



# Swisscontact's Policy on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

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## 1. Introduction

Swisscontact promotes the creation of economic opportunities through enterprise and skills development in its projects. It is widely acknowledged that gender equality and social inclusion essentially contribute to eradicating poverty and fostering peace and economic growth. Thus, gender equality and social inclusion are important means for achieving Swisscontact's aim of creating economic opportunities for jobseekers, the self-employed and enterprises.

Swisscontact's policy on gender equality and social inclusion is based on a systemic view and points towards an approach that is compatible with, and reinforced by, the private sector and market development. Partnerships are the main vehicle to implement the present policy and to achieve gender equality and social inclusion in our interventions.

While gender equality itself is one dimension of social inclusion, this policy on "gender equality and social inclusion" recognises that gender is a highly structure-determining category which then has differentiated impacts on people according to their ethnic identity, social position, sexual orientation, disability, among other things. In combining gender equality with social inclusion issues, we prevent bypassing vulnerable and disadvantaged groups because of an exclusive focus on gender, and at recognising that women and men are highly heterogeneous groups that can be grasped only in relation to other dimensions of social differentiation, inequality and exclusion.

This policy links up to the economic focus of Swisscontact, but we firmly believe that besides its economic rewards, gender equality and social inclusion have a moral and ethical "raison d'être" in and for themselves.

This policy builds the basis for a gender implementation guideline and the tools that will be used to implement it.

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## 2. Objectives and Definitions

### Gender Equality

Gender refers to the socially constructed differences between men and women, such as gender roles, perceptions, norms and behaviours which result in power relations between men and women.

Gender equality "refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys."<sup>1</sup> It refers to equality not only in terms of access, but importantly also, to equality in terms of agency<sup>2</sup> and rights. Gender equality means that, de jure and de facto, one's rights, opportunities, agency and recognition are not dependent on being born male or female. Women and men should, however, not be understood as homogenous categories, since behind gender categories lie highly heterogeneous social groups. Nevertheless, in certain socio-cultural contexts, men and women face barriers to access or enjoy socially valued goods or services because of the ascribed gender roles. This creates social and cultural barriers for some genders, despite individual possibilities. Attention must be paid beyond practical needs of each gender and

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<sup>1</sup> See UN Women Training Centre: <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=letter&hook=g&sortkey=>

<sup>2</sup> Agency refers to the power to make and act on decisions (see <https://thepalladiumgroup.com/news/Beyond-Income-Measuring-Womens-Economic-Empowerment>)

take into account strategic needs – requirements to improve the position of women and men regarding each other in a given society<sup>3</sup> – which are a precondition for gender transformation.

## Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is defined as “the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.”<sup>4</sup> The terms on which individuals or groups participate in society often depends on their social status which is based on many different dimensions (gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, ethnic identity etc.). We look at these dimensions from the perspective of an intersectional approach, which starts from the premise that various identities intersect with each other and in their combination contribute to experiences of oppression or privilege.<sup>5</sup> Social exclusion is created by structures of inequality which are expressed through the denial of opportunities, unequal income-generating prospects and unequal participation in political, civic and cultural life and leads to discrimination, stigma and reduced agency.<sup>6</sup> Social inclusion and an intersectional approach force us to approach the SDGs in an integrated way by recognising the cumulative nature of social exclusion since those left behind in relation to one SDG also tend to be left behind on others (Kabeer 2011: 1).<sup>7</sup> Without social inclusion, social justice cannot be achieved.

## Objectives

Swisscontact’s aim of promoting gender equality and social inclusion is to achieve:

- Equal access to resources (economic, social, cultural), assets (skills), economic opportunities, and political/public representation.
- Equal agency regarding decision-making power over income, time, workload, and leadership.
- Equal rights to ownership, mobility, income, and political participation.
- Positive impact on gender norms, roles, institutions, social recognition, reduction of violence and well-being.

Achieving these aims in our understanding depends on:

- Market-driven and occupational skills
- Access to assets, services and resources including social networks
- Ability to make and act on decisions
- Control over resources, profits and time (including the distribution of house chores and care work)
- Gender norms and roles that are based on equality, including social recognition
- Public and private institutions that aim at gender equality
- Market system with growth opportunities
- Laws and regulations that recognise equal rights of women and men, as well as access to legal services, advice on work issues, harassments and rights

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<sup>3</sup> See European Institute for Gender Equality : <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1397>

<sup>4</sup> See « Inclusion Matters » of the World Bank : <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion>

<sup>5</sup> See: «Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice», Women’s Rights and Economic Change, 2004: <http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/Intersectionality%20-%20a%20Tool%20for%20Gender%20&%20Economic%20Justice.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See «Leave no one behind”, UN Economic and Social Affairs, 2016 : <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/Leave%20no%20one%20behind%20RWSS%202016%20II.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See “MDGs, Social Justice and the Challenge of Intersecting Inequalities”, Naila Kabeer, 2011: <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/Kabeer%20Challenge%20of%20intersecting%20inequalities%20short.pdf>

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### 3. Principles

Swisscontact integrates the gender lens as part of the organisation, in gender mainstreamed projects and gender-specific projects. Social inclusion is being mainstreamed in the organisation and all of its projects. In all these areas, Swisscontact relies on the following principles:

