

GENDER EQUALITY: WHAT ROLE ARE TOURISM ORGANISATIONS PLAYING?



International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO)

An initiative of the working group on Gender Equality, Diversity and
Inclusion (GEDI)



GENDER EQUALITY: WHAT ROLE ARE TOURISM ORGANISATIONS PLAYING?



isto

A fair and sustainable
tourism for all

“Tourism activities should respect the **equality of men and women**; they should promote human rights and, more particularly, the individual rights of the most vulnerable groups, notably children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples.”

UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics, 2020
Article 5, paragraph 2

Reference:

ISTO (2021) [Gender Equality: what role are tourism organisations playing?](#),
Working Group on Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI)

2022



TABLE OF CONTENTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
PROLOGUE	5
INTRODUCTION	6
METHODOLOGY	8
RESULTS	9
What is gender equality?.....	9
Women in social sustainable and fair tourism	10
Gender equality policies within organisations	13
SUMMARY	16
RECOMMENDATIONS	17
RESEARCH LIMITATIONS	19
FINAL MESSAGE.....	20
USEFUL LINKS	21
REFERENCES	22



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by [Alexia Lacombe](#), with support from two experts: [Anya Diekmann](#), coordinator of the ISTO Alliance for Training and Research and associate professor at the ULB (Université Libre de Bruxelles), and [Iaia Pedemonte](#), leader of the Working Group on Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

The document was edited, designed, and translated into Spanish by [Jessica Pool](#). It was translated into French by [Amandine Abraham](#).

The report was coordinated and reviewed by ISTO's Secretariat, based in Brussels.

Special thanks are owed to the participants of the 25 organisations interviewed. Thank you for supporting this research.





PROLOGUE

Isabel Novoa

President of ISTO

Gender equity is part of ISTO's core values and vision of fair and sustainable tourism for all. In 2020 we launched our Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working group. We are honoured to have Iaia Pedemonte leading it, working very closely with Anya Diekmann. In this working group, we find many exceptional women who have shared with us their experience and worked together on defining ISTO's contribution to the tourism sector. I cannot thank them enough, as well as all the voluntary organisations that helped us build this first report on internal gender equality policies. This report is a call to action which aims to be a decision-making toolbox for all kinds of organisations, and in which we can find an overview of the current situation and its main challenges, as well as a set of practical recommendations. I am certain this is the first step of a wonderful path towards gender equality within tourism and welcome you all to join us.



Iaia Pedemonte

Head of the Working Group on Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

As if by a magical, astral synchronicity, everything seems to coincide with the birth of our first report on gender equality. While ISTO was collecting examples and recommendations from its members on how gender equality is being put into practice, the EU started inviting all industries to introduce a Gender Assessment Policy similar to the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) requested for research funds. Furthermore, the UNWTO is launching the project 'Centre Stage: Women's empowerment during the COVID-19 recovery', while the WTTC has declared that "Gender equality is economically advantageous". The first recommendation from experts is to begin collecting disaggregated data.



We hope you enjoy reading our report. It's one of the first to bring together data and opinion on the topic of a new gender-equal, sustainable, and fair tourism. And this is just the beginning.

At ISTO, we are forging a new path. Join us!



INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is one of the world's largest employers: one in 11 jobs is associated with touristic activity (WTTC, 2021). Although women are highly present in the sector, accounting for 54% of the total tourism workforce, they are often concentrated in low-skilled or informal work, which limits their access to social protection and puts them in a precarious position, especially in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic (UNWTO, 2019). On the other hand, men continue to occupy most management and leadership positions.

In view of this situation, there is an urgent need for **gender equality** to be promoted by, and from within, the sector. Tourism can be a motor for economic development, culture, and equality. Many studies have shown that the travel and tourism sectors provide more opportunities for women's empowerment, participation in the workforce, and leadership roles than other industries (World Bank, 2017). However, it has become clear that there will be no improvement, either in society as a whole or within individual organisations, if women's working conditions do not improve. Therefore, organisations' involvement is critical to achieve gender equity.

This research was conducted by the International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO), an international non-profit organisation created in 1963. The aim of ISTO is to bring together stakeholders from all over the world involved in social, sustainable, and fair tourism, and to promote accessible and responsible tourism. ISTO is represented in 40 countries and has 160 members.

In the tourism sector:

54% of the people employed are women.

Women earn 15% less than men.

