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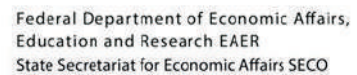
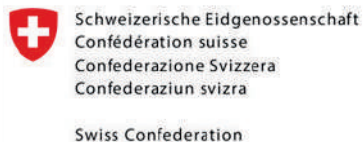
GEIPP
GLOBAL ECO-INDUSTRIAL PARKS PROGRAMME

2024

Advancing Gender Equality to Foster the Transition to Eco-Industrial Parks

Best Practice Series





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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological characteristics and roles that societies attribute to individuals based on their perceived biological sex. These roles encompass a broad range of identities, behaviors, and expectations that extend beyond biological differences and are shaped by historical, cultural, and social influences. Over time, these societal constructs are internalized, forming stereotypes that contribute to unconscious biases. These biases are often reflected in laws, norms, and regulations, perpetuating discrimination and inequality.

The goal of gender equality initiatives is to ensure that individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in every aspect of life, including social, economic, and political spheres. Such initiatives work to eliminate barriers so that gender does not dictate access to resources, benefits, or decision-making power. After all, gender equality is centered around human rights and for that matter this goal has been outlined in SDGs and CEDAW.

Gender equality is a foundational principle of social justice and sustainable development, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making processes. Beyond its intrinsic value as a human right, gender equality drives economic growth, fosters innovation, and strengthens communities. However, persistent disparities in representation, pay, education, and leadership opportunities necessitate proactive strategies to close the gender gap.

In the context of industrial parks, gender equality transcends moral imperatives and becomes a strategic asset. Industrial parks, as hubs of economic activity and innovation, play a critical role in advancing inclusive development. Yet, gender inequality often curtails their potential by limiting women's participation in scientific, technical, and leadership roles. Barriers such as gender-blind infrastructure, insufficient social protections, and inadequate community engagement further exacerbate this exclusion. Addressing these issues is vital for creating inclusive industrial parks that integrate equality alongside environmental and economic goals. This can be achieved through transitioning to Eco-Industrial Parks (EIP).

The International EIP Framework 2.0 highlights gender equality as a core social requirement for EIPs. It underscores the importance of fair employment conditions, including equitable wages, social protections, and recognition of workers' rights such as maternity leave. Gender-responsive policies, such as equal pay, flexible work arrangements, gender considering infrastructure, childcare services, safe working environments, and safe transport arrangements not only support women but also enhance economic performance and workforce productivity.

Integrating a gender lens into decision-making processes is critical. Social infrastructure and management systems within EIPs must address the differing needs of men and women while upholding equal rights. This approach requires industrial parks to incorporate gender considerations into the design and management of facilities such as medical centers, vocational training institutes, and public spaces, ensuring that infrastructure is accessible, safe, and equitable.

Despite progress in promoting gender equality, challenges such as underrepresentation in technical fields, limited training opportunities, and workplace violence persist. Women often occupy low-skill positions with fewer chances for career advancement, exacerbated by employers' reluctance to invest in their training. Industrial parks must address these disparities by ensuring equal access to capacity-building programs, skills training, fostering safe working environments, and implementing gender-sensitive occupational health and safety (OHS) measures.

The success of industrial parks in fostering economic growth and attracting investments relies heavily on their ability to draw skilled labor from nearby areas. However, weak infrastructure disproportionately impacts women, limiting their mobility and workforce participation. Issues such as poor lighting, unsafe transit areas, and inadequate facilities exacerbate risks of harassment and violence. Gender-sensitive infrastructure planning, including enhanced street lighting and safer public spaces, is essential to ensuring that all workers can benefit equitably.





