



WORKING PAPER LAUNCH ONLINE TRAINING & FEMINIST PEDAGOGIES

VIRTUAL DIALOGUE

WEBINAR REPORT

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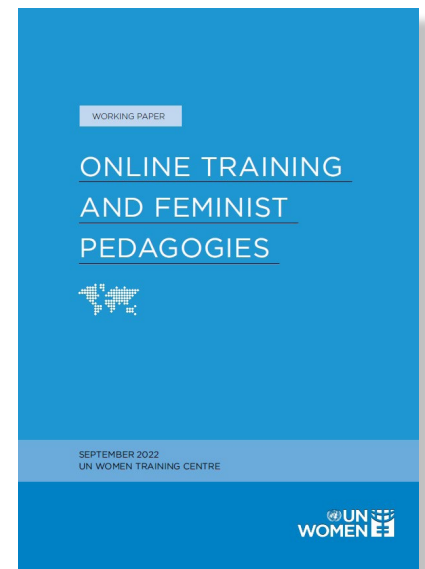
Online training is here to stay. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, online training has become the predominant modality for delivering training for gender equality worldwide.

But what implications does this shift to online learning have from the perspective of feminist pedagogical principles and practices? This question is at the heart of the UN Women Training Centre's new Working Paper on Online Training and Feminist Pedagogies, the subject of the first Virtual Dialogue hosted by the Training Centre's Community of Practice (CoP) in 2022.

WORKING PAPER WEBINAR

This Virtual Dialogue presented the key findings of the Working Paper on Online Training and Feminist Pedagogies, exploring the following key questions:

- ✓ **To what** extent are feminist pedagogies applicable in an online setting? What challenges and opportunities does online training present in terms of feminist pedagogical principles?
- ✓ **What** issues need to be taken into account at different stages of the training cycle when we shift to online training?
- ✓ **How** can online training be conducted in a way that is transformational, rather than merely technocratic or transactional? What experiences have gender trainers had in this regard?



VIRTUAL DIALOGUE REPORT

✓ Introduction to the Virtual Dialogue

Alicia Ziffer, UN Women Training Centre Chief a.i.

This webinar is part of the series of Virtual Dialogues hosted by the UN Women Training Centre's Community of Practice. The Community of Practice on Training for Gender Equality (CoP) is an open online platform for dialogue, information sharing and participatory knowledge creation on training for gender equality. The CoP is available through the Training Centre's website (<https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/course/view.php?id=235>).

It is open to everyone and currently has over 1,400 members, including gender trainers, other training practitioners, gender experts, academics, researchers, and representatives of development organizations, civil society and governments around the world. The CoP is a hub of three databases on training for gender equality:

- ✓ a growing resource library of materials on training for gender equality (featuring everything from manuals, to toolkits and working papers by diverse entities). We have over 400 materials specifically on training for gender equality listed in the library;
- ✓ a regularly updated list of training opportunities by organizations around the world; and
- ✓ a database of institutions that work on training for gender equality from across the world.

In addition, the CoP hosts a year-round discussion forum and regular interactive online events. Our main events are Virtual Dialogues featuring webinars and forum discussions with expert speakers and hundreds of international participants. This is the first Virtual Dialogue hosted by the CoP in 2022. Virtual Dialogues are inclusive processes of collective knowledge production organized as part of the CoP. They mechanisms for us – as training practitioners – to continually discuss, exchange and share knowledge, and to nurture a community for collective learning across the world. At the UN Women Training Centre, we believe in creating knowledge and sharing learning in a participatory manner. This is the drive behind our Virtual Dialogues.

This Virtual Dialogue Webinar celebrates the launch of the UN Women Training Centre's latest Working Paper on Online Training and Feminist Pedagogies. With the COVID-19 pandemic, online training has become increasingly important. At the Training Centre, only 5 of the 90 training courses we delivered in 2021 were face-to-face courses, or blended courses with a face-to-face component. The remaining 85 courses were all delivered online, in either a moderated or self-paced modality.