Source: UNWTO, 2019





INTRODUCTION



Over the last few years, the question of gender equality has gained significant relevance around the world. It has become a cross-cutting theme that has impacted several areas, including tourism. Gender equality is a human right and is one of the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promoted by the [UN SDG 5](#): “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

Based on findings from the World Congress on Social Tourism, which took place in Zagreb, ISTO found that women were not only underrepresented, but also did not play key roles in the conferences (Diekmann, 2018). This highlights the fact that women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of leadership. Given that ISTO’s very [DNA and core values \(1\)](#) are based on pillars such as fair business, solidarity, and quality of life, as well as the [2030 UN Agenda](#), the organisation’s interest in gender equality seems natural. ISTO is acutely aware of the importance of promoting gender equality within the tourism sector. This is why the organisation has decided to set up its [Working Group on Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion \(GEDI\)](#).

The working group, led by Iaia Pedemonte, member of the Associazione Italiana del Turismo Responsabile (AITR), is primarily committed to highlighting the place of women in the tourism industry and creating new opportunities through women’s empowerment. Developing recommendations to promote gender equality among organisations working towards social, fair, and responsible tourism was identified as a core priority. In order to have access to the widest possible range of perspectives and experiences, ISTO decided to interview its members about their internal gender policies.

The goal of this report is to present how gender equality is managed and implemented within different tourism organisations (ISTO’s members). This is followed by recommendations that tourism stakeholders can implement.

1. <https://isto.international/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DNA-ISTO-EN.pdf>



METHODOLOGY



A qualitative approach was utilised in this research, in order to objectively examine members' gender equality policies. The first call for participation in interviews was done through ISTO's social media in early July 2021. An invitation to participate was also sent to those who had previously expressed interest in this topic. A total of 50 members from 17 different countries were contacted. Finally, **25 semi-structured online interviews** were conducted to gather the primary data.

A total of 23 women and 5 men from ISTO member organisations, located in 4 continents and 13 different countries, were interviewed. The interviews were conducted by the ISTO Secretariat, based in Brussels. They were conducted in English, French, Spanish, Italian and Dutch, from October 2021 until the end of November 2021, and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes each.

The interviews were conducted with representatives of the following types of organizations:

Continent	Type (2) and number of organisations	Countries represented
Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism network (1) • Holiday support organisation (1) 	Madagascar and South Africa
Americas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local or regional government agencies (1) • Hostelng organisation (2) • Holiday support organisation (1) • Tourism network (3) • Tourism operator (1) 	Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica and México
Asia	Tourism operator (1)	Nepal
Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic institution (1) • Hostelng organisation(3) • Tourism network (5) • Local or regional government agencies (2) • Holiday support organisation (2) • Tourism operator (1) 	Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain

2. According to ISTO classifications



RESULTS

The results of the interviews are presented in the following sections.

What is gender equality?

This question was asked to all participants, who each shared their different points of view. At least **13 interviewees** argued that gender equality was about giving men and women the **same opportunities and rights**, in the aim of allowing “both genders to contribute to their full potential without barriers”, as a holiday support organisation from Africa stated.



Gender equality is basically that it doesn't matter who you are, you can access culture, you can access education, you can access a job, you can access anything that you want or need to participate and be part of this society.

- Tourism network based in the Americas



Equal pay and ensuring spaces for **decision-making** were also mentioned as important elements to guarantee this equality. However, in order to ensure access to opportunities, it is sometimes necessary to implement measures, as one interviewee from an European tourism network mentioned: *“We have projects that are 100% directed to women [...] whereas we don't do projects only for men [...]. In our society, we have to go through this in order to achieve gender equality; once we have reached it we won't need to do projects only for women anymore”.*

On the other hand, **5 interviewees** considered that talking about gender equality essentially involves not talking about men or women, but about **individuals**, as stated by a hosting organisation located in Europe: *“Gender equality for me means considering all individuals in the same way - whatever their function, whatever their gender, whatever their sexual orientation, their religion, their beliefs, we are individuals. As an individual I have rights and duties and these rights and duties are the same for everyone.”*



RESULTS

Women in social, sustainable, and fair tourism

All participants agreed that in a **recruiting process**, it makes no difference whether the applicant is a man or a woman; rather, they prioritise applicants' skills. However, at the same time, a clear segmentation and a high degree of gender-role stereotyping between women's and men's work in social, sustainable, and fair tourism was perceived, as expressed in this statement:



“What I've noticed is that women are more likely to be hired in positions requiring empathy, such as communication or receptionist. You know, where the creative and artistic side is needed... Whereas men are often hired for jobs with 'numbers', in the area of marketing or accounting”.