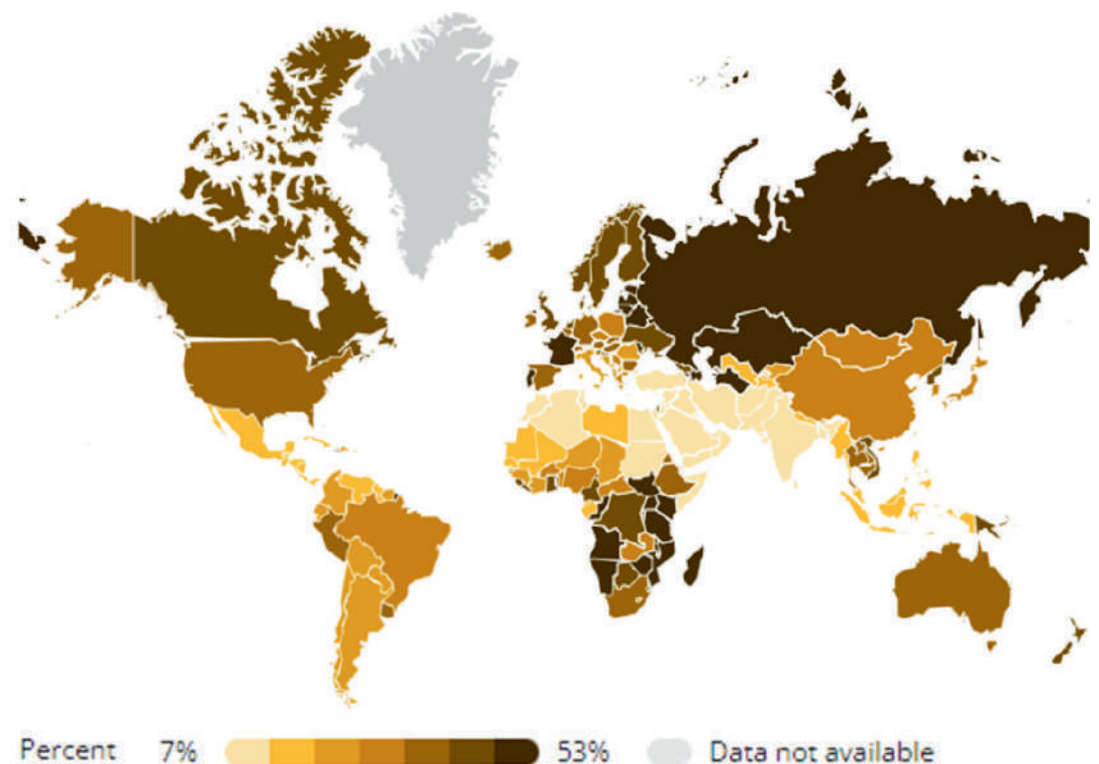
ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

In the industrial sector, women make up approximately 40% of the workforce (UNIDO 2020). However, women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are generally smaller, less profitable, and face greater financial constraints than those led by men. Women are also underrepresented in decision-making roles, with the majority employed in administrative positions rather than in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)-related fields such as engineering, information and communication technology (ICT), and construction.

Globally, women only hold approximately 24% of senior and middle management positions (UN Women 2023) with equally low percentage of firm ownership. Plethora of studies have been conducted to examine why this is the case and it is found that among the main reason being unconscious biases that affects investment decisions. Male investors are more likely to invest in male entrepreneurs. Women are usually offered lower valuations which pushes them away from share ownership. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that less than 3% of venture capital that is invested in women led companies (IFC, Oliver Wyman, RockCreek 2019). Only 7% of seed funding capital in emerging markets went to women-led companies.

Labor force, female (% of total labor force)



Source: ILO data retrieved from World Bank Gender Data Portal (Oct 2024)

Representation of women, by seniority, STEM vs. non-STEM roles



Source: World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2024

UNIDO's Vision on Advancing Gender Equality

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is dedicated to advancing gender equality as a cornerstone of its mission to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID). UNIDO envisions a world where women and men have equal opportunities to lead, participate in, and benefit from industrial growth that is both inclusive and environmentally sustainable. This vision reflects the organization's recognition that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a critical driver of economic and social development.

To operationalize this commitment, UNIDO integrates gender equality into all its programs, ensuring that the principles of inclusivity and fairness are embedded in its initiatives. One such initiative is well translated through the Global Eco-Industrial Parks Programme (GEIPP), which seeks to enhance the environmental, economic, and social performance of industrial parks worldwide. Through GEIPP, UNIDO actively promotes gender-responsive approaches, ensuring that women and men have equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making roles within these industrial ecosystems. This includes fostering access to skills training, financial resources, and leadership opportunities while also challenging gender norms that perpetuate inequality in the workplace and beyond.



**GENDER SELF-ASSESSMENT
TOOL FOR INDUSTRIAL
PARKS AND TENANT
COMPANIES**

GENDER SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR INDUSTRIAL PARKS AND TENANT COMPANIES

The implementation of gender equality in industrial parks requires addressing three primary challenges. First, women often fail to benefit equitably from the establishment of industrial parks, despite the significant potential of these parks to leverage skilled workers from local communities. This disparity largely arises from women's underrepresentation in scientific and technical fields. Second, inadequate or gender-blind infrastructure planning and service delivery frequently creates barriers that hinder women's participation in the workforce, limiting accessibility and inclusion. Finally, insufficient community engagement prevents industrial parks from integrating small, medium, and micro-enterprises (SMEs), where women's paid labor is often concentrated, into their operations.