“Following the virtualization process due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the question of how to make online training for gender equality a truly transformative process was brought up continuously by the community of trainers for gender equality” – Alicia Ziffer

Following the virtualization process due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the question of how to make online training for gender equality a truly transformative process was brought up continuously by the community of trainers for gender equality. This is also a question that has been brought up by previous Virtual Dialogues – like our dialogues on Gender Trainers and COVID-19 in 2021, and a dialogue on Online Methodologies for Training for Gender Equality.

In this context, the UN Women Training Centre set out to initiate a dialogue on what achievements and challenges there have been to date, and start bringing to light innovative and promising practices. This working paper is the result of this dynamic, participatory exercise that relied on the insights and experiences of gender trainers active, led by Clemencia Muñoz Tamayo and Dr Lucy Ferguson.

- ✓ [An overview of the Working Paper on Online Training and Feminist Pedagogies](#)
Dr Lucy Ferguson, UN Women Training Centre Consultant and author of the Working Paper

This paper has come out at an opportune time to be having these discussions, as we are coming out of the pandemic and thinking about what happened in terms of learning and training during that time, and where do we go from here. The reason writing this paper was so enjoyable is because we got to talk to some fantastic experts – including our panellists today – to learn first-hand about their experiences of implementing feminist pedagogies through online training.

“The paper looks at the extent to which feminist pedagogical principles are applicable in an online setting, what issues need to be taken into account in the training cycle, and how online training can be conducted in a way that is transformational.” – Dr Lucy Ferguson

The paper looks at the extent to which feminist pedagogical principles are applicable in an online setting, what issues need to be taken into account in the training cycle, and how online training can be conducted in a way that is transformational. The quotations included in the working paper give a nice flavour of the kinds of rich contributions received from all of the participants interviewed to inform the research.

The methodology is an important part of the working paper, which sets it apart from other knowledge products produced by the UN Women Training Centre. The paper delves deeper into primary research, rather than looking only at secondary sources. The research process began with a detailed mapping of different tools, a Virtual Dialogue moderated by CoP Consultant Ruya Leghari on Online Methodologies, and a workshop conducted by Dr Lucy Ferguson at a virtual conference of the International Feminist Journal of Politics (February 2021) with 30 participants.

Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted with training for gender equality practitioners from around the world, working in different environments and on different topics.

A quantitative, in-depth survey was conducted with other practitioners, alongside a review of the evaluation questionnaires completed by participants in various online training courses. The results of these questionnaires provided insights from participants' perspectives, complementing the information on trainers' perspectives gathered through the workshop, interviews and survey.

“Online training requires additional preparatory work during the analysis and planning phase of the training cycle [and] the implementation phase requires a great deal of multi-tasking.” – Dr Lucy Ferguson

The first question that the working paper explores is, how has the seismic shift to online training in the wake of COVID-19 changed different phases of the training cycle? For example, during the analysis and training delivery phases, online training requires much tighter planning. There is far less room for improvisation; everything needs to be set very clearly. The research uncovered logistical challenges, such as working with different world regions and different time zones. Many experts recounted how they would deliver one training course at 7 a.m. and another at 10 p.m. This indicates that trainers have been working erratic hours to try and accommodate the move to online learning.

There are also serious budgetary implications. Larger organizations were sometimes able to reallocate resources to develop online programmes, but independent trainers often did not have opportunities to negotiate the shift to online training. For instance, if a trainer already had a contract to deliver a certain number of trainings, they had to adapt to online settings without necessarily being able to question how this may take more time than originally anticipated.

A related question emerged on autonomy. Some trainers thought it was preferable to deliver training over a longer time frame, rather than through an intensive face-to-face course spanning three to five consecutive days. However, there are no good practice guidelines about how to do this, or how to do online training well in general. Deciding to space out a training course implies extra work during the design and development phases of the training cycle. Early on in the pandemic, the focus was on adapting quickly from in-person to online training, as opposed to being able to start from scratch and developing the training based on whether it is going to be online or face-to-face. Adapting in-person materials to online settings took a long time, especially as trainers had to learn and manage new technologies. There was an assumption at the beginning of the pandemic that participants automatically preferred in-person training. However, the interviews conducted for the working paper reveal that this is not the case. Many trainers enjoyed the challenge and new way of working, and thrived in an online environment.