- European hosting organisation



The results also showed that equality has not been achieved at every level in the organisations in question. Even in organisations where women are the most represented, the highest position is, in 7 cases out of 10, occupied by a man. Only 3 organisations mentioned that women occupied leadership positions.

In terms of **participation** and **inclusion**, respondents believe that women are always heard within the organisation and are part of the board of directors, if the organisation has one. Of those who have a board of directors, 10 claimed to be composed equally of women and men, and nine said they were not. However, the equality on boards of directors is mainly due to national laws, as some countries have implemented **gender quotas**. As one interviewee from a European tourism network mentioned, *“If we look at the managers and governing bodies, females represent 30%. This is because of the application of the law. In less than 10 years, we have increased participation at the level of the national governing body.”*



RESULTS

In the Americas, quotas are also implemented by some organisations, as stated by a local government agency: *“We have a law of labour equality and non discrimination at work. Because of this law, we must have 40% of women in managerial positions. We are currently above this percentage.”*

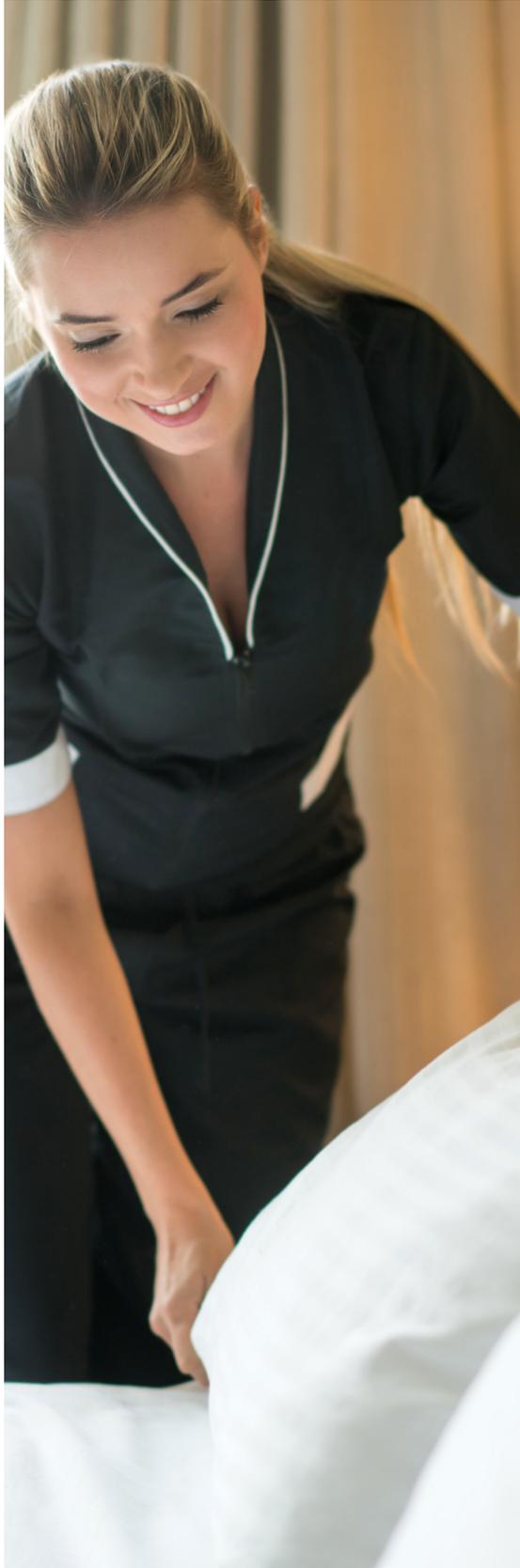
However, these gender quotas did not spark unanimous approval among participants. According to their answers, **1 of 5 respondents is opposed to these quotas** as, according to them, in some cases organisations are forced to hire women not for their skills, but only to fill quotas. In fact, these participants mentioned being opposed to positive discrimination towards women. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, positive discrimination refers to “special measures that aim to foster greater equality by supporting groups of people who face, or have faced, entrenched discrimination so they can have similar access to opportunities as others in the community” (Australia Human Rights Commission, n.d). In other words, while these interviewees believe that equality is important, they do not think that women should be given any advantage. They simply try not to discriminate in any way.

In terms of **salary**, the majority of organisations mentioned have an equal pay scale. However, for others, this equality decreased when it came to leadership positions: although salaries were equal in leadership positions, they were generally occupied by men, resulting in a higher average salary for men.





