



Findings and policy recommendations

05.11.2025



Authors:

Katrín Ólafsdóttir

Faculty of Subject Teaching, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland

Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir

Faculty of Political Science, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland

Annadís Greta Rúdólfsdóttir

Faculty of Education and Diversity, University of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland

Gender Equitable Interactions Online (GEiO)

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed working practices, accelerating a shift towards remote and hybrid work arrangements that depend heavily on videoconferencing platforms. What started as an emergency response has become integrated into organisational practice across Europe and beyond. This shift has created new workplace environments where professional interactions increasingly occur through digital rather than face-to-face contact.

Despite decades of policy interventions and increased attention to gender equality across European workplaces, gendered practices continue to constrain professional opportunities and experiences. These inequalities are evident not only in formal hierarchies—such as the persistent underrepresentation of women in senior leadership and executive positions—but also in everyday workplace interactions. Gendered communication dynamics, including behaviours such as interruptions, conversational dominance, and unequal attribution of authority, shape whose contributions are acknowledged, valued, and acted upon in professional settings. These routine and often subtle power dynamics reinforce organisational cultures that perpetuate gender inequality, harassment, and violence.

The shift to videoconferencing has introduced new dynamics to workplace interactions. However, there is limited research on how gender influences these digital environments. Organisations still lack evidence-based strategies to address gender inequality in online work settings. While severe online abuse prompts platform providers to implement rapid technological solutions such as waiting rooms, meeting passwords, and report and block functions, the more subtle and pervasive forms of gendered discrimination in online meetings often go unnoticed and unaddressed. Many organisations lack the understanding, training, and policies needed to tackle these concerns effectively.

Furthermore, there is limited understanding of how the affordances of videoconferencing platforms can be utilised to support rather than hinder equitable interactions. Without empirical evidence on these dynamics, organisations cannot develop well-informed strategies to promote equity in hybrid and remote work environments. As videoconferencing becomes a standard part of professional practice, understanding and addressing gender dynamics within these settings becomes essential. Organisations face growing social and legal expectations concerning corporate social responsibility, business ethics, and human rights. The digital transformation of work requires a corresponding shift in how we understand and promote workplace equity.

Without coordinated effort based on thorough research, we risk embedding historical workplace inequalities into the digital infrastructure of today's professional life, thereby continuing discrimination in new forms and spaces.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Management styles and agendas are vital. Meeting success largely depends on how chairs facilitate discussion. Chairs who share agendas in advance, ensure fair speaking opportunities, and listen actively create environments where participants can prepare and contribute meaningfully. Conversely, chairs who withhold agendas, neglect to organise turn-taking, or provide vague feedback generate uncertainty, requiring participants to exert emotional effort. These management styles impact not only meeting efficiency but also how valued and heard participants feel within their organisations.

Inclusive facilitation practices emerged as critical mechanisms for equitable participation. Conscious moderators regularly created opportunities for contribution without forcing participation, recognised input through verbal and non-verbal cues, and used strategic compliments to reinforce contributions. Active listening—demonstrated through nodding, verbal affirmations like "mhm," or explicit thanks to contributors—showed attentiveness where body language might be less clear. The intentional use of compliments conveyed that contributions were valued and helped diverse voices feel recognised. Without deliberate facilitation, meetings risked becoming spaces where only the most confident or persistent voices were heard.

Humour functions as a complex tool in online meetings, serving multiple purposes such as creating the atmosphere, shaping identities, managing vulnerability, or deflecting criticism. It also acts as a form of power, especially when directed at individuals based on their status, gender, or age. The capacity to respond to or resist humour is limited by these factors, leading to inequalities in who can safely use humour and who becomes its target. In the digital space, humour's ambiguity increases, making it more difficult to distinguish friendly banter from marginalisation.

Videoconferencing reinforced existing gendered communication patterns rather than creating new ones. Two key technical features influenced this: limited visibility of body language increased the effort needed to communicate and interpret reactions, raising cognitive and emotional strain, while audio delays disrupted natural conversational flow, making turn-taking more difficult. The format also allowed passive participation through muted microphones and turned-off cameras, which could hide some participants but also make others invisible. These technical limitations made pre-existing workplace patterns more noticeable online. Subtle face-to-face inequalities—such as who chairs meetings, dominates discussion, interrupts others, or receives recognition—became more visible online.

