



Gender equality & Women's rights

Supplier brochure
2023





About this brochure

At Albert Heijn, we think it is of great importance that all genders have equal rights and opportunities and are treated equally, in our own organization as well as in our supply chains.

Even though we work with qualified suppliers, in whose expertise we trust, the topic of gender equality is not always top of mind. Awareness, however, is necessary as equality between women and men is not always self-evident.

We hope that reading this brochure will give you inspiration and possibly new insights that you can apply to your own business in the right context.

Structure of this brochure

The first chapter introduces the topic of gender equality in general and what it means for businesses. The rest of the brochure covers four themes:

- **Women specific needs**
- **Safety & Security**
- **Finance**
- **Participation and empowerment**

For each theme the main issues are explained, followed by practical tips on how to think about addressing these issues and improve gender equality.

The themes are supported by real-life examples from different Albert Heijn suppliers.





1. Gender equality

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What is gender equality?

Gender equality means that all genders are equally able to access economic opportunities and resources. They can make the choices or pursue the career they want, without facing discrimination. In other words, people's rights, opportunities, and access to work and society are not limited based on their gender.

Equality does not by definition mean that everyone is treated exactly the same but rather that women and men's *different needs are valued equally*.

What are benefits of gender equality in business?

It is proven that enhancing gender equality can benefit a company in terms of productivity, profitability and efficiency. A fair and equal treatment of workers improves work culture and makes employees feel comfortable about coming to work. Motivation and productivity increase when workers are feeling safe, valued, and heard.

As a result, equality can significantly reduce employee turnover and absentee rates. Gender-balanced teams also bring in a variety of perspectives and skills which can help to create innovative solutions and promote a more collaborative and efficient work environment.

What does gender equality in business look like?

Working conditions and facilities reflect the needs of all employees. The following elements are important to consider:

- Equal treatment of women and men: The workplace is an environment of respect and men or women should not be treated differently based on their gender.
- Equal pay: Pay rates are not determined based on a person's gender (or race, age, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, etc.).
- Equal access to training and career-building opportunities.
- Equal representation on worker committees, within leadership roles, or in cooperatives.

1. Gender equality

Why a special focus on women's rights?

Although gender roles have evolved and expanded over the past century, they traditionally enabled men more than women to advance in the business environment.

Women tend to face more barriers because of different needs due to physical differences, societal expectations or because they carry more responsibility for the household and children. It can be harder for them to access education and trainings, or even the labor market.

We are not always aware of this, which is why we want to devote special attention to women's rights and needs in this brochure.

What can you do?

- Regular worker consultations to identify gender related needs regarding working conditions.
- Make sure both women and men are rightly represented in the workforce and decision making. Be extra sensitive to possible barriers for women to participate equally.
- Create open and safe communication step by step, within the cultural context. This can be challenging in places where societal norms do not always support gender equality.
- Sign the [United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles](#). These principles offer supportive guidance on how to strengthen women's rights.
- Design a gender equality strategy. Make sure employees are consulted and top management is on board.
- Set up policies to embed gender equality in your organization (e.g. on equal pay).
- Train your employees on your culture in the workplace, what is expected and what is accepted or not.



2. Women-specific needs

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To enhance gender equality, it is important to recognize the unique needs and challenges women face due to physical differences, societal expectations or responsibilities at home. To provide for equal treatment and opportunities in the workplace, these needs should be considered when designing company facilities, policies, or the hiring process.

Toilets and menstrual hygiene

Not everyone is aware of the different sanitary needs of women and men. Have you ever thought about why there is always a longer queue for the ladies' room? Or on large plantations, where the nearest toilet is?

Easily accessible and hygienic toilet facilities are important for women. Especially during the menstrual period, women have more frequent toilet needs. The availability of menstrual products and a bin for disposal can also make a big difference. Minor details we might not always think about could already discourage women to apply for a certain job.



2. Women-specific needs

Maternity

It is common for women not to apply for a job when they are not provided a paid maternity leave. Without a maternity policy, women could either stop showing up when they become pregnant, or even hide their pregnancy, which can affect their productivity and have severe health consequences for both the woman and baby. Women who return to work after pregnancy may need time for breastfeeding and/or pumping breastmilk during the day.

Women may also face issues with getting a job because of the possibility of longer-term maternity leaves. Having no job and income can affect the wellbeing of the family and further limits the woman's freedom and opportunities.

In countries with inadequate nutrition and healthcare provisions, maternity can also pose risks to women's health.

Maternity policy

A maternity policy is a plan that a company can make to support pregnant and breastfeeding women. Having a good maternity policy is a great way to attract and retain the best female employees. It can help with productivity, retention, and even company loyalty.

