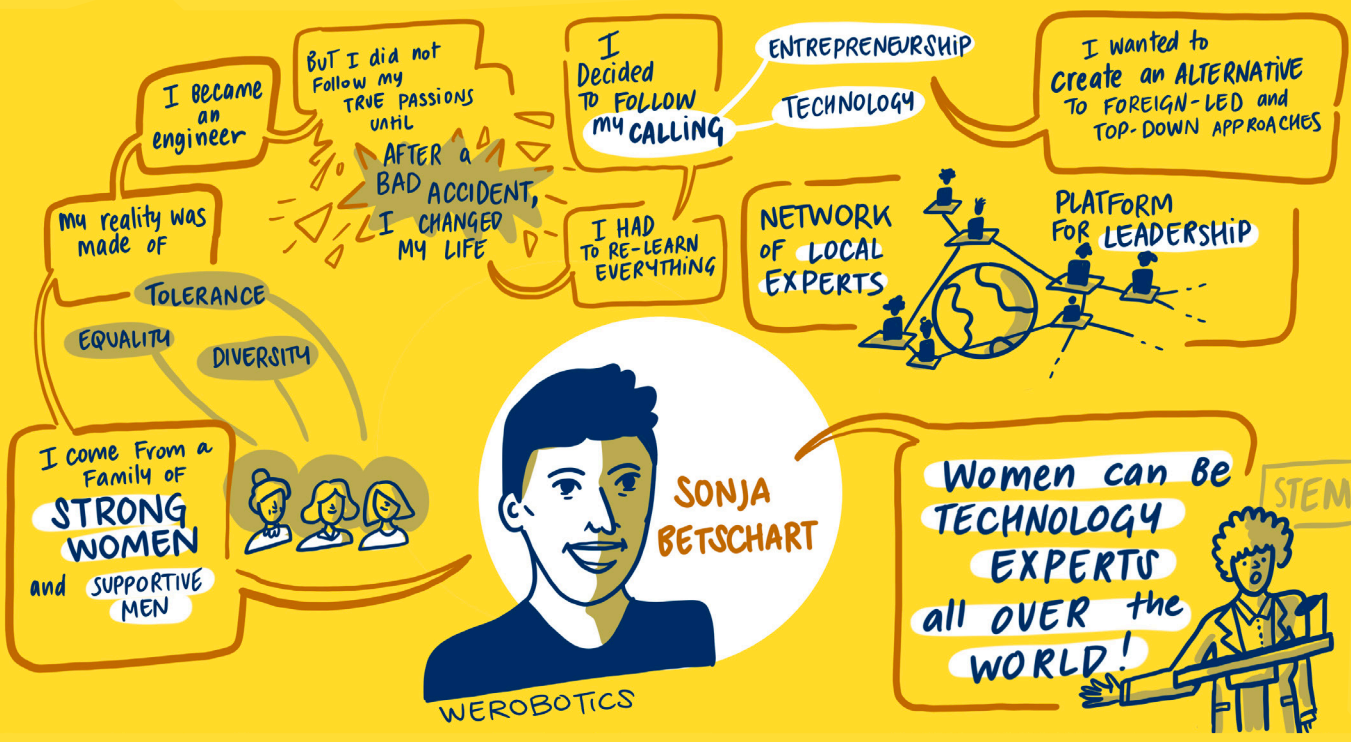
Women can SHAPE THEIR REALITY

And CREATE SPACES FOR WOMEN TO BE TOGETHER, SHARE, LEARN, & RETHINK THE WORLD



My MOTHER is a FEMINIST





“Applying an intersectional lens is essential to gender equity”

—Perspectives from Sonja Betschart, Co-Founder of WeRobotics

Ashoka Fellow, Sonja Betschart, is a pioneer in the “drone & data (technology) for good” sector and a co-founder of [WeRobotics](#), a social impact organisation that brings together local experts, communities and activists to offer practical alternatives to systems dominated by foreign-led and top-down interventions.

Sonja uses her organisation as a global platform to redefine who is an (drone and data/technology) expert, ultimately working towards radical inclusion of local experts in the Global South. In addition to excluding the local experts, the drone sector, and largely the technology sector also faces the unfortunate under-representation of women (only 13%, of which the majority of the positions held are non-technical positions). As the organisation’s values are deeply seated in gender equity, diversity and inclusion, every undertaking is reflective of those values. Through both Flying Labs and WeRobotics and in all their undertakings, Sonja emphasizes intersectionality by challenging socio-economic contexts, cultural contexts and the exclusionary nature of the tech field towards women. To walk the talk, women make up 80% of WeRobotics team members, and 100% of the technology positions are held by women.

In addition to the regular operations, [Flying Labs](#) have delivered 92 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) trainings for over 6’000 underprivileged youth and women interested in STEM careers with the support of WeRobotics. This was just in 2021 and 2022 and across 3 continents (Africa, Latin America, and Asia/Pacific).

On the impact of COVID-19, Sonja mentioned that lockdowns diminished opportunities locally, putting pressure on local experts to sustain their businesses. In addition, women had to shoulder more family responsibilities and hence suffered from greater work pressures and further opportunity loss.

“One of the key challenges for gender equity is applying an intersectional lens, even more so when it comes to technology where women already are encountering a strong bias. In essence, the key, and key challenge, is to bring about a mindset change.”

