



L-Università  
ta' Malta

# Intersectionality in Higher Educational Institutions: Design and implementation strategies. The University of Malta experience.

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University of Malta

Research Conference by WAHEN, CGHE and SKOPE

*Access and geopolitics: Next steps in tackling the equity crisis in global higher education*

Oxford, UK and Online  
3 June 2025



# Topics

- Integrating intersectionality in **policy design**
- Implementation: Intersectionality in **action**
- Challenges
- Intersectionality going forward



# Design



# Gender equality in Malta

In the 2024 European Gender Equality Index, Malta ranks 13th among EU countries with a score of 70.1 out of 100.

Its score is 0.9 points lower than the EU average.

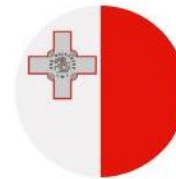


## Gender Equality Index 2024

Malta - 13th place



### Overall Gender Equality Index (GEI) score



since 2010: an increase of 15.7 points  
since 2021: an increase of 2.3 points

The GEI uses a scale of 1 to 100, where 1 is for total inequality and 100 is for full equality

# Factors that led to the design of the UM Gender+ Equity Plan

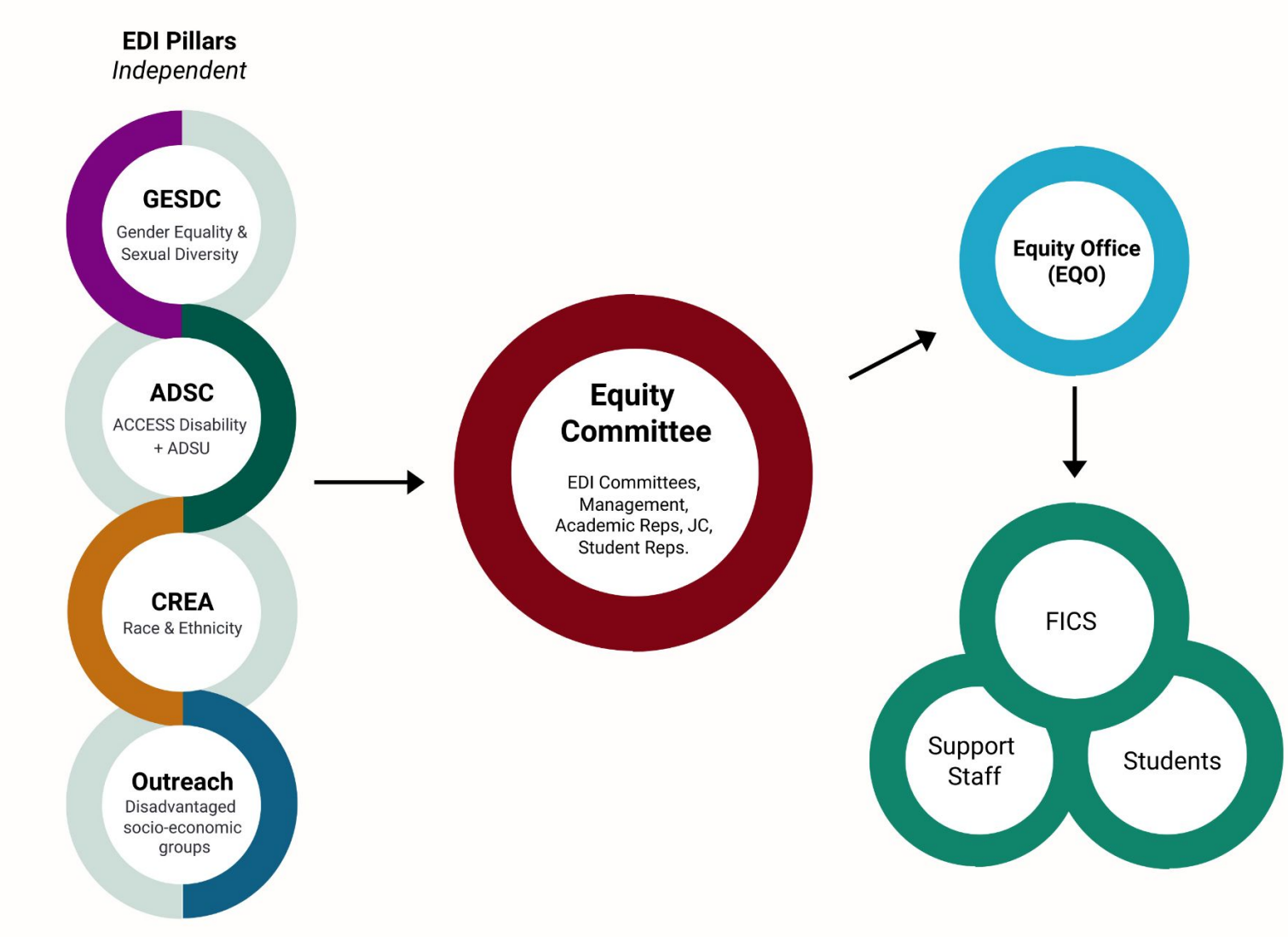