Another point is that online training requires additional preparatory work during the analysis and planning phase of the training cycle. Moreover, the implementation phase requires a great deal of multi-tasking,

especially when a trainer is running a training session on Zoom on their own. They have to do many things at once, usually using two screens. While some trainers enjoyed adapting to this, others found it challenging. In both cases, the working paper argues that the skills involved in online training are undervalued given how all-consuming it is to run an online training, both from a technological, logistical and pedagogical perspective.

Other implementation challenges include getting used to the new tools, finding ways of keeping participants engaged (e.g. how to encourage participants to turn their cameras, how to handle people constantly dropping in and out of the session, internet connection issues), having multiple windows active at the same time, and striking a balance between technical and content aspects. The research highlights that, as we move forward with online and in-person training, it is important to explore how trainers' different personalities are suited to different kinds and formats of training. Not every trainer will excel at delivering online training, while others may not feel as comfortable with in-person training as they are with online environments. Therefore, we need to consider how trainers fit with different kinds of training and vice versa.

Evaluation is also a challenge for online training. It appears much harder to understand the level and quality of participants' learning. During the pandemic, trainers developed many ways of addressing this, using a number of tools like mid-session survey questionnaires, polls, reaction buttons to gauge how participants were feeling, etc. Trainers were obliged to be very creative as they used these tools, as there was no handbook or documented best practices on using these

instruments. There remains space to think more deeply and critically about the evaluation of online training, including how to measure and demonstrate the impact online training compared to in-person training. We need to consider how to assess and justify when a training would be more impactful in-person or online. These questions still need to be explored in terms of feminist pedagogical principles.

The working paper also identifies some advantages of the change to online training. One positive aspect was that online training helped people feel connected to their colleagues during a difficult time for everyone during the pandemic. For instance, trainers in Syria and Lebanon reported being able to engage with women in their homes, and many of these women would not have been able to meet if they had delivered in-person trainings. Thus, there was an opportunity to engage more broadly with participants and a much broader scope for bringing people together and enabling them to connect with each other. This lends itself well to engaging with diverse groups of participants in terms of their location, social class, socio-economic status, etc. However, it is important to distinguish between the quality and the quantity of participation.

“Not every trainer will excel at delivering online training, while others may not feel as comfortable with in-person training [...] Therefore, we need to consider how trainers fit with different kinds of training and vice versa” – Dr Lucy Ferguson

Having lots of people connected does not necessarily make a training session a better learning experience. For participants, online training offers an opportunity for a degree of anonymity. For instance, you can turn your camera off at any moment, or walk away from your computer if there is a discussion that you are not comfortable with. Participants who are neurodiverse have different ways of engaging with the training that are not confined to having to be in a room with others all day.

“We need to pause and reflect on how to adjust privilege in online environments, how to negotiate power dynamics, and how to deal with issues that are highly personalized and challenging.” – Dr Lucy Ferguson

Online training also has the advantage of easily accommodating guest speakers from all over the world. They can share expert expertise in a way that only takes, for instance, 30 or 90 minutes of their time, without having to worry about travel arrangements or devoting an entire day to participating in a session. Engaging guest speakers in sessions has been very enriching. Benefits of online learning from a climate change perspective include potentially reducing emissions, since online sessions mean that participants and trainers do not have to travel to face-to-face training sessions. Furthermore, online training can allow for more flexible timeframes. Sessions do not have to gather participants together in the same room for, for example, one particular week. Reflection time can be built in between sessions. Many trainers are turning online trainings into much longer programmes rather than just intensive three or four-day courses, although intensive courses over a few days also appear to work well. We need to have these conversations about what works and what does not.

Participants surveyed for the working paper were asked which of the four feminist pedagogical principles they found most difficult to apply in an online format. They selected the validation of personal experience. This is largely because it is quite difficult to be able to bring out some of aspects of people’s personal experience in an online environment, particularly at the beginning of the shift to online learning. It would be interesting to repeat this survey and see whether the answer now would be different after 2.5 years of practice and the creation of a more solid field. Revisiting this question could help deepen the conversation, which is one of the aims of the present virtual dialogue.