Consider the following factors when drafting your policy:

- Know your legal obligations and try to go beyond them.
- Get input from stakeholders during the design.
- Make your policy loud and clear - so that women are not inclined to hide a pregnancy due to the feeling of a lack of support from the company.
- Make sure you support women both during, and after pregnancy with (paid) leave, time allotments for breastfeeding/pumping and safe and sanitary breastfeeding/pumping areas.

2. Women-specific needs

Unpaid care and household

Due to traditional gender roles in some societies, women are expected to take care of the children and be responsible for household duties. With this, they play an important role in securing the wellbeing and development of the family and in raising future generations of workers, thereby indirectly contributing to the economy.

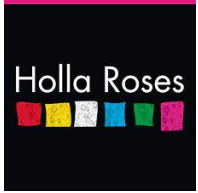
Women must often combine their income-generating jobs with unpaid household and care work. Women often also take on certain responsibilities within the community. Ideally, these responsibilities would be better distributed amongst women and men, as they affect women's availability and flexibility in the workplace. Coming in very early, working overtime, or after-work activities (which may be required in a higher position) may not be possible.

What can you do?

- Make sure there are (clean) toilet facilities available, also for workers in the field.
- Develop a maternity policy.
- Make sure menstrual products are provided in the workplace if women do not have access to this themselves.
- Consider additional care duties that women often have:
 - By providing flex time to let women divide their own time, and/or;
 - By providing time off during the workday for breastfeeding and breastfeeding facilities, and/or;
 - By providing daycare for their children, and/or;
 - By providing healthcare and other wellbeing facilities (possibly through partnerships), and trainings on family planning, and/or;
 - By engaging men in awareness raising sessions to stimulate a more equal share of duties.

Example Women-specific needs

Maternity and healthcare



Supplier: Holla Roses
Location: Ziway lake, Ethiopia
Product: Roses

The Dutch company Holla Roses has a rose nursery located in Ethiopia, with a workforce consisting of about 80% women. Besides focusing on the production of roses, the company also addresses the social aspects of her employees and has paid special attention to women-specific needs.

In this way the company responds to the specific needs of their female employees. This makes the employees feel understood and protected, which has increased their willingness to commit to their work and be more productive.



Pregnancy services

Infant mortality is still common in Ethiopia. To prevent this, Holla Roses provides free healthcare to its employees which includes a focus on services for pregnancy, like gynecology and maternity care.

Maternity leave

Holla Roses provides its female workers four months of maternity leave instead of three months of leave that is prescribed by Ethiopian law. This gives women enough time to rest and take care of their bodies before giving birth, as well as to spend enough time with their newborn after birth, before they return to work.

Breastfeeding time

The World Health Organization advises to breastfeed for at least six months. Holla Roses gives the women two hours per day to breastfeed their newborn. The first six months, the women do not work a regular eight hours per day but have time to go home in between work to breastfeed their baby.

Training

On top of that, the company offers trainings on family planning to reduce the risk of early pregnancy among girls. Condoms are provided at the workplace to stimulate this.



3. Safety and security

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Certain societal norms and biases can create situations in which women are prone to face unsafe and unsecure working conditions, based on their gender. Raising awareness on the norms and severity of such issues is an important step in creating a safer and more equal workplace for women.

Sexual harassment and abuse

Male-dominated environments may create a culture of acceptance towards the mistreatment or abuse of women. It can be part of the working culture that women need to do “sexual favors” in order to get a job, promotion or other benefits.

The root causes include a lack of knowledge about acceptable behavior, social norms, rights, the system in place to report on these issues, and poverty (often these women have no choice).



3. Safety and security

Consequently, on large farms or plantations (where there might be poor visibility) women may feel vulnerable and unsafe. And when women are not consulted or involved in communication or decision-making within the company, they may also feel like they can't speak up about their issues.

When these feelings of unsafety prevail, women may leave their jobs, which increases turnover rates and costs for the company. It also prevents women from earning a living and being able to provide for their family, which further limits their wellbeing, independence and freedom.

What can you do?

- Develop policies (e.g., on sexual violence and abuse) to safeguard women workers.
- Provide awareness training on gender bias and stereotypes. Include sexual harassment, rights, and desired or acceptable behavior on this topic. Make sure to train both women and men, including staff and management.
- Make sure women have a female counsellor available. Someone with whom they feel safe enough to communicate openly and share their concerns.
- A gender-sensitive grievance mechanism* and well-functioning workers committee can also create a safe space to speak up.
- Provide separate toilets and changing rooms to make women less subject to unfriendly comments or behavior.