To address these challenges, the Global Eco-Industrial Park Programme (GEIPP) developed a Gender Self-Assessment Tool, designed for use by industrial park management entities and tenant companies. The tool supports the transition of industrial parks into Eco-Industrial Parks (EIPs) by aligning operations with the International EIP Framework 2.0, which identifies gender equality as a key social requirement alongside compliance with national regulations.

The Gender Self-Assessment Tool enables organizations to evaluate their status regarding gender equality and develop actionable workplans to achieve inclusion and equal opportunities for men and women. The tool assesses performance across several dimensions of company operations, divided into topical components, and assists organizations in designing short-, medium-, and long-term actions to manage gender-related challenges effectively.

For an overview of the tool, please scan this barcode:



The assessment comprises 10 components designed to address corporate policies, operations, and practices, promoting equity, inclusion, non-discrimination, and gender equality across industrial parks and tenant companies. These components include:

Component 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate policies and commitments to gender equality 	Component 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment, promotion and job advancement with equal opportunities 	Component 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation and representation in the composition of the workforce 	Component 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal pay, benefits, and work-life balance 	Component 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to training, education and coaching
Component 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational health, safety and hygiene 	Component 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational climate and culture 	Component 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention and attention to cases of violence, and complaint mechanisms 	Component 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suppliers, value and supply chains 	Component 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community relations and corporate social responsibility

The above-mentioned component is then broken down to 32 elements that industrial park management and tenant companies are required to evaluate internally. Each element is accompanied by a detailed description to facilitate the assessment of whether the park or company fully, partially; does not comply with the said element; or if it is not applicable to the company's context.

With the development of EIP standards at the horizon, the Gender Self-Assessment Tool has proven invaluable in raising awareness among companies about their gender performance. By empowering organizations to autonomously create action plans for improvement, the tool fosters meaningful progress in gender equality, positioning industrial parks to align with broader sustainable development goals.



**GENDER EQUALITY
INITIATIVES IN ZONA FRANCA
DEL CAUCA**



GENDER SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR INDUSTRIAL PARKS AND TENANT COMPANIES

Colombia has established a strong legal framework to promote gender equality. To date, the country has implemented 64 regulatory instruments aimed at fostering inclusivity and equity, with nine specifically designed to advance women's economic autonomy, support income generation, and bolster entrepreneurship. Key regulations and strategies include:

- **Labor Equality with an Ethnic and Gender Approach:** A program introduced by the Ministry of Industry to promote equality in employment, emphasizing both gender and ethnic inclusivity.
- **Women Leaders:** An initiative led by the Ministry of Trade to support female entrepreneurship and leadership development.
- **National Development Plan:** A comprehensive strategy by the National Planning Department, which includes specific goals aimed at advancing gender equality.

Within this landscape of progressive policies, Zona Franca del Cauca (ZFC), GEIPP Colombia priority industrial park, has emerged as a key player in translating these national mandates into actionable change. Serving as an economic hub for its surrounding community, ZFC has not only created employment opportunities but has also become a testing ground for innovative gender mainstreaming practices. The journey of ZFC toward fostering gender equality began in 2020, when the Global Eco-Industrial Park Programme (GEIPP) provided technical assistance and formally launched gender self-assessment tool to help the industrial park incorporate gender-focused strategies into its operations.

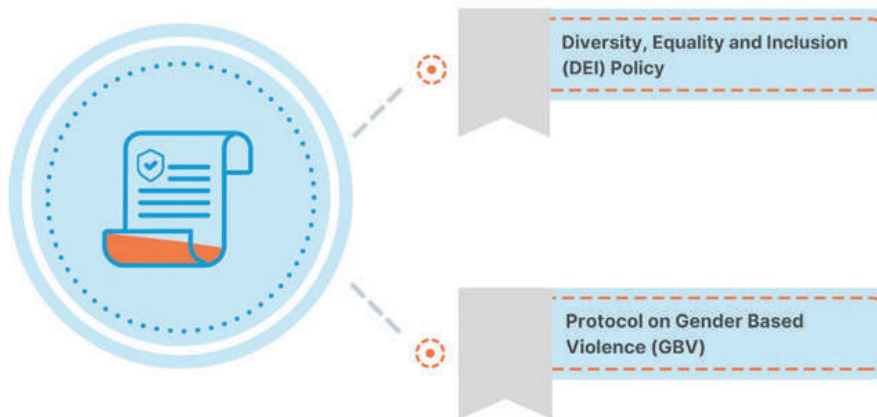
Using the tool, ZFC undertook a comprehensive analysis of its workforce and identified critical gaps in gender representation. This analysis revealed that while women made up 28% of the registered workforce, they were predominantly employed in administrative roles, with limited presence in technical or managerial positions. To address these disparities, ZFC launched a survey aimed at setting specific goals and prioritizing measures to advance gender equality. The findings underscored the need for targeted labor inclusion and employability programs, a clearly defined target population for gender initiatives, and a robust corporate social responsibility (CSR) plan. Further, ZFC identified four strategic areas for development: social, environmental, human, and communication, which would serve as the foundation for its action plan.