For more information on Sonja Betschart’s work, please go [here](#)

These are
HARD
TIMES in
POLAND
Every ACTIVIST
is called to ACT



I
WORKED FOR
MOTHERS'
RIGHTS
in POLAND



WORK WITH
FEMINIST
NGOs

NOW

NOVELIST

AND PUBLICIST
ON SOCIAL &
POLITICAL
ISSUES



DECENTRALIZE
THE
MOVEMENT



TO THE
COUNTRYSIDE

I am
an ACTIVIST

I am a
QUEER MOTHER



I Focus
ON LGBTQ+
RIGHTS

and
REPRODUCTIVE
RIGHTS

“Everything is connected, intersectionality is a requisite when tackling gender inequality”

—Perspectives from Sylwia Chutnik, Founder of MaMa Foundation

Ashoka Fellow, Sylwia Chutnik, founded the [MaMa Foundation](#) to prevent the social, economic, and cultural exclusion of mothers, particularly teenage mothers. Specifically, MaMa Foundation addresses the invisibility of mothers in the workforce and society in general by equipping mothers with the skills and support system needed to re-enter the workforce.

Sylwia’s journey to this work was an evolution. She began by advocating for mothers’ rights and this gradually grew to advocate for the rights of women from minority communities, LGBTQI+ communities, and human rights writ large. Coming out as queer mother in 2020, she became a role model and an ambassador for the LGBTQI+ community in Poland. Sylwia says her endeavours are intersectional; she considers individuals’ varying identities and social structures when advocating for rights. This lens, too, is what drives the work at the MaMa Foundation.

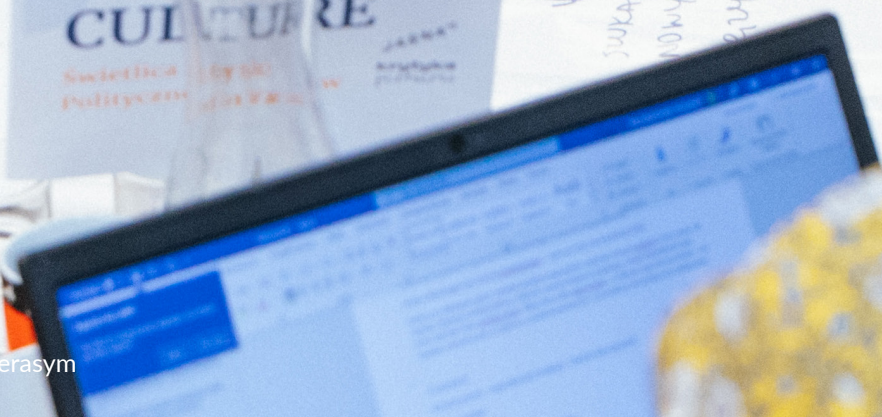
“Everything (social issues) is connected. This is the story, the movement is led by anger, minds, souls, emotions and lived experiences. Every woman, every individual should have the right to choose whatever they want to, go wherever they want to.”

For more information on Sylwia Chutnik’s work please go [here](#)



CULTURE
Swedish
Publicity

Handwritten notes on a white sheet of paper, including the words "Pleby", "Kont", "so", "site", and "Monyo".



#4: Frame gender inequality as a cross-cutting issue

Gender inequality is not a confined issue; it is at play in all contexts. It is an immigration issue, with women and girls making up half of the refugee, internally displaced, and stateless population¹¹. When we talk about individuals affected by global poverty, we are largely talking about women (i.e., 60% of those who go hungry globally are women and young girls)¹². In the domain of environmental protection, women and young girls bear the brunt of negative environmental impacts. Roughly two-thirds of individuals living in poverty in Asia-Pacific are women and young girls; their quality of life is further compromised by indoor pollution and lack of access to indigenous resources¹³.

A true collective approach means all social actors whether in immigration, climate, or otherwise are intentional about solving gender inequality. All social entrepreneurs participating in interviews and session discussions stressed the importance of framing gender inequality as a cross-sector issue, as opposed to a separate cause. Below, we have included examples of how social entrepreneurs are pioneering integrated approaches in law, business, and more.

11 UNFPA (2021) Women and girls' needs require urgent attention as climate shocks, conflict and COVID fuel humanitarian crises; ReliefWeb (2022) "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022"

12 UN Women. Poverty and Hunger. Facts and Figures

13 UNEP. "Promoting gender equality and the environment"

“Perspectives from women and solutions created by them are necessary for a healthy functional society”

