

Policy for Gender Equality Work in Umeå Municipality

ENGLISH VERSION

The image has been edited with AI.

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Adopted by the Municipal Council 2025.

Contact

Annika Dalén
Development Strategist for Gender Equality
annika.dalen@umea.se

Linda Gustafsson
Development Strategist for Gender Equality
linda.gustafsson@umea.se

Visit our website: umea.se/jamstalldhet

Photo: Fredrik Larsson, Malin Grönborg, Matilda Audas Björkholm and Bea Holmberg.

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Background

The previous *Strategy for gender equality work* was first adopted by the Municipal Council in 2011 and revised in 2017. This 2025 update of the governing document aims to ensure that it continues to serve as support for strategic gender equality work in Umeå Municipality and to work for a clearer integration of gender equality into the management and governance system of the municipality. Since Umeå Municipality has undergone a reorganization and adopted a new governance model, there is a need to review the design of the document so that it harmonizes with the new governance. This update also includes changing the document from a strategy to a policy for gender equality work, in accordance with the Municipal Council's guidelines for governing documents.

Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to clarify the principles and approaches that underpin Umeå Municipality's work on gender equality.

The policy is primarily intended to serve as support for the municipal committees in understanding how gender equality work should be integrated into their regular activities. The Committee for Gender Equality is responsible for the policy, and its starting point is the overall strategic gender equality goal adopted by the Municipal Council.

What is a policy?

A policy describes the overarching approach or principles of the municipality within a specific area. Policies are general, and designed to be sustainable over time. They allow for considerable flexibility in implementation. Policies are adopted by the Municipal Council.

[Regulations and Policy Documents on umea.se](#)
(in Swedish)

Scope and delimitation

Umeå Municipality has an overall gender equality policy goal, decided by the Municipal Council:

Umeå Municipality shall create the conditions for women and men to have equal power to shape society and their own lives.

The Municipal Council's policy goals are long-term and are used to create direction and change in specific issues or within a defined area shared by several municipal actors and may aim to build capacity for development.

The gender equality policy goal is part of the program for social sustainability, and the program governance serves as a concretization and framework for the policy goals adopted by the Municipal Council. At the same time, gender equality is a horizontal perspective and an overarching strategic issue that must permeate all programs and activities and not be limited to a single focus area within one of several programs.

Although gender equality work is based on gender, an understanding of how other factors influence people's life conditions is necessary. Gender equality work based on the Municipal Council's goal focuses on a just distribution of power and resources. It does not primarily address rights from a discrimination perspective and does not focus on individuals but on power distribution and structural conditions.

Who is covered by the policy?

The policy covers Umeå Municipality corporation. The municipal corporation consists of the Municipal Council, the Municipal Executive Board, municipal committees and administrations, as well as wholly owned municipal companies. In partly owned companies and other forms of association, the municipality shall work to ensure that the policy is applied where relevant. What is deemed applicable shall be assessed based on ownership structure, the nature of the activity, and other circumstances.