Example Safety and security

Sexual harassment and abuse



Supplier: Danper
Location: Peru
Product: Avocados & green asparagus

As a leading and reliable agribusiness founded 29 years ago in Peru, Danper has built an innovative business model based on the creation of shared value which connects its economic profit with the progress of their workers and communities.

In Peru, as well as in other places, inequity, discrimination and violence against women threatens not only women themselves but also the development of the country. That is why at Danper they focus on fighting against these issues, ensuring a safe and equal work environment that empowers women and impacts their business performance.



Their constant work has made them the first company in Peru and the only agribusiness to obtain the globally renowned gender equality EDGE certification.

Training on discrimination and gender-based violence

Danper implemented the gender equality program called 'Victoria'. Under the program, gender bias- and stereotype training is provided to workers and high school students to become agents of change and fight against discrimination and gender-based violence in their communities. Nowadays more than 1680 students and more than 5600 female and male workers were trained under the Victoria program.

In 2020, in the context of the Corona pandemic, Danper worked with the Albert Heijn Foundation to adapt its gender equality program into a virtual program. This enabled more students to learn about gender issues in different regions of Peru.

The program has impacted the lives of many. Danper conducted a survey with 100 students from the last year of high school at COAR La Libertad. 95% indicated that they now lead conversations with their families about what they learned from the program. 8 out of 10 students evaluated that they had the knowledge and capacity to facilitate a discussion with peers about gender inequality issues.



4. Finance

4. Finance

Due to insecurity, poverty, household responsibilities, or early marriage and pregnancy, women may drop out of school and may not have the same work opportunities as men. It is also possible women have less income than men or lack ownership over finance. All of these factors might limit the women's ability to develop and become resilient and might hamper them in pursuing the career and life they want.

Pay gap

The pay gap between women and men is linked to a variety of factors, including differences in education and experience, occupational segregation, and discrimination.

Women can end up in less well-paid jobs because of different perceptions based on gender. Women can be seen as more diligent, modest or careful, which makes them seem as better suited for lower-paid positions like harvesting, picking flowers/fruit or packing products.



4. Finance

In many places, women also get paid less even if they perform the same jobs as men. Globally, female employees earn about 20 percent less than men for the same work of equal value.

Financial ownership

Women often lack ownership over financial resources and expenditures. Women often have no personal bank account and wages are paid in cash, which can increase the risk of having to hand in their salary to the male head of the household. Land is usually owned by their husbands, brothers or fathers, making women ineligible to join cooperatives or receive a loan. This may limit their ability to invest in input services, such as improved technology or seeds.

Not having ownership and not being included in decision-making processes around expenditures further increases inequality for women.

What can you do?

- Identify whether you have a gender pay gap.
- Establish a pay policy and salaries that assure equal pay for same positions.
- Provide training for skills improvement so women can get promoted to higher-paid functions.
- Work together with financial service providers, like banks, to make them more accessible to women.
- Pay women on a personal bank account instead of paying them in cash.
- Provide financial education and resources to help women become more financially literate.
- Organize couples' dialogues to build trust and transparency and support women's decision-making power within the household.

Example Finance

Financial ownership



Supplier: Tony's Chokolonely
Location: Ghana and Ivory Coast
Product: Cocoa

The [100WEEKS program](#) funded by the Tony's Chokolonely Foundation is targeted at vulnerable smallholder cocoa communities in West-Africa. Typically, the male head of the household receives the premium for the cocoa that the family has sold.

The 100WEEKS program provides the women of these farmers €8 per week for 100 weeks, combined with entrepreneurial, financial and life skills training, which enables them to them to make their own financial decisions, invest in an alternative source of income and have a bigger voice in household spending.

Impact measurement has demonstrated that financial empowerment has improved women's confidence, spurred female entrepreneurship and strengthened their position in their communities. Besides gender equitable outcomes, the project increases households' income and by reducing poverty it takes away the main cause of child labor. When women have more control over how income is spent at the household level, they will typically prioritize the development of their children.

To generate local support for the 100WEEKS program, representatives from the communities select the women from the most vulnerable families to be program participants. The men are not forgotten. As they sometimes feel threatened by the empowerment of their women, they are involved in parts of the program. Gender equality cannot be achieved if men are left out of the equation.

Up to now, the Tony's Chokolonely Foundation has funded three 100WEEKS projects in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire.





5. Participation and empowerment

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Many factors could disempower or discourage the participation of women in the workplace and in society more generally, like traditional gender roles, women-specific needs, lack of safety, limited financial resources, and inequality in education. More awareness on these factors can also create a more equal workplace for women.

Representation in workers' councils

Women may not be well represented in councils or committees, due to social norms on what positions are (not) considered suitable for women as well as women's lack of confidence. As a result, their desires and interests are not heard or well represented. The fact that most men occupy senior leadership positions also means that women are less represented in decision-making processes.