Some of the challenges in terms of feminist pedagogical principles include how to construct a democratic feminist classroom, with equal conditions for all participants, in an online setting. Conditions in face-to-face trainings are strong equalizers – participants stay in the same hotel, have breakfast together, are in the same room, etc. It is much more difficult to create equal conditions online in the context of massive global inequality, structural inequalities across various levels of discrimination. This is an aspect we need to work on. In online trainings, it is harder for trainers to make sure that participants who are quiet can also speak as much as their peers, i.e. to make sure that everyone gets a voice. However, having to be creative in terms of engaging participants has helped to bring the spontaneity, fun and playfulness back into training for gender equality. Trainers are now more able to use humour and tools like Forum Theatre.

Another challenge is addressing structural inequalities like the digital gender divide, poor internet infrastructure and electricity supplies in many countries. If a face-to-face training session takes place in a city where there is a power outage, then it affects all of the participants. But if this occurs during an online training with trainees in diverse locations, then it will affect some participants but not others. Delivering online training in countries with limited internet infrastructure is especially challenging; online learning can't be fully accessible or engaging if participants struggle to connect, their connections drop out or they lack the bandwidth to use interactive tools. Age has also been a key factor of discrimination or exclusion, as many older found the technological aspects of online training especially stressful.

We need to pause and reflect on how to adjust privilege in online environments, how to negotiate power dynamics, and how to deal with issues that are highly personalized and challenging, such as issues around gender identity and gender diversity. We need to discuss how to ensure that trainings are inclusive for everyone, and how to deal with emotional and emotive topics that come up in training for gender equality when we are in an online setting. Considering the well-being of participants is extremely important from the point of view of mental health and occupational health. For instance, we need to consider how long it is healthy to be looking at a screen (e.g. no more than 20 minutes), how often do we need to take breaks, what do we need to provide in order to make sure that participants are looked after. Online training offers opportunities for democratization but this is threatened by the expanding digital divide and the expanding gender divide in digital access. We need to ask who gets excluded in an online format and how do we address these exclusions in an explicit, open way.

Working conditions are another important aspect to consider. Trainers need several days to prepare for online training sessions, often more than they require for face-to-face sessions. Accordingly, there is a case that trainers can or should raise their rates for online training, especially when the client organization does not provide technical support – such as an IT specialist – to run the technical parts of the training session. If the trainer must deliver the training and take care of technical aspects alone, they are essentially doing the job of two people. Online training might be cheaper than in-person training, but that does not mean that it is cheap.

Another point concerns the platforms we rely on to deliver training. We need to ask what kinds of gender considerations have gone in to the design of these platforms and software, and question how they could be more feminist. It is worth considering what we could demand of platforms and technology companies to better serve feminist pedagogical learning practices.

✓ **Being ambitious and experimental with online methodologies**

Claudia Callegari, ITC-ILO

Before the pandemic, the gender cluster of the International Training Centre – the training arm of the International Labour Organization (ITC-ILO) and a key part of the UN system – focused on face-to-face training at the ITC-ILO campus in Turin, Italy. The COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point.

The ITC-ILO had to fully convert all of its courses to distance learning activities. The UN Women Training Centre's new working paper reflects these experiences of the ITC-ILO, as well as of other trainers and organizations.

The adaptation that the ITC-ILO implemented after the pandemic was a point of no-return in terms of only delivering face-to-face training for two reasons. First, distance learning increased the centre's outreach in terms of the number of participants that are able to attend. Second, online courses are less expensive, enabling training to be more accessible for participants in different world regions.

Adapting to online training was not easy. In the beginning, the ITC-ILO had to adapt the methodologies used in face-to-face training to an online modality. This involved, for instance, the transformation of tools like Forum Theatre, a powerful methodology widely used in the centre's courses, especially the biennial Gender Academy, to raise awareness and promote behavioural change.

Adapting this methodology to distance learning courses was an interesting experience that enabled this emotional, fun and thought-provoking tool to be used online. The ITC-ILO also decided to invest in a new methodology with a similar objective to Forum Theatre – that is, using artificial intelligence and virtual reality to raise people's awareness of topics related to violence and harassment at work. Last summer, the centre delivered a training course using virtual reality for government representatives in Asia, promoting zero tolerance of harassment at work. It enabled participants' active participation and improved understandings of how to address violence or harassment at work through an immersive virtual tool. This is a good example of using new tools to promote the process of knowledge acquisition through online learning.