**Strategic Plan  
2020–2025**

*Serving students, scholarship  
and society, sustainably*



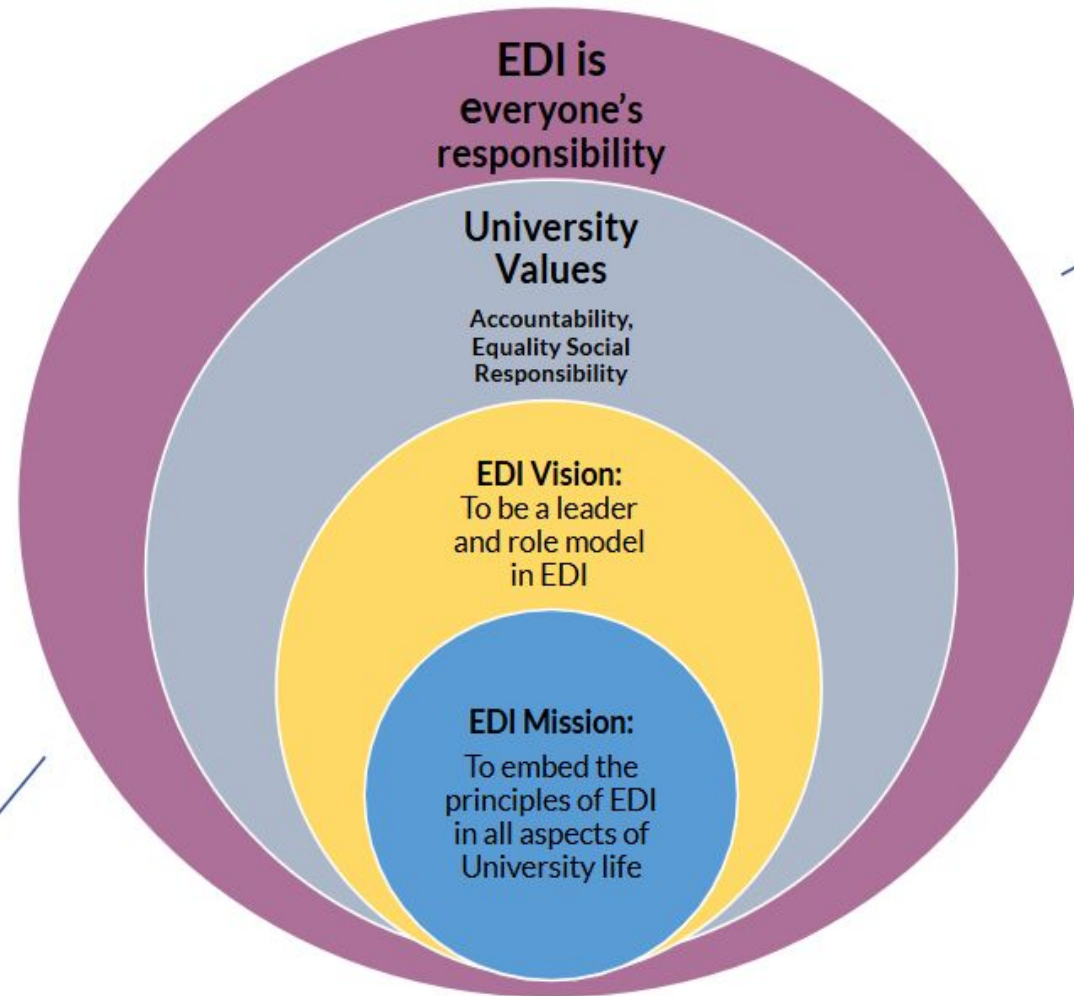
# UM EDI Pillars



# Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

## EDI Principles

- Equality of Opportunity
- Equity
- Mainstreaming
- Universal Design
- Access
- Legislative Compliance
- Awareness
- Consultation
- Data gathering



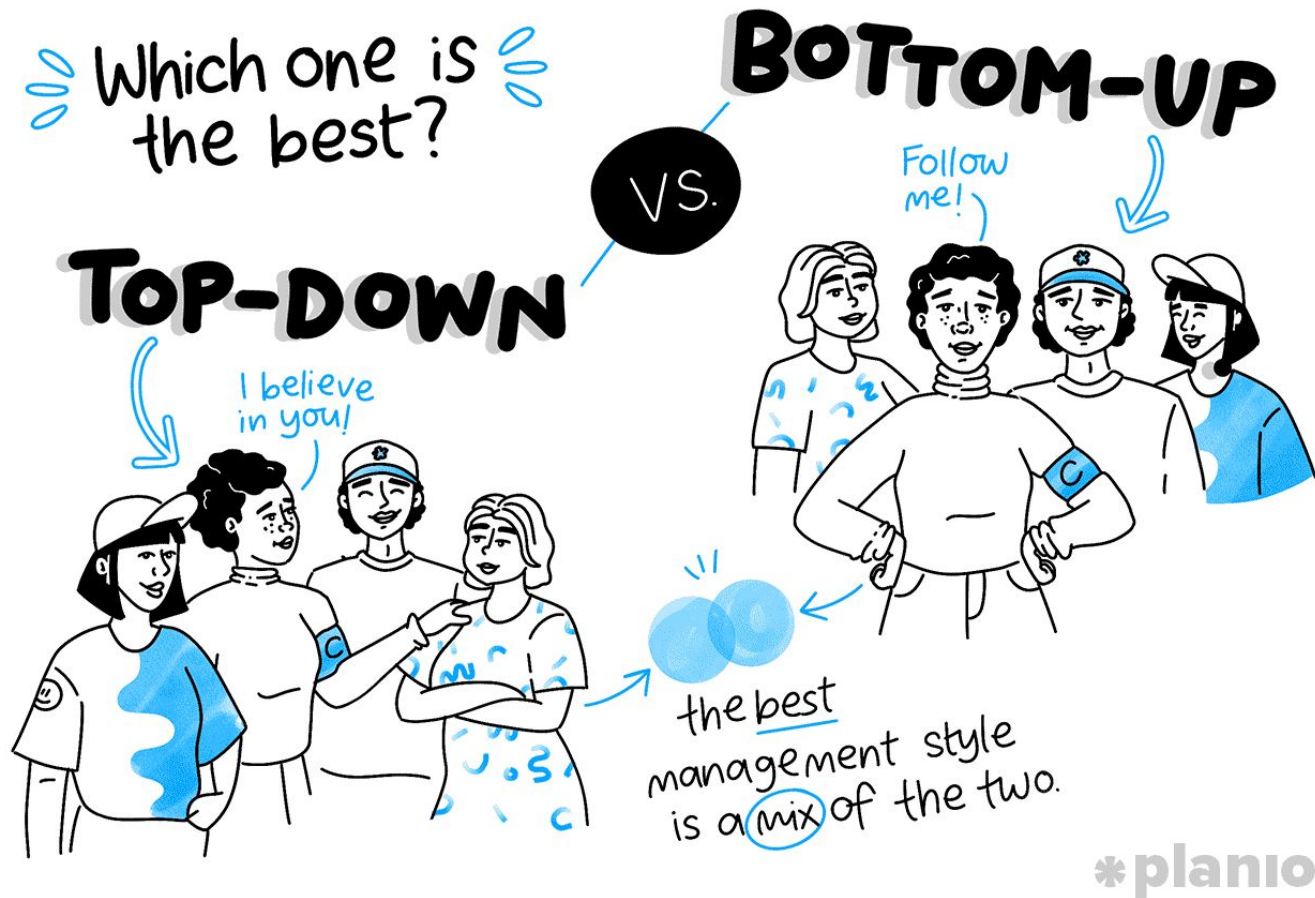
## Equality grounds

- Age
- Civil status
- Disability
- Family status
- Gender, Gender Identity
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Socio-economic status