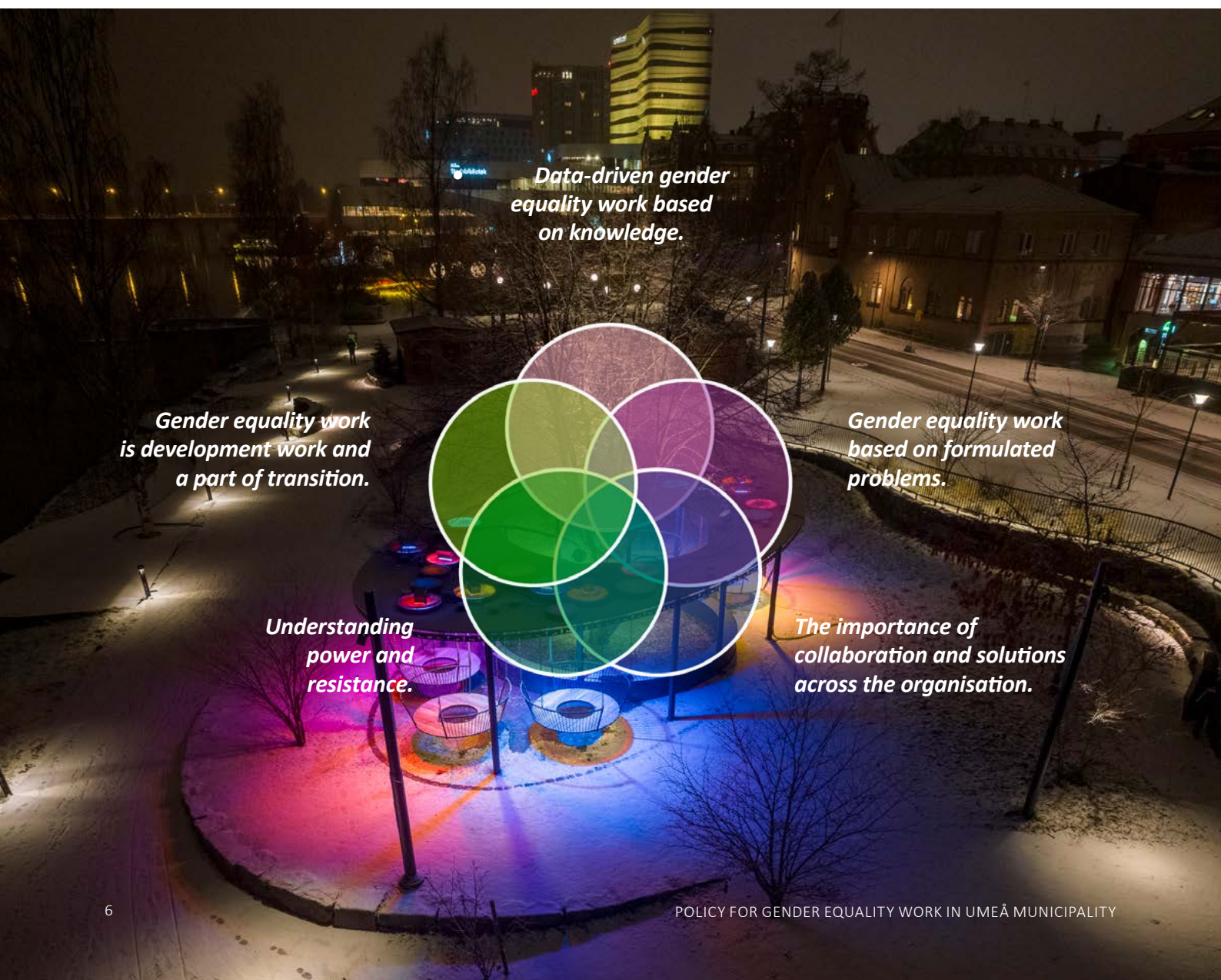
Principles and approaches

Gender equality means that women and men shall have equal rights, opportunities, and obligations in all areas of life. People should be able to develop based on their own aspirations and not be governed or limited by stereotypical notions of gender. It is about creating awareness of the life conditions of girls and boys, women and men in our municipality, and developing efforts to provide gender-equal public services and to be a driver for a gender-equal society.

We need to be aware of the risk that gender-stereotypical norms and assumptions may influence how we assess, treat, and interact with people, and have insight into the difference between gender stereotypes and real gender-based differences. The municipality must be a driving force in gender equality work and has an important role in promoting gender equality both within the organization and in society at large.

Working to make visible and transform power structures requires ambition and courage. Umeå Municipality's most successful gender equality initiatives have succeeded because of political will, supportive leadership, committed employees, and work that has been connected to the mission of the organization. Thus, wording concerning gender equality can advantageously be included in committee mandates where appropriate.

The core principles of gender equality work in Umeå Municipality are:



Data-driven gender equality work based on knowledge

Knowledge is a central part of the municipality's gender equality work and increases insight into how different decisions affect women and men. Both individuals and organizations develop when women's and men's knowledge of gender equality increases.