Workplace interactions are intertwined with broader social discourses that continue to position women's leadership as requiring justification. Analysis revealed persistent ambivalence about women's authority, with female leaders navigating contradictory expectations around assertiveness and collaboration. Women chairs were portrayed as needing to exert more effort to gain legitimacy, facing greater scrutiny of their facilitation styles, and experiencing penalties for behaviours that would be considered normal in male counterparts. The digital environment amplifies these

dynamics, as reduced social cues increase focus on leadership performance while also making it harder to project authority.

Routine gendered practices become naturalised and therefore invisible within organisational cultures. Repeated patterns—such as who organises meetings, interrupts, receives credit for ideas, or sparks follow-up discussion—go unnoticed despite their cumulative effects on equity. The ordinariness of these practices renders them unremarkable. Even organisations with strong formal commitments to equality nevertheless reproduce subtle gendered dynamics in everyday digital interactions. This invisibility creates significant challenges for organisational change, as addressing these patterns requires first making them visible and recognisable as meaningful rather than incidental features of meeting culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are recommendations for policymakers, organisations, and platform developers on effective meeting facilitation and chair training, both vital to ensuring fair participation in digital work environments.

ORGANISATIONS

Chair Training Programmes: Develop and implement training programmes for all meeting chairs that focus on inclusive facilitation techniques specific to videoconferencing. Training should address technical challenges—particularly limited body language visibility and audio delays—and offer practical strategies to manage them. A best practice manual should be made available to all staff.

Inclusive Meeting Culture: Foster cultures that recognise different communication styles and value diverse contributions. Create space for questions and discussion rather than over-prioritising efficiency.

Advance Agenda Distribution: Require agendas to be shared in advance to allow sufficient preparation time. This reduces uncertainty, enables meaningful contribution, and distributes cognitive load fairly rather than favouring those comfortable with spontaneous responses.

Meeting Necessity Assessment: Before organising videoconferences, assess whether the meeting is necessary and if the video format is appropriate. Provide a checklist to determine if the meeting's objectives justify the cognitive and emotional demands of online interaction.

Organisational Awareness: Encourage reflexive practices among staff and create feedback systems that uncover routine gendered behaviours in meeting culture. Regularly observing patterns—such as who chairs meetings, dominates discussions, interrupts, or receives recognition—helps reveal unseen dynamics. This awareness enables organisations to go beyond formal equality commitments and address everyday practices that influence participation and recognition.

PLATFORM DEVELOPERS

Facilitation Support Tools: Implement features that encourage fair facilitation, such as hand-raising tools, speaking time monitors, turn-taking systems, and mechanisms that highlight interruptions or disparities in speaking time to alert chairs of participation inequalities.

Accessibility and Inclusion Features: Develop comprehensive accessibility features that address diverse needs and design solutions that minimise appearance-related concerns, recognising that increased self-consciousness can hinder participation, especially among marginalised groups.

Multiple Engagement Channels: Offer diverse methods for contribution—including voice, chat, and reaction features—to allow participants to engage in ways that suit their communication styles, rather than favouring assertive spoken participation alone.

POLICYMAKERS

Digital Work Equity Standards: Establish requirements for organisations to develop and implement digital work policies that specifically promote gender equality in videoconferencing environments. This includes mandating evidence-based training programmes on fairness in digital meetings and setting organisational standards for inclusive facilitation practices in online settings.

Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms: Establish monitoring and reporting requirements that enable organisations to track gendered patterns in digital meetings, such as who chairs, speaks, interrupts, and receives recognition. These systems should hold organisations accountable for addressing inequalities in digitally mediated workspaces.

Intersectional Recognition of Digital Environments: Recognise digital work environments as spaces that require specific equality measures, addressing how gender intersects with disability, race, age, class, and other social categories. Policy frameworks should adopt an intersectional approach that recognises the layered experiences of marginalisation in online professional settings.