# Implementation



# Top down design and bottom up implementation



# Implementation through Policy

Clause 2.3 of the **University Harassment and Bullying Policy** clearly states that the University of Malta is committed to:

uphold the well-being and dignity of members of staff and students alike irrespective of gender, marital or civil status, family responsibilities, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnicity), disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, political opinion, or membership or non-membership of a trade union.

**L-Università ta' Malta**

**EQUITY OFFICE**



**WHAT IS HARASSMENT?**

Any repeated, unwanted, unwelcome or uninvited behaviour. It makes you feel humiliated, intimidated or offended.

**REMEMBER:**  
What is acceptable to one person may not be acceptable to another.

**Examples of Harassment:**

- › Physical
- › Verbal and non-verbal
- › Cyber-bullying
- › Mobbing

**Effects of Harassment:**

- › Fear & anxiety
- › Anger
- › Helpless & vulnerable
- › Depression
- › Physical distress
- › Low motivation & morale

**WHAT IS BULLYING?**

Bullying is more emotive with more emphasis on intimidation. Bullying can happen to anyone, anywhere!

**Effects of Bullying:**

- › Increased stress
- › Increased absenteeism
- › Reduced quality & productivity
- › Inability to perform duties effectively
- › Increased staff turnover
- › Overall tense work environment

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Harassment is a crime and is punishable by law (Article 251A (4) of the Criminal Code, Chapter 9 of the Laws of Malta.

**REPORTING**

If you think you are a victim of harassment or bullying, Speak up and Report!

**STEP 1** Communicate complaint to a UM Staff Member. The complaint will be redirected to Advisor and Co-Advisor

**STEP 2** Complainant is encouraged to directly request the alleged perpetrator to stop the offensive behaviour.

**Possible Procedures to follow after initial complaint:**

- 1 Informal Procedure
- 2 Formal Procedure
- 3 Decision to take no further action

This policy applies to UM and Junior College (JC) staff and students. It also applies to clients of UM and JC, its sub-contractors and other third parties with whom the institutions conduct dealings with.

**HERE TO SUPPORT YOU**

UM Health & Wellness Centre ☎ +356 2340 3988 📧 [health-wellness@um.edu.mt](mailto:health-wellness@um.edu.mt)  
UM Security ☎ +356 2340 2803 / +356 9990 8888  
UM Harassment & Bullying Advisors ✉ [um.edu.mt/services/harassmentandbullying/contactus](mailto:um.edu.mt/services/harassmentandbullying/contactus)  
National Emergency Support Line ☎ 179

This is a guide; please ensure you read the Policy and Procedure in full:



10

# Implementation through Awareness-Raising

- Staff Training
  - EDI Introduction training sessions
  - Tailor-made training sessions
- Faculty-focused seminars
  - EDI Introduction training sessions
  - Introspective seminars
  - Both administrative and academic staff



# Teach in on 'Masculinities'

A series of initiatives

- Multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary
- Academics, students, personal experiences, support services
- A teach-in on the evolving roles, expectations, and expressions of masculinities within Malta's modern landscape.



