Masterclass summary: Building gender-equal workplaces – From vision to practice

Posted on April 24, 2026 by Laurene Thil

Key Outcomes from the Bridges 5.0 Masterclass on 17th April 2026

This masterclass brought together four researchers and practitioners to explore how the transition towards Industry 5.0 can advance gender equality in the workplace.

Valeria Cirillo (University of Bari) and Armanda Cetrulo (Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies) presented findings from their book on technology and vulnerable workers. Their research highlighted that sectors dominated by women, such as cleaning, logistics, and healthcare, suffer from low wages, limited autonomy, and weak union representation. In the cleaning sector specifically, robots and digital tools are being introduced without genuine improvements to working conditions, and a troubling digital gender gap was identified: women were less likely to interact with new technologies, partly due to structural reasons (e.g. exclusion from night shifts) and partly due to persistent prejudice about their digital skills.

Marta Dell'Aquila (Centre for European Policy Studies) examined Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) under Horizon Europe, arguing that, when implemented meaningfully rather than as tick-box exercises, they can serve as practical instruments for structural change, shaping who designs technology and ensuring more inclusive research outcomes.

Cristina Oyón (SPRI, Basque Country) presented evidence linking gender equality directly to business competitiveness, demonstrating across hundreds of companies that the most gender-equal firms are consistently the most competitive. She noted, however, that progress at leadership level, particularly on boards and in CEO roles, remains strikingly slow.

The panel discussion, moderated by Ylenia Curci (CNAM/CEET), focused on artificial

intelligence and its gendered impacts. Panellists warned that generative AI disproportionately threatens feminised occupations, from clerical work to translation and call centres, and that the prevailing public narrative remains skewed towards its effects on male-dominated, high-skilled sectors. Key recommendations included linking technology adoption to health and safety bargaining, promoting human-centred design to give workers a voice before implementation, and tackling algorithmic bias at its source.

The recording and presentation are available at
https://freshthinkinglabs.com/recordings/

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