Guided by these insights, ZFC began implementing tangible initiatives to bridge gender gaps. One of the first steps was to conduct Gender and Industrial Development Training, supported by UN Women, to equip management teams and tenant companies with the tools and knowledge to foster inclusivity. Building on this, ZFC collaborated with USAID in 2022 to roll out a gender equality program, further institutionalizing its commitment to change.

By 2023, ZFC had significantly expanded its efforts, introducing continuous training and mentoring programs for both management and employees. Partnering with CoreWomen, a specialized organization in gender-focused training, ZFC leveraged CWTech, CoreWomen's digital training subsidiary, to deliver customized courses aimed at embedding gender mainstreaming practices across the workforce. These initiatives culminated in the development of a "Pro-Equality" project, an ambitious plan designed to ensure inclusivity throughout the industrial park.

Milestones and Policies

The year 2024 marked a milestone for ZFC with the formal adoption of a Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) Policy and a Gender-Based Violence Protocol. These groundbreaking policies, approved by the board of directors, reflect ZFC's commitment to fostering a safe, equitable, and inclusive workplace. To ensure these policies were more than symbolic, ZFC launched comprehensive communication campaigns to raise awareness and secure buy-ins from its workforce. These campaigns included the creation of practical guides for implementing the policies, further embedding them into the organizational culture.





Recommendations and the Road Ahead

To build on this progress, ZFC has outlined both short-term and long-term recommendations aimed at sustaining its commitment to gender equality. In the short term, the industrial park plans to review its policies to ensure compliance with national maternity and paternity leave regulations, conduct regular training on preventing sexual harassment, and launch organizational climate surveys to assess workplace culture. ZFC intends to proactively engage its suppliers by communicating its commitment to gender equality, setting an example for partners and stakeholders.

Looking further ahead, ZFC envisions transformative initiatives to support work-family balance for both men and women, develop career advancement programs to increase women's representation in leadership roles, and create opportunities for women-led suppliers and contractors. Moreover, ZFC plans to participate in multi-stakeholder platforms to promote the rights of women and girls, reinforcing its position as a leader in industrial gender equality.



Conclusion



CONCLUSION

Advancing gender equality in industrial parks represents a cornerstone of sustainable industrial development and inclusive economic growth. The integration of gender-responsive policies, practices, and infrastructure into the fabric of industrial operations is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for optimizing workforce potential, enhancing productivity, and fostering innovation. When women are empowered to participate equally in industrial sectors, the ripple effects extend beyond individual enterprises to strengthen entire communities and economies.

Industrial parks, as hubs of economic activity, have the capacity to lead transformative changes by embedding gender considerations into their governance, operations, and outreach. The adoption of tools such as the Gender Self-Assessment Tool provides organizations with a structured approach to evaluate their gender performance and develop actionable strategies to address gaps. Key components such as equitable hiring practices, gender-sensitive infrastructure, equal pay, and safe working environments are critical for fostering inclusivity and dismantling systemic barriers that disproportionately affect women.

Achieving gender equality in industrial contexts requires addressing persistent challenges. approach that integrates gender equality into corporate policies, Women remain underrepresented in technical and leadership roles, face limited access to skills development, and often endure inequities in pay and workplace safety. Overcoming these challenges demands a holistic community relations, and supply chain management, ensuring that all facets of industrial operations contribute to a more inclusive ecosystem.

Beyond compliance with legal frameworks, gender equality initiatives in industrial parks must embrace innovation and collaboration. By fostering partnerships with government entities, development organizations, and civil society, industrial parks can leverage expertise, resources, and networks to create comprehensive solutions. Continuous training, awareness campaigns, and engagement with local communities further reinforce the importance of gender equity, ensuring sustainable progress over time.

The benefits of gender equality extend beyond social outcomes. Research consistently shows that diversity drives stronger financial performance, enhances decision-making, and fosters resilience in the face of global challenges. When industrial parks prioritize gender equity, they unlock the full potential of their workforce, attract broader investments, and contribute to achieving global development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As industrial parks transition into eco-industrial parks (EIPs), they can set a global benchmark for integrating gender equality into sustainable industrial development. By adopting gender-transformative practices, industrial parks can position themselves as leaders in creating equitable, innovative, and environmentally conscious economic hubs. In doing so, they ensure that industrial growth is not only inclusive but also impactful, laying the groundwork for a future where gender equality is both a means and an outcome of sustainable development.





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