The poster features a vibrant orange background with a large, stylized title 'RAGEL fuq l-irġiel' in bold, black, block letters. The title is surrounded by several yellow and orange starburst graphics. Below the title, the subtitle 'Teach IN: Masculinities in Maltese Contemporary Society' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The event details, including the date '20 November 2024', time '12:00-14:00', and location 'VC101, IT Services Building, UM Msida Campus', are listed in a black, sans-serif font. A prominent red button with the word 'REGISTER' in white, uppercase letters is positioned below the event details. To the right of the button, the text 'Be part of the discussion for International Men's Day 2024!' is written in a black, sans-serif font. At the bottom left, the logo of L-Università ta' Malta is displayed, consisting of a shield with a cross and the university's name in Maltese. To the right of the logo, the text 'Equity Office Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee' is written in a black, sans-serif font. On the right side of the poster, there is a stylized illustration of a man with a beard and a white shirt, looking slightly to the left.

**RAGEL fuq l-irġiel**

Teach IN: Masculinities in Maltese Contemporary Society

📅 20 November 2024 ⌚ 12:00-14:00  
📍 VC101, IT Services Building, UM Msida Campus

**REGISTER**

Be part of the discussion for International Men's Day 2024!

 L-Università ta' Malta

Equity Office  
Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee

# Implementation through Inclusive Language

- Inclusive Language
    - UM's Good Practice in Inclusive Language
    - Awareness-raising campaigns
    - Universal Inclusive Design
- ✓ Avoiding gendered language
  - ✓ Representation in visuals
  - ✓ Addressing intersectionality
  - ✓ Culturally sensitive language
  - ✓ Inclusive marketing campaigns
- Adopting a **Universal Inclusive Design Approach**