RESULTS



Finally, a minority, composed of three interviewees, mentioned an inequality in base salaries. A European hosting organisation, for example, mentioned that women are still paid less than men for equal jobs, reaching a **gender pay gap of 10%**. However, this figure is below the EU average, which in 2021 was 14% (European Commission, 2021).

Related to this aspect, it is important to mention that some of these organisations work with (usually unpaid) **volunteers**, with women being the most active. According to a study conducted by UN Volunteers, the majority of the world's volunteering is done by women (Borromeo, 2021). There is also a difference in the kind of activities performed by women and men, as well as the level of responsibilities. While women are more likely to perform care activities in informal settings, men tend to have formal leadership roles.

Another important element is **flexibility**. According to some participants, certain kinds of jobs are designed for men because of the amount of hours needed and because they do not offer flexible schedules. As one interviewee stated: "Food and beverage jobs are often done in evenings, when mothers have to be at home for their kids. But yet, it's one of the most paying jobs".



RESULTS



Gender equality policies within organisations

Although all the respondents mentioned that gender equality is important to them, only 6 of the 25 interviewees said they were implementing gender equality policies. According to the ILO (n.d), equality policies are “gender-specific measures involving women and men, either separately or together or through measures designed explicitly to overcome inequalities”. These policies “demonstrate a workplace’s commitment to improving measurable gender equality outcomes with respect to employee representation, value, safety and recognition” (UN Women, 2020). Policies can address many aspects in order to ensure equality, for example:

- Recruitment and advancement processes that ensure equality between men and women
- Equal pay for equal work
- Recognition and rewards based on performance

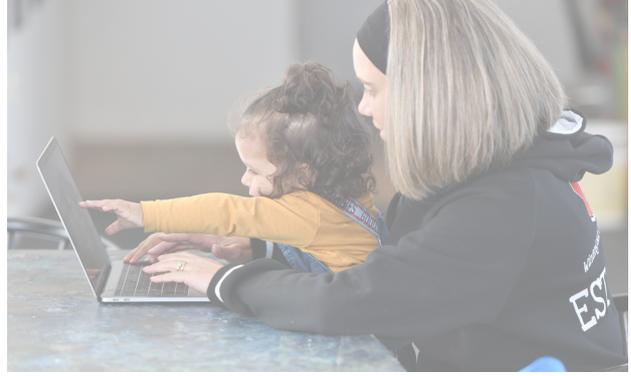
Only **6 of the 25 interviewees** said they were implementing gender equality policies.

Organisations with gender policies

For the organisations that confirmed having gender equality policies, it was noticeable that in all cases, women were the Director or President of the organisation. In fact, the question of gender equality within organisations is clearly treated more often than when men have leadership roles. This reflects what is happening on a global level: in general, **women place more importance on gender equality than men do.**



RESULTS



Some of the initiatives mentioned as a part of organisations' gender equality strategies are:

- Flexibility (work-life balance)
- Gender quotas
- Training for women
- Gender equality commission
- Participation committee for women with disabilities

Gender equality committees

The implementation of a **gender equality committee** has been a very important step in the establishment of policies within organisations. For some organisations, these committees are the reason equality exists on their board of directors, because they are working with people who have a broad understanding of what needs to be done regarding gender issues. A participant of a local government agency based in the Americas confirmed the following: *“We have a committee for gender equality, which is why we have equality in our positions. The committee is striving for gender equality on all levels of the organisation. We have a nursery and a playroom. So, when the children have holidays, parents have the option to bring their children to the office.”*

“The commission is a working group promoting gender equality in the associations, also through campaigns at national level to combat prejudice and obstacles women encounter. Every year the commission organizes national events using diverse languages and initiatives (conferences, theater shows, workshops) that are promoted all over the country.”

- Tourism network based in Europe





RESULTS

Organisations without gender policies

When organisations were asked why they did not have a gender policy, **6 interviewees** answered, “Because we apply the law”, implying that they do not see the need to do more to promote gender equality. The remaining organisations (**13 of the 19** that do not have gender policies), explained that they “are not there yet”. This was primarily because they did not have a problem with gender equality in the workplace. As a result, policies were considered unnecessary.

Despite the fact that most of the organisations interviewed do not have a strategy in place, they are promoting gender equality among their clients. Following are some examples of the initiatives implemented:

- Including women in tourist routes. They can be guides or host tourists, giving them the opportunity to have open conversations with tourists and meet new people.
- Recognising that the majority of community leaders are women; community involvement.
- Educating audiences. One participant created online open access webinars about gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. Another developed YouTube sessions that explain more about social tourism and the role of women in starting a social tourism business, *“Because I believe there is a need for e-learning platforms for women to learn about tourism and to connect with other women in order to form a network.”* (Holiday support organisation from Africa).
- Creating a mentoring program for women in order to fight gender stereotypes that still exist in the industry.