- Swisscontact recognises gender equality and social inclusion as prerequisites for sustainable development, economic growth, and social justice.
- To be effectively mainstreamed, gender equality and social inclusion needs to be part of the organisational culture and depends on the commitment of all staff and the whole management.
- To implement the policy on gender equality and social inclusion, sensitivity, reflection and specific competencies are needed, which need to be acquired through continuous training and transparent organisational culture.
- We recognise that gender and various forms of exclusion are highly complex fields which need thorough understanding as they intersect with multiple dimensions of marginalisation and discrimination.
- Swisscontact acknowledges gender equality and social inclusion as a human rights issue that includes non-negotiable norms and rights and recognises that gender, social and cultural norms, roles, obstacles and opportunities are context-specific.
- Gender equality and social inclusion can only be achieved by a combined effort of actors within a system. We recognise that strong partnerships with organisations, institutions, and qualified professionals are needed to achieve gender equality and social inclusion.
- We recognise gender transformation as a means to create employability, income and jobs, to reduce the risk for violence and increase decision-making power and well-being.

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### 4. Implications

Swisscontact commits to the following 7-point agenda to ensure gender equality within the organisation and in its projects:

#### 1. Gender-equal and diversity-driven internal policies and practices

Swisscontact ensures that its internal policies and practices are gender-equal and inclusive. In particular, this includes HR, security, communication policies and practices and budgeting. We therefore:

- Expect from all our staff to uphold the policy on gender equality and social inclusion and consider this in recruitment and promotion.
- Train staff at Head Office, regional office and all project teams in being sensitised for gender issues and diversity.
- Aim at achieving workforce diversity, a gender-balanced middle and senior management team (40% women or men) and seek to reduce gender inequalities in hiring and payment.
- Seek for a balance between work and family life for our employees.
- Invest in capacity-building of gender focal points and gender advisors.
- Regularly report on gender and diversity issues within the organisation. Thematic advisors together with communities of practice lead the institutional process of defining, collecting and analysing gender-related internal data.
- Promote that project and communication materials are prepared in a gender-equal way.

## 2. Gender and context analysis in projects

Local norms, inequalities and power dynamics need to be kept in mind when designing projects. This means that norms, barriers and obstacles as well as the intersection of different types of discrimination, disadvantage, and opportunities need to be firmly understood at the outset of a project (e.g. intersectionality between gender, ethnicity, religion, poverty, etc.). Each project will include resources for a thorough context analysis that explores gender and diversity and recognise the heterogeneous needs, interests and obstacles of women and men in the field of intervention. The analysis identifies vulnerable and excluded groups and delves into the reasons for their exclusion and vulnerability regarding access, agency and rights. Context analysis is being conducted and aligned with a systemic perspective, which means that opportunities, obstacles, access, agency, participation, norms, regulations and services are considered. A gender analysis is being conducted either separately, or as part of the baseline assessment and produces quantitative as well as qualitative data. Results of the gender analysis feed into the planning of interventions, result chains, the definition of indicators and monitoring and measurement instruments, and the selection of strategic partners.

## 3. Strategic partnerships

Swisscontact creates strong strategic partnerships with organisations that have a common understanding of gender equality and social inclusion. Complete with qualified professionals, they are anchored in the systems we work with, reinforce positive outcomes and impacts social and economic empowerment and enhance structural change and policy debates. Swisscontact identifies potential partners, develops targets, conducts due diligence processes and provides tools and instruments for partners who are vehicles in creating gender-positive impact. In addition, Swisscontact trains and sensitises project service partners to guarantee high quality in gender equality and social inclusion outcomes.

## 4. Affirmative activities

Experience has shown that in some cases, projects need to consider specific affirmative actions and tailor products for certain target groups. This means that in some cases measures of equity need to be taken to achieve equality.<sup>8</sup> These are specific incentives, interventions and products for vulnerable or excluded groups in the particular context of the programme, even if they are not the primary target of the programme's interventions. To design such specific action, we apply a life-cycle approach and are sensitive towards local cultural norms. Our work is based on a human-rights based approach and affirmative actions aim at gender transformation and follow as a minimum requirement, the principle of "do no harm".

## 5. Involving the community

Swisscontact works closely with actors on community, regional and state level. Men and boys explicitly need to be engaged in gender equality issues and women economic empowerment interventions.

## 6. Equal participation of men and women

Swisscontact designs projects in a way that they enable equal participation of men and women in project activities and project benefits are distributed equally to men and women. In addition, we analyse and integrate, as part of our adaptive project management, the way "how" specific groups participate and what the impact of the project on the relation between men and women is. To create gender-positive and transformative outcomes and impacts, projects must consider affirmative actions regarding access to resources, opportunities and rights that are aligned with our project goals and activities.

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<sup>8</sup> Equity refers to the principle that is based on the idea of moral equality and that all counts in the moral calculus when dealing with different people (Jones, 2009: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/4577.pdf>). It means "treating people with equal concern and respect (Dworkin, 1983); and that the notion that alike cases should be treated as alike, with similar benefits (or burdens) to be enjoyed (or suffered) by similar people." (ibid:13).

## **7. Gender-sensitive monitoring, reporting and evaluation**

Sex-disaggregated data are crucial to monitor projects and to measure outcomes and impacts regarding gender-equality. We collect sex-disaggregated data in all our projects for all indicators on all levels and aim at further disaggregation based on social status. In addition, we measure change with quantitative and qualitative indicators defined by each project. Based on reporting regarding gender and social exclusion, we continuously adapt our project interventions and document our experiences.