**Good Practice in  
Inclusive Language**  
UNIVERSITY OF MALTA



# Challenges

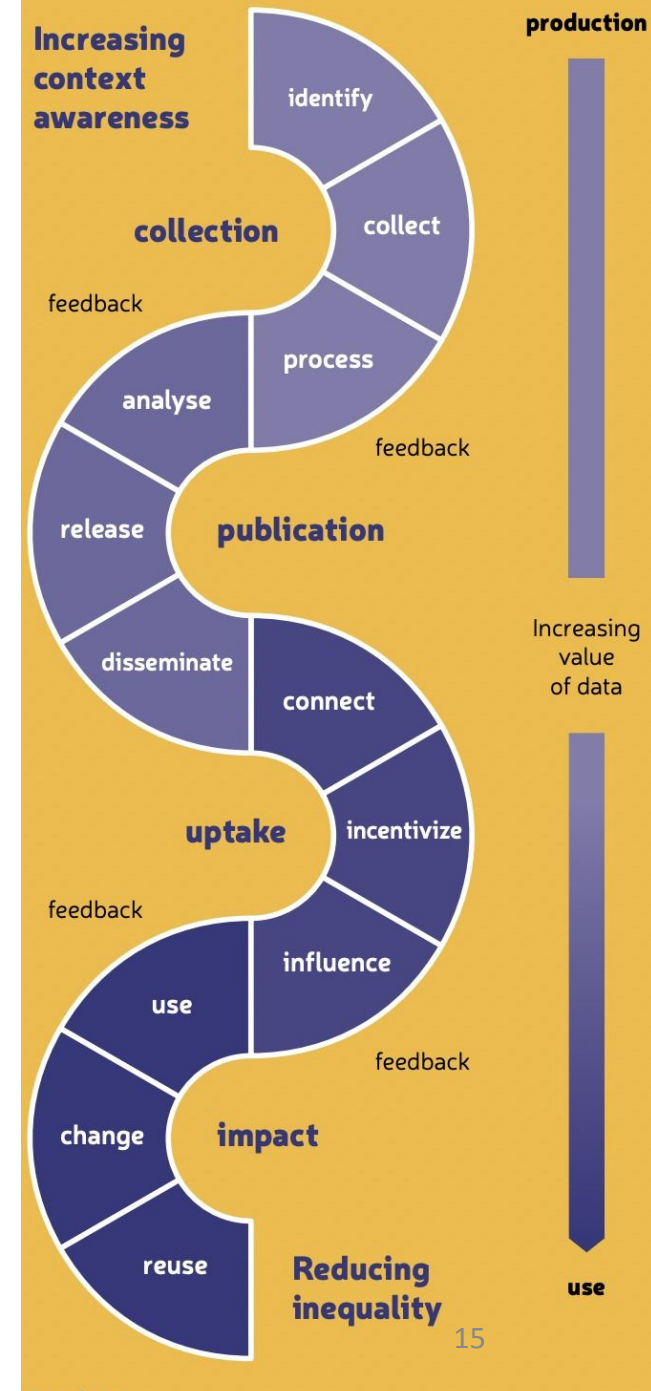


# Lack of centralised intersectional data gathering

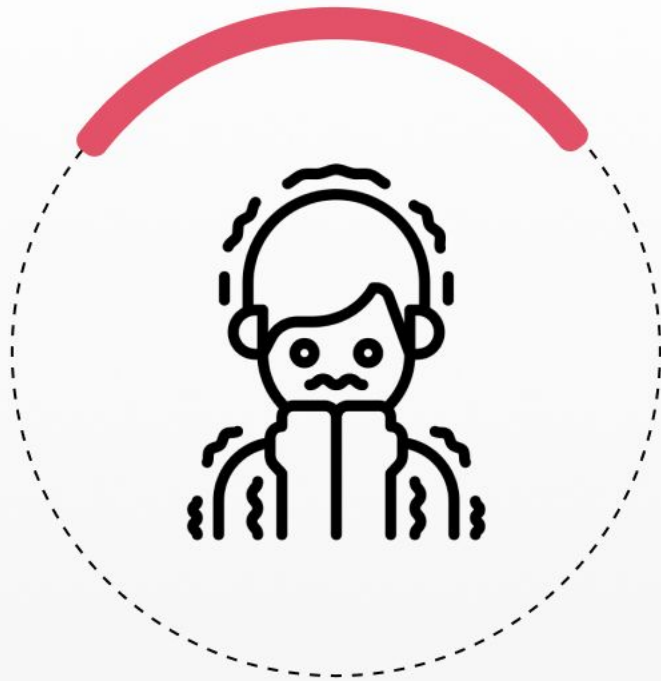
- Results in
  - Lack of holistic understanding of the cultural context
  - Lack of comprehensive evidence-based policy drafting
  - Greater risk of marginalisation and discrimination

# Lack of a solid monitoring system

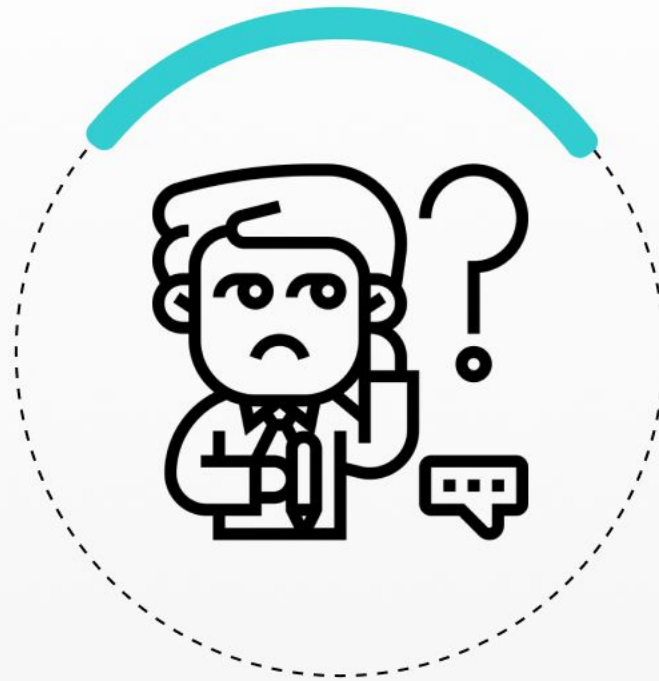
- Results in
  - Lack of commitment and actioned measures
  - Risk becoming a tick-box exercise instead of leading to an organisational shift
  - Difficulty to assess the true progress of various initiatives



# Resisting change



Fear



Misunderstanding



Skepticism

# Going Forward

*Food for thought where intersectionality is involved*



# Sandra Fredman (2016)

Three main ways in which discrimination can be conceptualised:

1. **Sequential multiple discrimination** – when a person suffers discrimination on different grounds on separate occasions.