“The ITC-ILO also decided to invest in a new methodology with a similar objective to Forum Theatre [...] using artificial intelligence and virtual reality to raise awareness of topics related to violence and harassment at work.” – Claudia Callegari

✓ **Using exit questionnaires to improve practice**

Jouliia Bou Karroum, GESI Adviser at FHA 360 Lebanon (USAID-funded)

As an independent trainer who manages trainings alone, the experience of shifting to online learning was demanding and at times overwhelming, especially in terms of balancing work with childcare during the pandemic. As a trainer, having to change rapidly from in-person trainings to online sessions felt like turning into a screen. It helped to approach the transition with a sense of humour.

Basic internet infrastructure affects the pedagogical approach of online learning. Questions remain about who has access to online platforms, who is privileged enough to access the internet and be digitally literate, and who can afford access to different technologies. These questions apply to both trainers and learners. Ignoring these questions implies neglecting feminist philosophy.

There are also questions about how sustainable the shift to online training is, due to these information technology (IT) limitations. A lack of basic competences and digital knowledge has been challenging for trainers, requiring them to revisit their competencies and reflect on the extent to which they can deliver training in an online environment. We need to look at ways to make technologies more inclusive and accessible for a wider audience.

E-facilitation can be hectic and overwhelming, especially at the beginning of the shift to online learning. With time, trainers learned how to better divide their labour. They began learning from one another how to retain the playful aspects of participatory learning and guarantee participants' well-being and mental health. Many trainers with external contacts put in extra effort to develop meaningful materials for a broader range of participants. They need to charge higher prices to reflect this additional work.

Using an exit questionnaire after a session, such as by using online forms, or one-on-one chats, is a useful way of learning how to create more impactful training in the future. These are an alternative to the coffee breaks that we have during in-person trainings. Another best practice is interactive online energizers. The UN Women Training Centre has many materials that we can refer to, but we still need to develop more knowledge products about feminist e-pedagogies, taking into account participants' diversity and different cultural backgrounds.

“Using an exit questionnaire after a session, such as by using online forms, or one-on-one chats, is a useful way of learning how to create more impactful training in the future.” – Joulia Bou Karroum

We need to introduce new tools to overcome challenges. Recording online sessions is useful, enabling trainers to revisit discussions and identify where to follow up. Other useful tools are polls and chat logs, both of which give us useful data. Having a mentoring system or space is also useful, such as the Community Practice or Virtual Dialogues. This helps participants interact, network and support each other to overcome challenges based on their diverse experiences.

✓ Looking after participants' physical well-being

Elisabeth Robert, Independent Gender Trainer and Consultant

Online, you can only see trainers' or participants' heads and faces. But remembering our bodies is very important from a feminist perspective, especially in terms of issues of self-care and the principle of doing no harm. The burden of care work increased during the pandemic. We need to think about how to care for our mental and physical well-being, both in face-to-face and online training. It is important in online sessions to come back to really practical things, such as asking participants to grab a pen and paper, and to just take a moment to write something down without using any technology.

There are examples of gender trainers giving a little yoga session, or asking participants to strike a pose. It is especially important to give participants sufficient breaks during the session (e.g. every hour) so that they can stand up and walk around. It is important to think about how to create safe spaces online, especially when working on issues like gender-based violence.

“It may be useful to add another principle to our feminist pedagogical principles, [... these] need to consider not just our minds, but also our physical bodies and emotional well-being” – Elisabeth Robert

It may be useful to add another principle to our feminist pedagogical principles, about thinking more about the body, especially in online settings where facilitators and participants are not physically together. Our principles need to consider not just our minds, but also our physical bodies and emotional well-being. One good practice is to hire a counsellor who would be able to help participants struggling with emotions or trauma.

USEFUL LINKS

- Watch the webinar recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXjAwXCiool>
- Access the forum discussion: <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=3613>

WHAT ARE VIRTUAL DIALOGUES?

Virtual Dialogues are online discussions to exchange ideas, insights and good practices on training for gender equality. These inclusive processes of collective knowledge production are organized by the [UN Women Community of Practice on Training for Gender Equality \(CoP\)](#), an open platform for dialogue and a repository of [training resources](#), [institutions](#) and [opportunities](#).