—Perspectives from Petra Sachova, Founder of Restorative Justice Institute

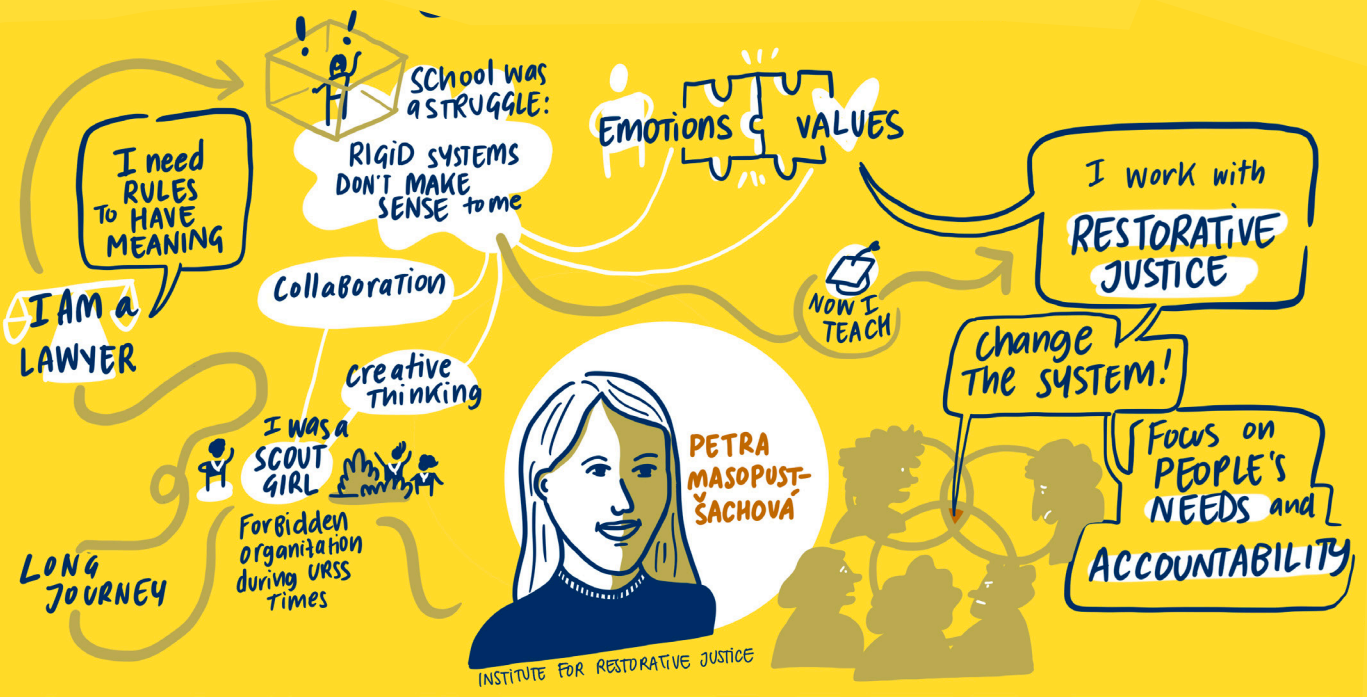
Ashoka Fellow, Petra Masopust-Šachová, is reforming the criminal justice system in the Czech Republic. She is doing this by encouraging the uptake of restorative justice practices. Restorative justice is an empathy-driven, participatory process—many steps removed from the long-standing approach of authoritative decision-making and punishment as a solution. Both the harmed and those who take responsibility for the harm are given the opportunity to communicate and address their needs. In this process, the offenders develop empathy and begin their journey to restoration.

Petra’s organisation, [Restorative Justice Institute](#), is working toward the wide adoption of this empathy-based approach. Restorative Justice Institute engages a range of stakeholders, including judges, lawyers, policymakers, academics, and probation officers in “restorative circles.” Restorative Justice Institute is also employing this approach to survivors and offenders of gender issues as well. These circles include practitioners focused on gender issues, such as GBVs. Restorative circles thereby help their members to integrate restorative justice practices into their line of work.

“As recidivism rates for GBVs are high, harsher punishments might not be the answer, but a paradigm that helps offenders build empathy for the victim.”

“Women’s perspectives need to be incorporated while developing solutions, for the whole society to be healthy.”

For more information on Petra Sachova’s work, please go [here](#).



I need RULES To HAVE MEANING

I AM a LAWYER



SCHOOL WAS a STRUGGLE:

RIGID SYSTEMS DON'T MAKE SENSE to me

EMOTIONS & VALUES

Collaboration

creative Thinking



I was a SCOUT GIRL

Forbidden organization during URSS Times

LONG JOURNEY



PETRA MASOPUST-ŠACHOVÁ

INSTITUTE FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

NOW I TEACH

I work with RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

change The SYSTEM!

Focus on PEOPLE'S NEEDS and ACCOUNTABILITY

“To achieve a fairer society, we need to change the economy by creating gender-balanced, diverse and gender-inclusive businesses.”

—Perspectives from Isabella Lenarduzzi, Founder of JUMP

Ashoka Fellow, Isabella Lenarduzzi, founded her organisation [JUMP](#) to create a more equitable and inclusive society by working with organisations to achieve gender equality and fair representation of diversity.

JUMP’s mission is to help change the world and change companies. They work for a fairer society and more inclusive organisations. JUMP puts equality between women and men at the heart of its work because they believe that, by addressing 50% of the population, gender equality is the most powerful lever for building the basics of inclusion and tackling all other inequalities and under-representations.

To achieve these goals, JUMP offers numerous studies and tools free of charge and provides a wide range of solutions to public and private organisations.

“If we manage to have more gender equality in the organisation, meritocracy will increase too. Leadership stereotypes were created by men for other men. Women are now changing the exercise of power to sharing the power.”

For more information on Isabella Lenarduzzi’s work, please go [here](#).