Different groups have different preconditions and, consequently, differences in circumstances. The life conditions of women and men can be partly made visible through sex-disaggregated data, highlighting the conditions women and men face in Umeå Municipality. Facts and sex-disaggregated data form a good starting point, but in order for the information to become a tool for real change toward increased gender equality, analyses and actions are necessary to ensure a more even distribution of power and resources, and to create conditions for everyone to have the same power and ability to influence their lives.

Knowledge of gender equality, how inequality arises and is maintained, and how it can change is essential to conducting transformation work. To identify accurate gender inequality problems, it is also necessary to understand how other power structures interact with gender. Based on this knowledge, gender equality work must be organized in ways that create institutional learning that remains within and spreads throughout the organization.

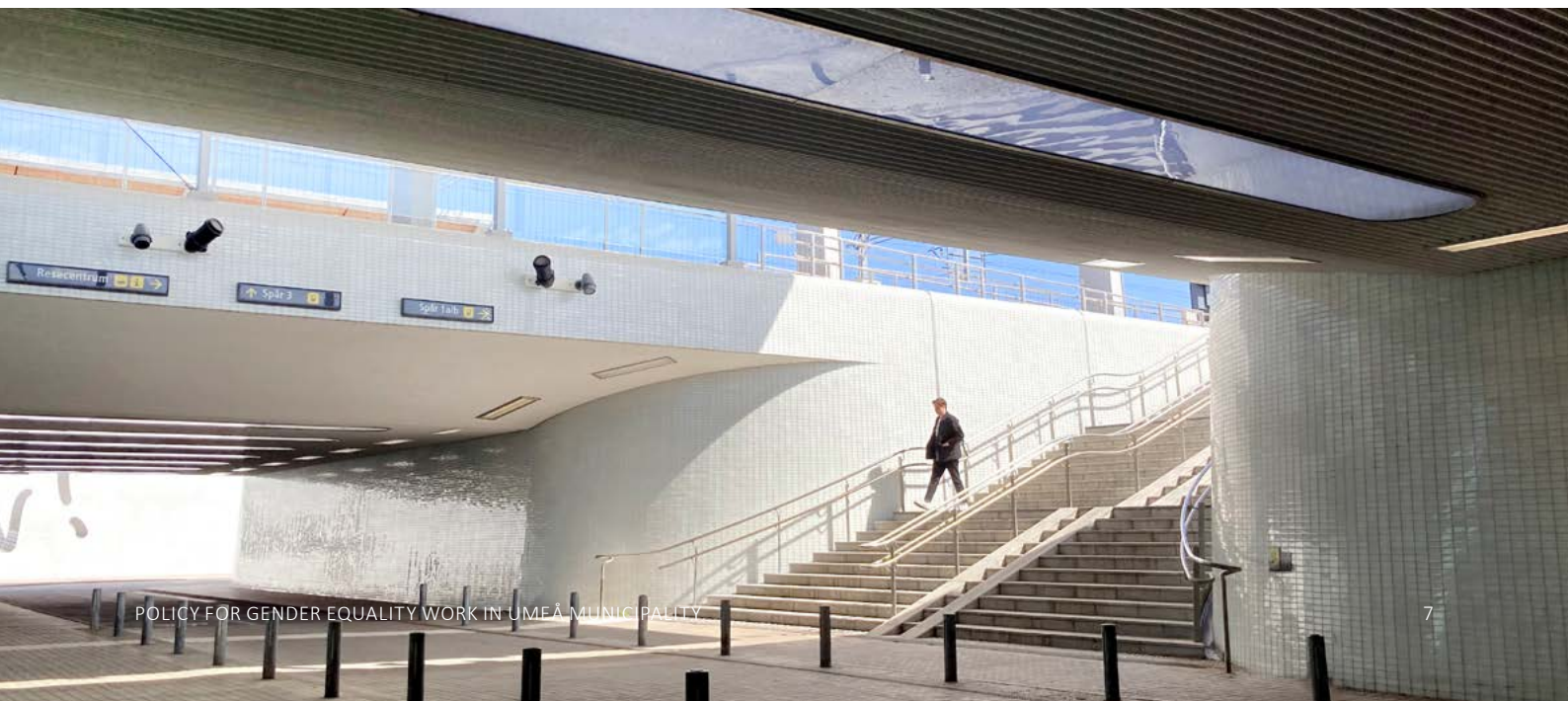
Gender equality work based on formulated problems

A fundamental premise of gender equality work is to start from clearly formulated and concrete problems so that goals and efforts respond to existing inequality issues within the organization and in society. A clear problem formulation should show:

- what needs to change
- who is affected by the problem
- what or who contributes to maintaining the problem.