5. Participation and empowerment

Education and training

Access to education and training are key in empowering women and providing them with knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in better paid positions in the labor market. However, early pregnancy may lead to young girls dropping out of school. As a result, they cannot obtain essential knowledge or have limited levels of literacy, which may limit their ability to opt for higher job functions.

Through education, women may acquire better job opportunities and pay, giving them a chance to provide for their family and to make decisions about their health, fertility, and family size, in light of their own futures and those of their children.

Equal job opportunities

In many companies, women work in roles that require detail and care, such as sorting and packing. Jobs that require more physical strength and a higher skill profile often go to men and are better paid. Women interested in non-traditional jobs often lack key skills for such jobs. They also have to fight against gender stereotypes.

Management positions are often predominantly filled by men. Companies are increasingly realising that a gender-balanced workforce makes good business sense. Especially in companies with a predominantly female workforce, female supervisors have been found to improve working relations and reduce sexual harassment.

5. Participation and empowerment

Gender-sensitive grievance mechanism

When there is no effective grievance mechanism or safe space to speak up, women may fear that their concerns are not handled anonymously or that they could lose their job.

Having mostly (or only) men in senior positions can discourage women to talk about issues they face at the workplace, especially when these issues are sensitive and involve men, such as sexual harassment or abuse.

It is important that the system in place is trusted, accessible and that workers and new hires are trained about their rights, the system and related local laws. This can be challenging especially when there are insufficient financial resources to train workers on an ongoing basis.

A gender-sensitive grievance mechanism provides a safe space for women to make their voices heard. This could also take the form of a 'gender committee'.

For a gender-sensitive grievance mechanism consider the following:

- Make sure it is anonymous.
- Report when complaints have been made, even if no action has been taken.
- Make all workers aware of their rights and accessibility of the system. Make the system public so that someone who cannot read can ask others and no information is withheld.
- Make sure complaints are handled by a balanced team of women and men.
- Have an independent, external party (e.g. ombudsman) look at the process to ensure its credibility and functionality.
- Collect input and feedback from workers and especially women to improve the functionality of the system.
- Involve the local police when the severity of an issue violates the law

5. Participation and empowerment

Include female farmers in the supply chain

In some countries, men are the legal owners of the land and therefore dominate farmer organizations. As a result, men are given access to inputs, training, and decide on social programs.

Women actively contribute to the production of crops and products, but their role is often overlooked in farmer organizations. As most smallholder farms are family enterprises in which both husband and wife actively take part, it may be the women who actually manages a farm.

What can you do?

- Build women's confidence to speak up or interest them in running for elections, local cooperatives or councils, e.g. by training. Empowering women could also mean encouraging men to step back.
- Set-up a gender-sensitive grievance mechanism.
- Provide education in literacy or (on-the-job) training opportunities related to management positions or non-traditional (technical) jobs e.g., driving tractors and lifters.
- Increase access for female farmers but also spouses to agricultural inputs and trainings. Organize these in a location and at a time that is accessible for them.
- Support financial ownership by women.
- Set up a strategy to address and create awareness on the barriers for women to actively participate in the farmers groups.

Example Participation and empowerment



Supplier: Fyffes
Location: Latin America
Product: Tropical fruits

Fyffes is a large importer and distributor of tropical products and an international player involved in the production, procurement, shipment, ripening, distribution and marketing of bananas, pineapples, and melons. Besides the company's focus to produce sustainably and deliver healthy foods to markets, it has a big focus on enriching peoples' lives and taking care of its employees, growers, and communities.

After conducting its first Human Rights Impact Assessment in 2019, Fyffes identified gender discrimination and gender-based violence to be priority risk areas in Latin America, particularly in agriculture, where women represent about half of the total agricultural labor force. To address this issue, gender equality has become a key component of Fyffes Global Sustainability Strategy.

Education on gender equality and personal skills

In 2019, Fyffes partnered with Business for Social Responsibility to launch its first Gender Equality Program with the goal to engage, empower, and encourage workers and managers to build more harmonious relationships, both at home and in the workplace, and give them the tools to address challenges they face around subjects like finances, family planning, health, and communication. The training was adapted to the Latin American sociocultural context, providing examples of gender issues that people in the region face.

The training program, which was initially imparted in-person in Fyffes farms, was later digitalized by BSR to continue its implementation during COVID-19. The program, called HERessentials, has since then been rolled out to 100% of Fyffes farms in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Honduras.

To date, almost 4.000 Fyffes farm employees and workers have been trained on gender equality, and many have voiced their motivation to pursue further education and advance their career thanks to the program.



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