ISABELLA
LENARDUZZI

JUMP

EQUALITY at WORK
&
ECONOMIC
INDEPENDENCE
FOR WOMEN

We need to CHANGE
POLITICS

SOCIETY
ECONOMY

I
ACCOMPANY
ORGANIZATIONS
TO BECOME MORE
INCLUSIVE

I am an ACTIVIST
and an AMBITIOUS
WOMAN

NOW
I
WORK
ON

When OYSTERS
are WOUND
They make
a PEARL



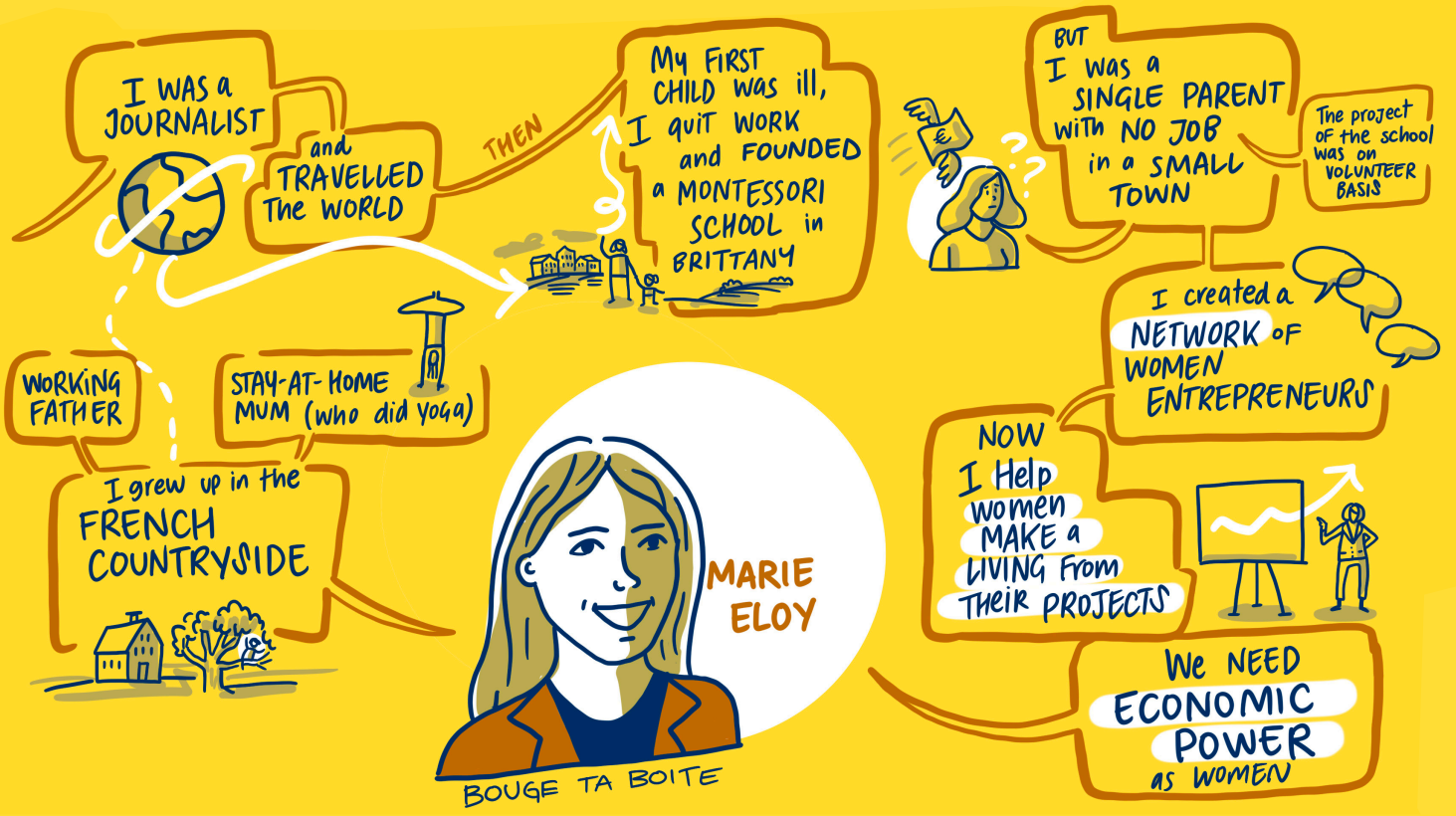
My HUSBAN
KIDNAPPED
MY CHILD!

BUT also a
VICTIM OF
GENDER BASED
VIOLENCE

I was a
SUCCESSFUL
PERSON

Trainings
Action Plans
Audits





“Gender equity is a cross-cutting issue, needed for a balanced economy”

—Perspectives from Marie Eloy, Founder of Femme de Bretagne

In 2014, Marie Eloy, launched [Femme de Bretagne](#), a network that empowers women to start small businesses. Femme de Bretagne offers year-round workshops to equip women with the professional skills required for success in entrepreneurship. Femme de Bretagne has grown to 1,350+ members across 70 cities. There are now Femme de Territories branches in 50 cities in France.

In addition to Femme de Bretagne, Marie has launched [Bouge Ta Boite](#). After learning that 70% of women in France earn less than men¹⁴. She created Bouge Ta Boite to help women entrepreneurs lead sustainable ventures. Through both Bouge Ta Boite and Femme de Bretagne, 5000 business per year across France are organised. Marie drives home that women are an essential part of the economy, and their contribution is of great importance to development.

“Women do not envisage financing, so they think small. Too small. Likewise, they constantly have doubts related to the lack of legitimacy and the lack of examples. It is difficult to be the pioneer in a field.”

For more information on Marie Eloy’s work please go [here](#).