SUMMARY



- In general, the results coincide with the situation of gender equality at a global level.
- There is a clear segmentation and a high degree of gender stereotyping between women's and men's work in social, sustainable, and fair tourism: jobs requiring soft skills (administration, services) continue to be occupied mostly by women, while men occupy positions related to hard skills.
- Men continue to occupy the majority of leadership positions. This, and previous points, are important because, although tourism is a sector that offers more jobs and where women make up a large part of the workforce, it is vital to analyse what kind of jobs are being offered in terms of salaries, conditions, and growth opportunities. There is still a significant gap in the jobs held by men and women, even in social, sustainable, and fair tourism.
- Only 6 of the 25 organisations interviewed have a gender equality policy. Those that do have one are led by women.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism's great potential for advancing women's empowerment can be further boosted by developing and implementing adequate policies and strategies within organisations (UNWTO, 2021). Achieving gender equality and creating equal opportunities for women and men at all levels of the tourism sector generates a positive impact for everyone. This aspect should particularly be considered in the context of social, sustainable, and fair tourism. With this in mind, ISTO has compiled a non-exhaustive list of recommendations, based on examples provided by its members, that any organisation can implement in order to promote gender equality:

- Talk about gender equality at work: Discussing the issue at work can help to dispel stereotypes and involve more people in the debate. This may also alter some employees' perceptions and raise awareness.
- Give everyone the same opportunities: Everyone, no matter their race, gender, age, or experiences, should have equal opportunities.
- Listen to everyone: Everyone should have the same opportunity to speak up and be heard. This will help to address critical situations or conditions.
- Provide training to men and women: Training can be put in place to raise awareness about gender equality among men and women.
- Give equal pay for equal work: When men and women work in the same positions, they should be paid the same.





RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide a safe working environment: Work environments should be free from harassment, discrimination, and violence, not only against women but also against other people. If harassment occurs, a help desk or a person of confidence should intervene to avoid the situation in the future.
- Conduct surveys to identify issues: Because it is not always easy to discuss issues directly, an anonymous survey could be conducted to identify them.
- Do not ask to fill in a questionnaire where the person's gender has to be mentioned: Asking someone's gender can be a sensitive topic for some.
- Make work-life balance a priority: Providing flexible schedules, for example, will benefit both women and men.
- Encourage mixed teams: Make sure teams are composed of both men and women with different types of leadership roles.





RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This research presents limitations, which must be addressed.

First, this study was limited to ISTO members, who are all stakeholders in social, sustainable, and fair tourism. As a result, findings are limited to these types of tourism organisations.

Second, it was difficult to identify members who were willing to take part in the interviews. Indeed, 25 semi-directive interviews were conducted out of 160 ISTO members. However, this remains a representative number for this first approach.

Finally, because the sample included people from 13 different countries, the socio-cultural aspects varied greatly from one person to another. As a result, the findings cannot be generalised to all countries around the world.