## Case-by-case basis:

This type of discrimination is the **easiest to deal with**. Each situation is evaluated individually, rather than applying a blanket rule. This approach is crucial in employment discrimination cases, where factors like the nature of the job, the specific reasons for a decision, and the impact on an individual are considered.



## 2. Additive multiple discrimination

Additive multiple discrimination – when a person suffers discrimination on the same occasion but on two grounds, for example a gay woman is harassed because she is a woman and Muslim. This type of discrimination is additive, because each of the grounds can be identified independently.



*Female and lesbian*

### 3. Intersectional discrimination

Intersectional discrimination occurs when multiple factors, like race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, overlap and amplify each other, leading to unique and complex forms of disadvantage. It's not simply the sum of individual discriminations but a new, intertwined experience.

- Characteristics/identities interact with each other so as to be **inseparable**

## *Female student Disability Parent*



# Bonilla-Silva (2021)

- When institutions address race, gender, and class separately
- **This limits the transformative potential of gender equality plans by failing to recognize how multiple oppressions are mutually constitutive.**

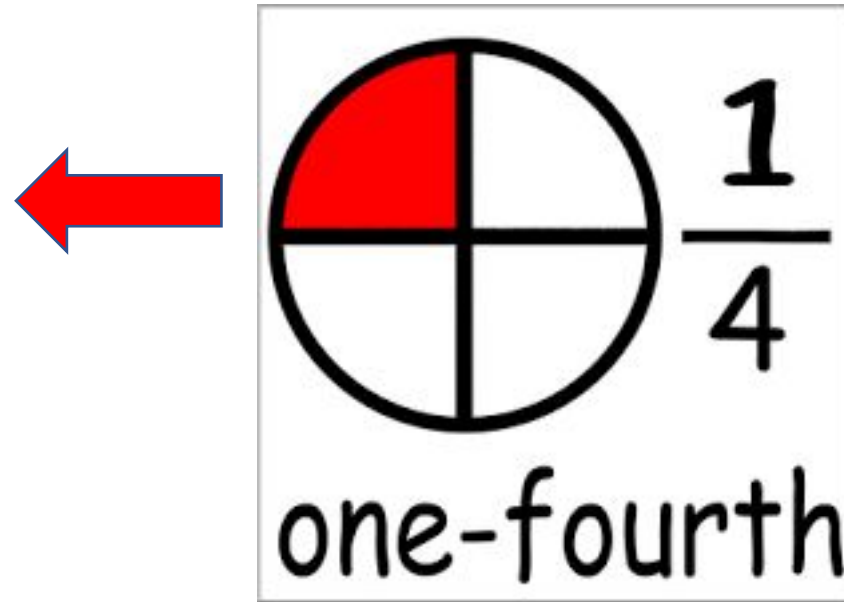


# Challenges in DEI – Bonilla-Silva

## UM Rector's Delegates 2024-2025

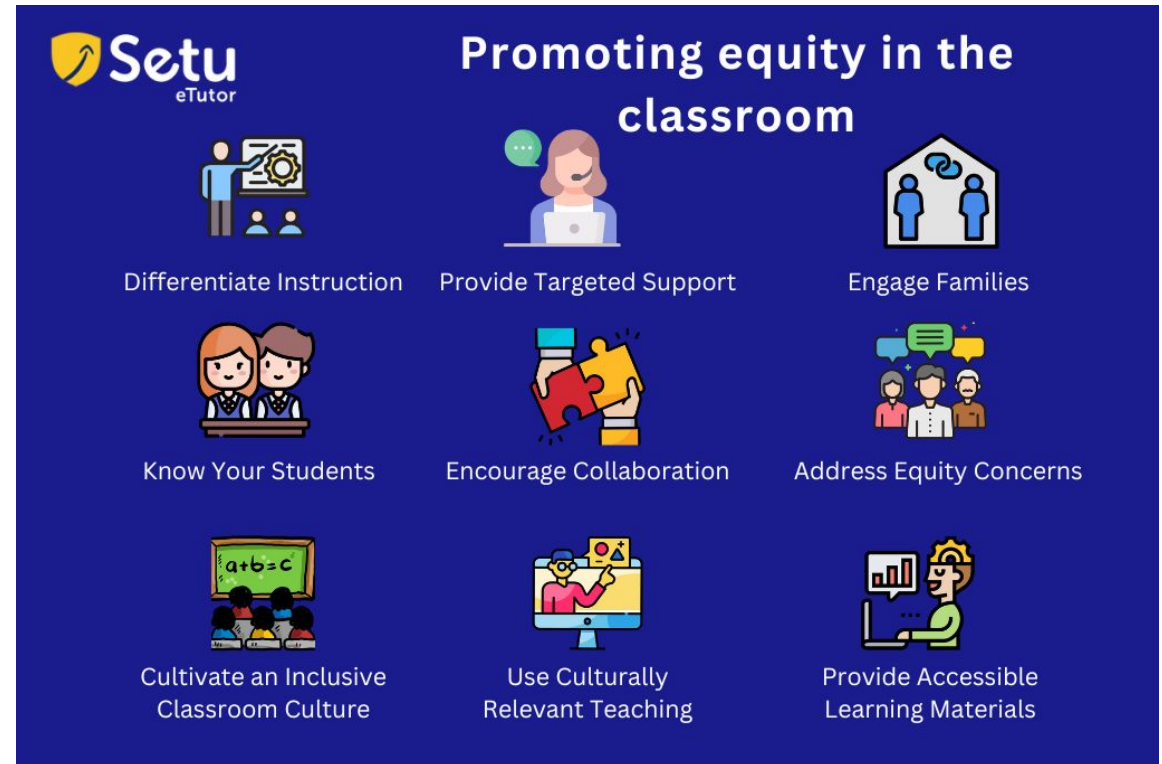