¹⁴ Borgen Project, ‘The Gender Gap in France’. 2022. Retrieved from <https://borgenproject.org/gender-wage-gap-in-france/>



#5: Collaborate across sectors to advance gender equality

To make lasting progress toward gender equity and thus enable gender equality, we need to orchestrate collaboration across social entrepreneurs, philanthropic funders, impact investors, intermediaries, and more. To develop the evidence base for this claim, or more simply put, spell out why collaborative changemaking is so critical, we present rationales from our social entrepreneurs.

Before our sessions, we asked social entrepreneurs why a collaborative approach is important. Here is what they said:

- 1. Collaborative changemaking leverages diverse expertise and perspectives for common good.** Social entrepreneurs know that only through combined efforts can they make lasting changes toward gender equality. These combined efforts need to involve many stakeholders—with varied skills, experiences, perspectives, and access to audiences, resources, and more. Understanding this, Marie Eloy, Founder of Bouge Ta Boite and Femme de Bretagne in France, invited multiple organisations to partner with her to develop a platform to support thousands of women and to increase these women entrepreneurs' visibility and credibility. This is work that could not have been accomplished without the distinct expertise of each of the actors involved. Likewise, Ute Latzel, who leads the Federation of Mothers' Centres, said that because she engaged with the German Women's Council, she eventually gained access to a key stakeholder group—policymakers—with whom she needs to work. As Sonja Betschart, Co-

Founder of WeRobotics, eloquently said, “[Cross-sector collaboration] brings the diversity and shared experiences needed to tackle the intersectional issues that come with addressing gender and power imbalance issues.”

Despite the benefits of collaborative changemaking, the social sector still struggles to collaborate within and across sectors. Agata Teutsch, Founder of Autonomia Foundation, said, *“There is a lack of cooperation between civil societies, decision-makers, policymakers and the community of young girls and women. The system also suffers from a lack of transfer of experiences and ideas, and not mainstreaming gender issues into other initiatives. Organisations have started to feel exhausted and burnt out, without synergies and this very lack of cooperation.”* This idea was echoed by both Marie Eloy, and Sylwia Chutnik, who similarly feel that there is too little cross-sector collaboration.

- 2. Collaborative changemaking creates a safe space to learn from others.** The collective sessions provided a space for brainstorming and learning from others’ perspectives. Some social entrepreneurs said this safe space was the greatest benefit of participating in the sessions. Ute Latzel said that hearing diverse perspectives from all over the EU helps her strengthen her vision for the Federation of Mothers’ Centres. Sonja Betschart, Founder of WeRobotics, also mentioned that the collective sessions provided her with a safe space to brainstorm ideas with others and gave her ideas for when she holds and facilitates such collaboration in her community.
- 3. Collaborative changemaking expands social entrepreneurs’ reach, generating greater impact.** Cross-sector collaboration also allows social entrepreneurs to expand their reach. For example, Ana Bella Estevez, Founder of the Ana Bella Foundation, collaborates with media partners to change key narratives about victims of abuse. She switches the narrative from victim to survivor, and to encourage those suffering in silence to come forward, she shares the positive testimonies of survivors who overcame their abuse. She also co-creates with educators to generate content that empowers teenagers as changemakers against gender-based violence. She trains these teenagers to detect and support women surviving abuse. These cross-sector collaborations—media and education—allow her to reach audiences she may never have through her own.

The collective sessions themselves were a tool to help social entrepreneurs expand their reach. For example, Marie Eloy said just this collaboration with other social entrepreneurs has helped her discover avenues to scale her model to other EU countries.

Conclusion

Social entrepreneurs across Europe are creating a more equitable world for women and girls. Even (or especially) in the crisis that is the COVID-19 pandemic, Fellows remain committed to delivering on the ambitious goals they have set for their organisation and broader society. However, as we have said before, societal transformation requires continued collaboration—better yet, a groundswell of changemakers. To this end, we want to provide you with suggestions for how to use the learnings from this report to contribute to the gender equality movement:

Corporations and Funders: Take action to integrate gender-equitable policies and mitigate bias in your institutions. Consider funding social entrepreneurs working for gender equality.

Media Partners: Partner with social entrepreneurs to rewrite patriarchal narratives and educate the public on issues related to gender equality.

Lawmakers and Policymakers: Partner with social entrepreneurs to use their practices and learnings to inform policy changes.

Youth: Identify opportunities to challenge the patriarchal narrative where you see it. Find role models to support you in your journey as a gender equality advocate and changemaker.

Men (as Allies): Consider yourself a solution-provider, not a bystander. Serve as a role model by challenging orthodox patriarchal narratives.

Social entrepreneurs: Identify strategies that complement your current strategies to create an equitable world for women and the LGBTQI+ community.

In addition to the insights shared in this report, Ashoka will be producing a podcast that provides more detail on our learnings from the session discussions. We will also publish a Manifesto for Gender Equality in November 2022. This Manifesto will bring to light key narratives to enable gender equality and thus bring us closer to gender equality.

Together, we hope these pieces inspire conversation, action, and an overwhelming sense that we each have the agency to create a more equitable world—that we do live in a world where everyone can be a changemaker.

Appendix

In addition to supporting the work above, Beiersdorf also provided financial support to five Ashoka Fellows to further their work in times of COVID-19. The impact of this support cannot be understated. More than 70% of social entrepreneurs who completed our survey said that they needed to moderately or significantly pivot their programs during the pandemic. Likewise, 72% of social entrepreneurs said the pandemic moderately or significantly reduced their funding opportunities. There is no question that Beiersdorf's support was integral to continued progress toward gender equality.


1. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted Flying Labs and STEM Shereos, two programs developed by WeRobotics Co-Founder, **Sonja Betschart**. Funding opportunities became very limited, affecting Sonja's ability to operate Fly Labs. True to her entrepreneurial nature, Sonja found a way to persist. She secured funding from Beiersdorf to create a 3-month online learning program that helped Flying Labs to regain sustainability. Through Panama Flying Labs, she also conducted 15 STEM training sessions for underprivileged youth and women. Through these endeavours, they have reached 13 local volunteers, 173 children (103 girls, 70 boys), 4 local NGOs and 4 local schools.
2. Ashoka Fellow, **Marie-Madeleine Gianni**, founded **Bet She Can** to empower young girls and challenge gender bias as early as possible to bring about a mindset shift. *Volo con Te* (Translation: Flight with You) to support not only vulnerable individuals and groups affected by the Covid pandemic but also social entrepreneurs. This comes after successful 2 pilot projects and 3 editions in 2019 based on *Bet She Can* book.

After Beiersdorf's financial support, the special edition 'Volo con te, Edizione Speciale Biblioteche Municipali 2022' was dedicated to reaching youth through municipal libraries. A total of 39 public libraries with a youth section, from all 20 Italian Regions, were involved throughout the project. They also developed a specific online programme with all the librarians involved. Each programme involved quizzes, brainstorming sessions on how to increase awareness and reduce gender bias's impacts, and workshops on how to approach and support elementary school children during and after the pandemic. Roughly, 73 professionals (95% women) from 39 public libraries involved in the *Volo con te, Edizione Speciale Biblioteche Municipali 2022* project indicated that will use the methodology and the material provided, as well as the increased awareness on gender-related topics, for their activities with about 156 schools. At least 15,600 young girls and overall, around 31,000 children, teachers, and educators are estimated to benefit from their enhanced know-how and skills.

3. Ashoka Fellow **Hera Hussain** founded **Chayn**, a community run by survivors and allies from around the world. They create open, online resources and services to support the healing of survivors of GBVs. These resources are trauma-informed, intersectional, multi-lingual, and feminist. Most of their work deals with the issues of domestic abuse, sexual violence, child abuse or neglect, harassment, and tech-enabled abuse. Supported by Beiersdorf, they have expanded their remote trauma support service, Bloom—now offering support and courses in four more languages (Hindi, Urdu, Spanish and French). They have also created a new reproductive rights guide for their Your Story Matters (YSM) webpage for sexual assault survivors. Furthermore, they have researched and produced an investigative podcast series documenting the experiences of women who choose to report sexual violence. This podcast is now available on all major streaming platforms. In addition to these, Chayn and End Cyber Abuse, launched Orbits, a guide on how to design interventions against tech abuse that are intersectional, survivor-centric and trauma-informed. In the last 12 months, Chayn reached a total of 53,732 users with 146,936 page views.
4. **Isabella Lenarduzzi**, Founder JUMP observed that the effects of COVID-19 were not symmetric, for men and women. Isabella and her organisation took efforts in understanding and measure the impact on gender equity. They published a call to action and wrote letters to ministries of gender equality in France and Belgium. Further in the course of the last two years, supported by funding from Beiersdorf, they have consolidated a handbook on inclusion, gender equality, and the effects of COVID-19. In addition to this, they have conducted numerous workshops and training in over 26 companies, as well as for the French Federation of Employers, with participation from more than 4000 people. They have also participated in numerous conferences and hearings in parliaments, around the issue of gender inequality.
5. **Agata Teutsch**'s organisation Autonomia Foundation which has been tackling anti-discriminatory practices across workplaces, schools, and communities—was one of the frontline organisations in response to the disproportionate impacts on women and children of the recent crises of Covid-19 and the war in neighbouring Ukraine. In the past year, they published their very first knowledge material 'Empowerment of young girls and women in four languages (Polish, English, French and German). They also launched their online training 'Girls' Power Centre-How to get started which was attended by 13 local initiatives across 13 cities in Poland. Subsequently, Autonomia Foundation also travelled more than 2200 kilometres for these initiatives and conducted 15 workshops reaching around 62 women and girls. In addition to this, they also started a webinar series 'Girls' Empowerment Centre-In Practice', and inaugurated 5 new Girls Power Centres in Glogow, Warsaw, Lodz, Elk, and Niepolomice.

Besides the empowerment workstream, Autonomia Foundation also works on the prevention of violence against women and young girls. In line with that, they established a WenDo (a self-defence technique) Academy 2 for WenDo Trainers, attended by 24 women. They also established WenDo Academy 3/UA, the first WenDo training course for women speaking Ukrainian. This course is attended by 21 women from Poland, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic. They also conducted numerous WenDo workshops reaching more than 100 women with disabilities, refugee women, migrant women and girls, and women supporting refugee women.

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Autonomia Foundation also participates in GBVs working groups mediated by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (OHCHR). This exercise helps to engage information on available services on GBVs and to create a GBV referral system. They also engaged women who were directly affected and were fleeing from Ukraine by providing them with safe space, and psychological and economical support, and empowered them to develop solutions for themselves and others in the community.