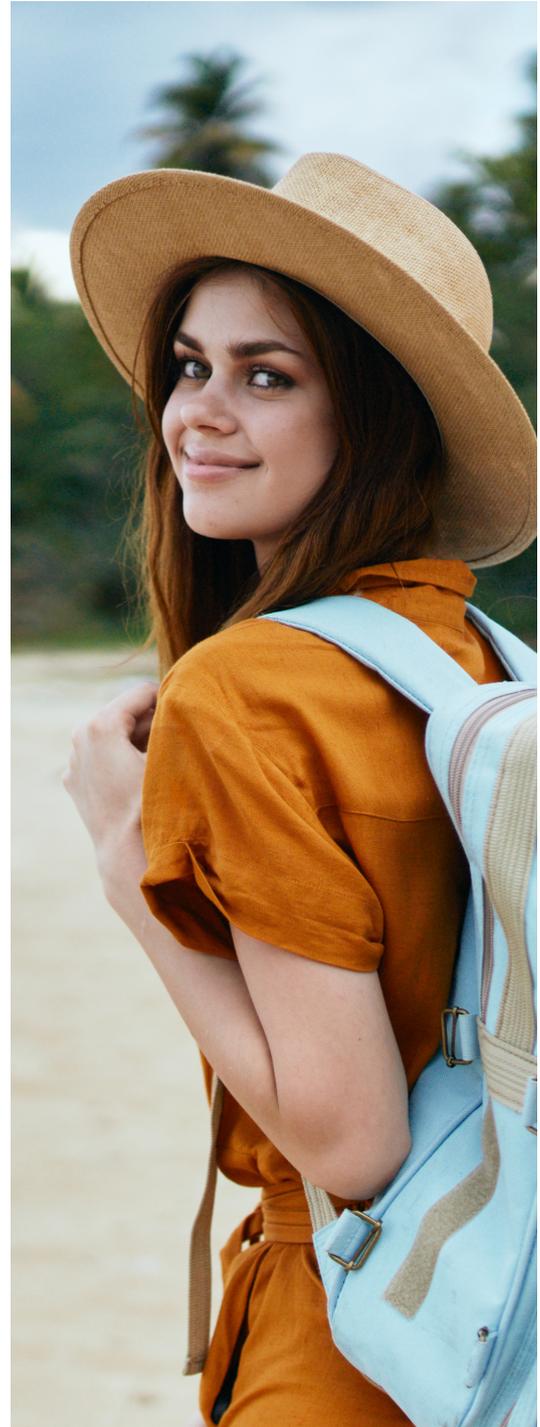
FINAL MESSAGE

This research is a first approach that has sought to make the importance of gender equality visible, as well as to position it within the tourism industry's agenda. In this sense, ISTO would like to congratulate the organisations that are already working on the issue. We encourage them to continue and motivate other organisations to join this initiative.

ISTO invites all organisations to reflect on the important role they play in gender equality and urges them not to lower their guard on an issue that concerns everyone because **WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS**.

For more information on the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working group, [click here](#). On the [ISTO website](#), you can find more information about gender equality and how you can contribute to providing equal opportunities for men and women in the industry.

If you are interested in joining us or accessing more information, please write to info@isto.international





USEFUL LINKS



The following is a list of materials that may be useful to deepen your understanding of gender equality in the tourism industry:

- [CafeCISTO International: Tourism & Gender \(International Social Tourism Organisation- ISTO, 2021\)](#)
- [Gender Equality training \(European Institute for Gender Equality- EIGE, n.d.\)](#)
- [Global report on Women in Tourism \(World Tourism Organisation- UNWTO, 2019\)](#)
- [ILO guidelines on decent work and socially responsible tourism \(International Labour Office- ILO, 2017\)](#)
- [Inclusive and Diversity Guidelines \(World Travel & Tourism Council- WTTC, 2020\)](#)
- [Inclusive Recovery Guide \(World Tourism Organisation- UNWTO, 2021\)](#)
- [Women and Tourism designing for Inclusion \(World Bank, 2017\)](#)



REFERENCES

Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d). *Positive discrimination*. Retrieved from Australian Human Rights Commission: <https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12078>

Borromeo, K. (2021, March 4). *Beyond averages: do gender disparities exist in volunteering?* Retrieved from UN Volunteers: <https://www.unv.org/Success-stories/Beyond-averages-do-gender-disparities-exist-volunteering>

Diekmann, A. (2018). *Où sont les femmes?, Réflexions sur le rôle et la place des femmes dans ISTO*- Internal report

European Commission. (2021, November 8). *The gender pay gap situation in the EU*. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu_en

International Labour Organisation. (n.d.). *ILO and gender equality*. Retrieved from ILO: <https://www.ilo.org/gender/Aboutus/ILOandgenderequality/lang-en/index.htm>

International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO). (2018). *The DNA of ISTO and the Sustainable Development Goals*. Retrieved from ISTO: <https://isto.international/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DNA-ISTO-EN.pdf>





REFERENCES

UN Women. (2020, July 28). *Gender equality and diversity policies*. Retrieved from <https://www.endvawnow.org/fr/articles/2018-gender-equality-and-diversity-policies.htm>

World Bank. (2017). *Tourism for Development. Women and Tourism: Designing for Inclusion*. Washington: World Bank. Retrieved from https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/28535/IFC_Women%20and%20Tourism%20final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

World Tourism Organisation. (2019). *Global Report on Women in Tourism*. Retrieved from: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284420384>

World Tourism Organisation. (2020). *Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics*. Madrid: UNWTO. Retrieved from <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284421671>

World Travel & Tourism Council. (2021). *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2021*. WTTC. Retrieved from <https://wtcc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Global%20Economic%20Impact%20and%20Trends%202021.pdf?ver=2021-07-01-114957-177>