- Women

- **Co-Optation:** Institutions may adopt intersectionality retorically without enacting substantive changes.
- **Tokenism:** GEPs can be used to justify symbolic diversity (e.g., hiring practices) rather than addressing structural inequalities.
- **Depoliticization:** Institutions can depoliticize intersectionality, stripping it of its radical critique of power and oppression.



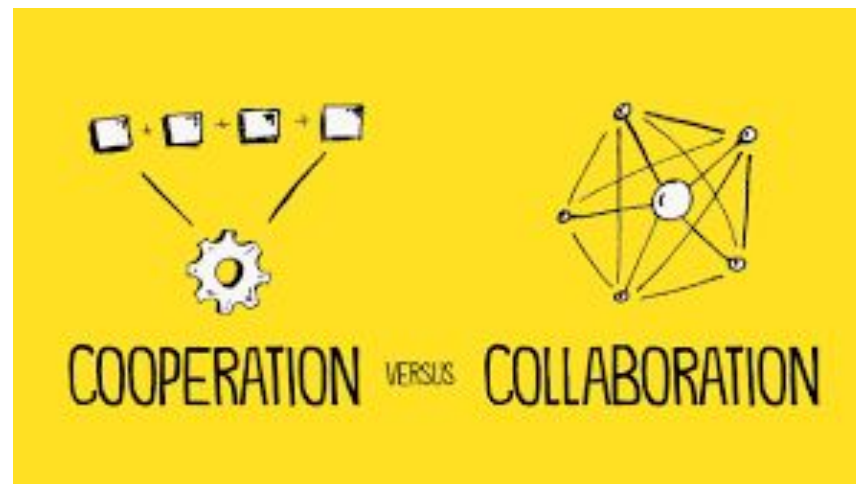
# Moving Toward Genuine Institutional Engagement (Bonilla-Silva, 2021)

- **Structural Focus:** Institutions must address the **root causes of inequality** rather than treating symptoms.
- **Integrated Approach:** Institutions should **analyze and act** on how intersecting oppressions function together rather than separately.
- **Commitment to Equity:** Policies should aim for **equity** rather than mere **diversity**, recognizing and redressing historical and structural disadvantages.



# Conclusion

- This presentation underscores the gap between the **theoretical** promise of intersectionality and its **practical application by an institution**.
- It is important to recognise that, at an institutional level, an intersectional approach requires a **cooperative** and **collaborative** framework
- We acknowledge that establishing such a system demands not only strong commitment at the highest and lowest levels, but also investment – human and financial.



# Thank You

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