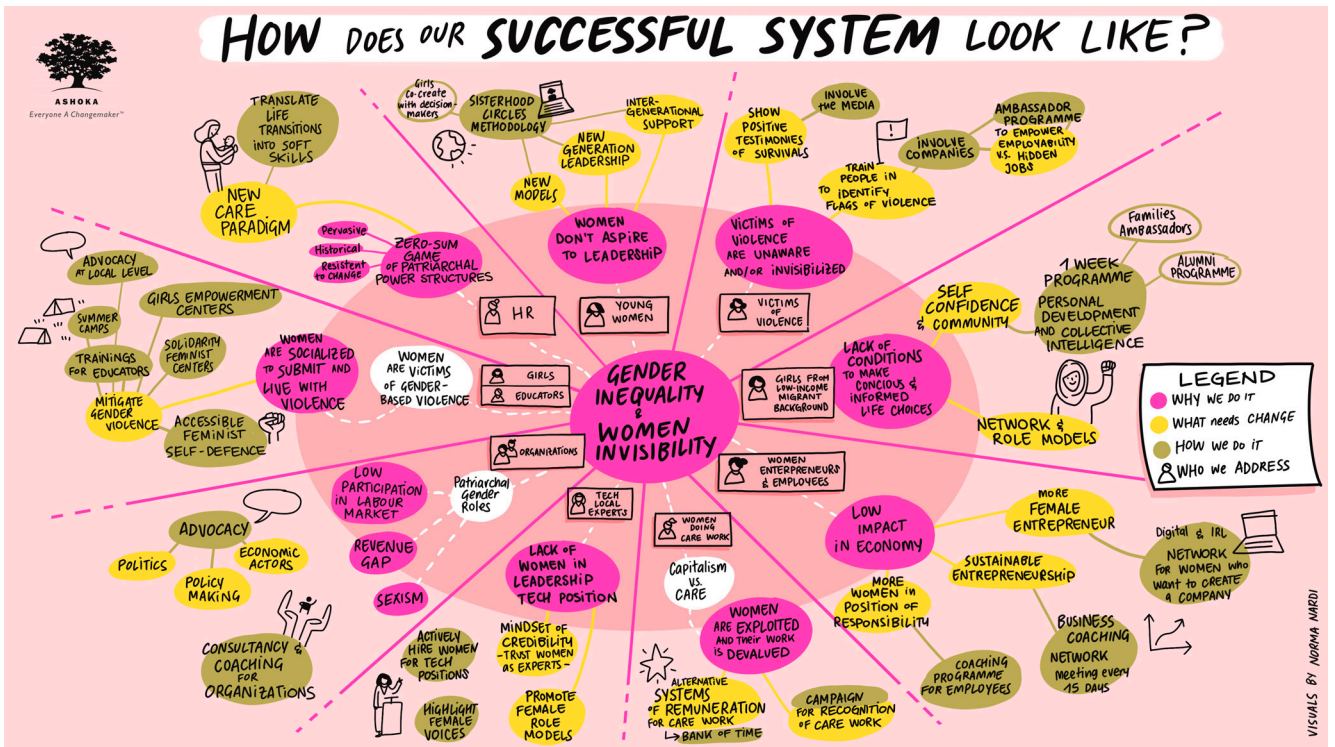
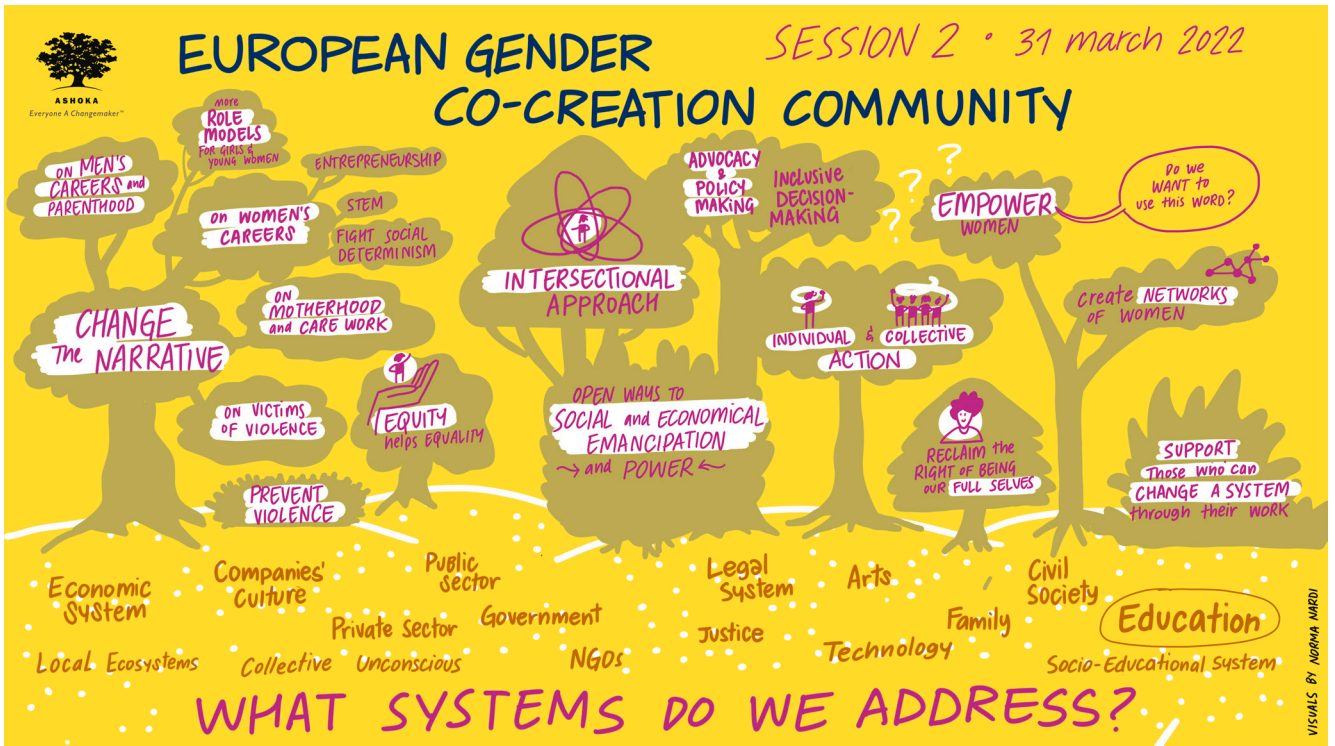


