



Workshop in collaboration with Anna Lindh Foundation Gender equality workshops for Arabic speaking youth

Outcomes and recommendations:

1. It is worth noting that gender discrimination is universal and is present in all societies, cultures, and sectors. Achieving gender equality is not an easy task. However, it is not impossible and can be achieved gradually. If one society can achieve a certain development, it is possible elsewhere.
2. The negotiation strategy can be one of the best strategies as all parties gain approximately equal advantages. In this regard, it is important to remember the goals of others, to include all genders, and to work to create mutually beneficial opportunities for all. Feminism has different branches, and some branches may be considered extremist, even by women, whilst other branches have the tools to achieve positive progress towards gender equality.
3. Gender equality cannot be achieved by focusing only on women. Men also need support and education. For example, there is a need to spread awareness on what is toxic masculinity. Moreover, there is a need to achieve more awareness about the ability of women to hold the same positions in society as men.
4. Culture, traditions, customs, and beliefs need to be questioned when it comes to violating basic human rights. Despite the importance of a culturally sensitive approach, any violation of basic human rights should never be tolerated.
5. Gender discrimination has been made clear to exist in all societies even in Finland which is considered very equal, but in order to strive for greater equality, discussions are still taking place at the local level. The same should apply in Arab societies, because it is the only way to achieve continuous change towards equality.
6. Constructive discussions, such as intercultural dialogues, are needed. It is more challenging in the online digital debates, especially on social media. A strategy is needed to combat digital abuse and threats. The environment and rules for conducting a discussion can play a vital role in achieving better conclusions.



7. Cooperation and working together approach. Societies must cooperate to eliminate gender discrimination as a common goal for a better world. Societies must continue to defend and build upon the progress that has been made.
8. Education and training sessions on discussion skills are needed in order to respect each other's opinions and to open up certain topics without concerns, such as talking about sexual rights. It should be noted here that in Arab societies it is difficult for people of another opinion to join a peaceful conversation and that they usually tend to avoid participation, for fear of being implicated as supporters of such events.
9. Comparisons and learning from successful stories strategy. In our workshops, we made a comparison of the employment infrastructure for both genders between Finland and the Middle East, on how employment opportunities for women differ. However, it is clear that although the freedom to work in the desired field is much easier in Nordic societies, there is still a problem proven by local statistics which show that women end up receiving a lower pension than men due to inequality of salary.
10. During the workshop we posed the idea of the Nordic models for stay-at-home fathers and the interest in that amongst men who live in family settings where the woman represents the larger source of income. We proceed to establishing that there is really no gender based inherent desire for goals in life, but rather how the structure of the society of what one can do is built. If there are strict gender roles, then it is most likely that a lot of women accept being a parent that stays at home in such societies.
11. One of the main challenges in the workshops is to positively engage men in gender equality. However, we have overcome this problem by making the workshops more personal on an individual level. It was interesting to note, for example, that men change their beliefs and opinions when they are able to identify the invisible privilege they enjoy.
12. Another challenge that had to be deconstructed is the understanding of terminology that deals with topics of gender equality. There lies a huge confusion amongst words such as feminine, femininity and feminism for example, them being lumped into synonymous meanings can dangerously lead to regarding feminism as the idealization of women above men, which is not the case at all.
13. Understanding toxic masculinity is a fairly new concept to approach in the Arabic speaking community, even within immigrant communities living in Western countries. Deconstructing the mentality of viewing masculinity as necessary in all its forms including the violent, manipulative and destructive behavior and thinking of them as necessary traits



to being a “real man”, is strongly needed. We have reached a common ground during the workshops, that having the protective and stronger role within masculinity as an excuse for toxic behavior is exactly the part that is needed to change in order to understand that gendered roles do not have to conform to unequal opportunities and choices in life.

14. Masculinity and masculine figures play a big role indeed in Middle Eastern societies. Dismantling this structure towards a society where women have as strong of a voice as men in every aspect of their lives brings us closer to a safer environment for Arab women to speak for themselves and flourish.
15. We have established that as an outcome of deconstructing patriarchal structures, that diminish the voices of women, and encouraging men to enhancing their emotional work, only then we can start seeing progress towards a more equal society and a safe space for all genders to express themselves as they seek.
16. One of the challenges that prevents us from reaching this outcome is certain behavioral models and ways of thinking that are deeply rooted in toxic masculinity within Middle Eastern cultures. One main example of such toxic behaviors and ways of thinking is the imaginary fear of a society where women become dominant and men becoming in an oppressed position. However this kind of thinking pertains exactly the ironic fear toxic masculinity projects unto itself after acknowledging in a subconscious manner that women have been placed in a submissive role as far as men can remember.
17. Fear plays a significant role within gender discrimination and toxic gender roles. Therefore the workshops offered an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their own gendered experiences of why they feel that the patriarchal communities they grew up in are very protective of old traditions that represent distinct differences in gender roles.
18. Acknowledging the existence of unequal opportunities led our participants to a conclusion of realizing that beliefs based on both genders having different qualities, thus different roles play a huge role in men claiming they're purpose is to protect and provide, whilst a women's role is to nurture. Whether some of the participants have even admitted of believing such notions for a huge part of their lives, we proceeded to discussing how these roles can be alternative for both genders. Furthermore we presented existing social models such as paternity leaves and stay at home-fatherhood in Nordic societies as good examples for understanding the healthy practice of gender roles that Arabic speaking families can start assimilating.
19. As an outcome of both workshops, the participants felt that the conversations have provided a safe space for discussing their thoughts on gender equality. This was ended on the note of the participants wishing the need of workshops like these to discuss such topics in a safe space.