This involves identifying how the problem is defined, what assumptions underlie the definition, and examining the consequences of the problem's representation for different groups and individuals — including what aspects are left unspoken or unaddressed. What remains unaddressed and unproblematicized will not be included in the work.

It is important to prioritize the problems where there are a mandate and ability to influence, and to select efforts that have the greatest potential to increase gender equality for the target group and generate the greatest societal impact, in alignment with the gender equality policy goal.



The importance of collaboration and solutions across the organisation

Gender equality work aims to solve overarching issues that go beyond functional boundaries, and collaboration is essential to success. By bringing together people with different expertise, questions are formulated in new ways, preventing the risk of repeatedly narrowly framed solutions within the single organization. A brave, challenge-driven, collaborative, and exploratory approach should therefore be the basis for gender equality work, fostering innovation and co-creation across municipal units as well as with actors in the public sector, civil society, business, and academia. Here, the municipality serves as an important role model and catalyst for broader participation in gender equality efforts.

Understanding power and resistance

Gender equality concerns the equal distribution of power and resources between women and men, as well as creating conditions for women and men to have equal power and opportunity to influence their lives. Power may refer to formal authority through, for example, a certain position, but also to the possibility and privilege of defining both problems and possible solutions, and of shaping society as well as one's own life.

The policy is based on a gender perspective, but awareness is needed of how gendered power structures interact with other structures such as ethnicity, class, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other social categories.

Challenging power distribution, privilege, and influence can both affect and upset. Active gender equality work requires critical examination of one's own organization and is therefore often met with resistance. It is important that municipal activities are aware of this and that leadership clearly communicates that gender equality is a prioritized issue intended to improve conditions for both employees and residents, and that support is offered to those leading the process.



Gender equality work is development work and a part of transition

Gender equality work is an integral part of an organisation's ability to adapt. In order to adapt to changes and develop sustainable solutions, an active and conscious effort towards gender equality is required. This means identifying and addressing structural barriers, as well as developing strategies that promote a fair distribution of power and resources.

Gender equality work is also development-oriented based on knowledge and continuous learning. By collecting and analysing data and training employees and leaders, the organization can develop effective strategies to promote gender equality. This also requires a willingness to challenge existing norms and structures and to be open to new ideas and perspectives.

For gender equality work to produce results, it must be integrated into the organization's activities and processes. A gender equality perspective should be included in all decisions and at all levels. It is a strategy for learning and change in which the organization develops reflective and analytical working methods to identify and address inequality. This requires an organization with adaptive capacity where systematic learning can take place through analysis and innovation. Gender equality work contributes to improving the quality of activities and creating a just distribution of power and resources, which in the long term contributes to a more gender-equal society.



Organization and responsibility

The Municipal Council's Committee for Gender Equality is tasked with supporting the implementation of the policy, based on its mission to initiate, review, and follow up on municipality-wide issues from a gender-perspective; prepare matters for the Municipal Council; develop strategies to achieve gender equality goals; and increase awareness of the importance of a gender equality perspective within various policy areas.

The responsibility for concretizing sub-goals, activities, measures, and indicators — based on the principles in this policy — lies with the committees, municipal administrations, and the boards of municipal companies. Gender equality work should be part of operational planning and followed up within ordinary management and governance systems. Committees and companies needing support may turn to the Committee for Gender Equality or the gender equality strategists.

Umeå Municipality has staff resources that provide support in processes concerning gender equality and gender mainstreaming at an overarching level, and that work with strategic development in these areas. In addition, the HR function is responsible for employer-related issues, pay surveys, and matters relating to anti-discrimination legislation.

Relaterade styrdokument

- [Planning Directives adopted by the Municipal Council](#) (in Swedish)
- [The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life](#) (CEMR Charter)