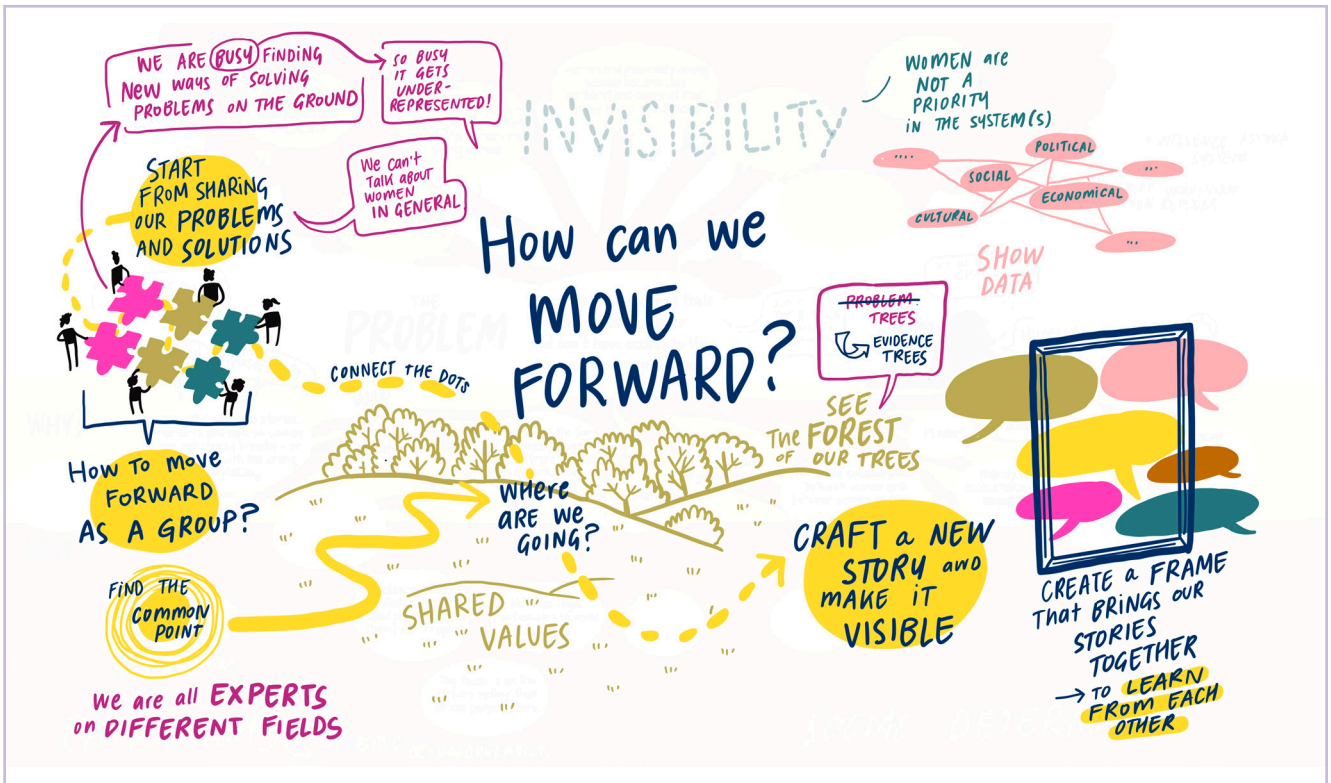
“Every war is a crisis, especially for women, young children, and for those excluded, marginalized, and discriminated against based on race, gender, and levels of ability. Around 4 million people were forced to flee from Ukraine, and 95% of those were women and kids.”

Agata Teutsch, Founder, Autonomia Foundation



Outputs of Sessions





“Every Survivor a Changemaker: Changing Societal Narratives about Survivors of Abuse”

•

“Caregiving, including maternity leave, should be seen as a time of profound learning and not as a time off”

•

“I was told with two children, a woman can't work anymore”

“A lack of strong role models is the main barrier to gender equality”

•

“There should be no ceiling for dreams for young girls”

•

“Girls and Women are change agents and not victims”



“Applying an intersectional lens is essential to gender equality”

•

“Everything is connected, intersectionality is a requisite when tackling gender inequality”

•

“Perspectives from women and solutions created by them are necessary for a healthy functional society”

“To achieve a fairer society, we need to change the economy by creating gender-balanced, diverse and gender-inclusive businesses.”

•

“Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue, needed for a balanced economy”





Supported by

Beiersdorf

Published October 2022

This report is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0
International License.