



# Gender experts and gender expertise Results of a survey

By Hayley Thompson and Elisabeth Prügl

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Hayley Anna Thompson is writing her doctoral thesis in Political Science and International Relations at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. Her research interests are in global governance, gender, feminism, social justice, and contentious politics.

Elisabeth Prügl is Professor of International Relations at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva where she directs the Programme on Gender and Global Change. Her research focuses on gender politics in international governance, in particular in the areas of agriculture, development, and conflict.

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## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of findings from a survey conducted at the Programme on Gender and Global Change (PGGC) of the Graduate Institute, Geneva from May 2012 to January 2014 of 118 international gender experts, i.e. professionals hired by intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations to work on gender. The survey reveals gender expertise as a loosely structured field that is functionally differentiated, shares the outlines of a common problématique, has a wide array of entry points, and displays the outlines of an uneven distribution of professional influence.

Reponses to our survey lead us to suggest that gender experts come in two types: *Gender mainstreaming experts* often work in an organization's gender unit and oversee the implementation of gender mainstreaming. In contrast, *gender-and experts* work on gender within a thematic issue area. For both, gender expertise has been acquired through experience, academic training, and professional recognition.

Questions regarding topics that experts engage with paint a picture of considerable overlap and a sophisticated engagement with gender issues. Topics such as women and girls, inequality, discrimination, gendered power relations, gender divisions of labour, men and boys, and various intersectional categories figure prominently in the works of experts. In contrast, and despite a strong focus on gender as a social construct, constructions of masculinity and femininity receive notably less attention in their work.

Though gender experts are highly educated and many have vast experience and training, there are no particular entry requirements for becoming a gender expert. Experts are recruited from the social sciences broadly. Only 10 per cent of our respondents had degrees in Women's/Gender Studies, but a much larger number had taken courses, written a thesis, or encountered gender in their studies. Sixty per cent in addition indicated that they taught themselves, 70 per cent that they also learned on the job, and 57 per cent that they got formal training from their current employers. We received some narrative comments of experts having gained their knowledge through participation in the feminist movement, and 61 per cent of our respondents self-identified as feminists.

Gender expertise as a field of knowledge is structured in the sense that influence is distributed unevenly. Most of the academics that our respondents considered particularly influential come from the Anglophone world. British academics and institutions appeared as especially salient, with the London School of Economics and the University of Sussex (Institute for Development Studies) emerging as the main centres of scholarship for international gender experts. A disproportionate number of experts earned their top degrees in the US and the UK, accounting for 40 per cent of individuals surveyed. Experts participate in a diverse range of networks and organizations with relatively little overlap. The most commonly mentioned network was AWID, the Association for Women's Rights in Development.

Survey results point to a high degree of dependence of the professional field of gender experts on employers, who play a crucial role in networking experts and in providing training. This raises questions regarding the chance for professional autonomy of gender expertise, i.e. the extent to which gender experts are able to develop independent curricula and standards for the field and practice their profession independently of the agendas of their employers. The strengthening of professional autonomy of the field could enhance the authority and opportunities of gender experts.



# GENDER EXPERTS AND GENDER EXPERTISE

## Results of a Survey

Twenty years of gender mainstreaming in international organizations (IOs) has produced an international network of gender experts and a distinctive body of expertise on gender relations. Gender experts have led the development of policies, built capacity through training, designed and implemented projects, pioneered new administrative techniques (such as gender budgeting), spearheaded innovative research, and evaluated interventions geared towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. In the process, they have introduced the term gender into international politics, built a body of knowledge about gender relations and women's subordination, fostered the diffusion of such knowledge internationally and its translation into local contexts. They also have formed networks among themselves, and they recognize each other's work. In other words, gender expertise has emerged as a professional field.

Gender experts and gender expertise were conceptualized by movement activists as the Trojan horses of the feminist movement within state bureaucracies. And indeed, early gender experts had to engage in savvy strategizing in order to fulfil their mandates in often hostile environments. However, as intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations have become more receptive to integrating gender, gender experts have become an asset and a source of epistemic authority. They provide these organizations the credibility to put forward interventions geared towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

We suggest that it is useful to think of gender experts and gender expertise as being in the process of developing a new transnational social field distinct from (though loosely connected to) the feminist movement.<sup>1</sup> The making of this field entails the construction of gender relations as an object of research and of gender inequality as a policy problem. It also includes a process of structuring, the creation of entry requirements into an emerging profession, the differential valuing of bodies of knowledge about gender relations according to the reputation of those who develop it, and the associated formation of professional hierarchies.

In order to examine the contours of the emerging field of gender expertise, the Graduate Institute's Programme on Gender and Global Change (PGGC) conducted a survey of international gender experts from May 2012 to January 2014. The survey was part of a multi-disciplinary, multi-method research project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, which examined the construction of gender expertise in transnational spaces.<sup>2</sup> This report provides a summary of the principal findings of the survey.<sup>3</sup>

5

### THE SAMPLE

For the survey, we identified gender experts by approaching the heads of gender units in a variety of intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Some were open to providing us with lists of relevant individuals in their organizations, some offered to forward our questionnaire to relevant staff, while others declined to participate or did not respond to our repeated email messages. We also scoured websites for lists of gender experts and gender focal points and included individuals who were publicly identified as such. Through

1 On the notion of a field as related to science see Bourdieu 1999; Bourdieu 2004.

2 The project is directed by Elisabeth Prügl, Professor of International Relations at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID). Other members of the team are Rahel Kunz (University of Lausanne) and Hayley Thompson (IHEID), both political scientists, and Christine Verschuor and Francoise Grange, both anthropologists at IHEID. The project seeks to understand (a) how gender experts are organized; (b) how gender experts and gender expertise are constructed and reconstructed in transnational encounters; and (c) what gender expertise is and what the effects are of its application in two issue areas, namely security and development. We suggest that the circulation of gender experts and gender expertise takes place in transnational social fields and explore structures and processes operating in these fields through empirical research with entry points at the headquarters of international (governmental and non-governmental) organizations and in three case countries, i.e., Colombia, Mali, and Nepal.

3 Other results from the project can be found on the PGGC website at <http://graduateinstitute.ch/home/research/centresandprogrammes/genre/recherche/feminismes-et-politique-du-chang.html>

these various methods we identified approximately 600 individuals with valid email addresses who received our questionnaire.<sup>4</sup> We sent two reminders in order to increase our response rate. In the end, a total of 118 responses were received – a rate of about 20 per cent.

Our sample is fairly representative of the range of organizations and issue areas in international affairs. As shown in **Table 1**, 33 of our respondents (28 per cent) worked in non-governmental and mixed organisations and 85 (72 per cent) in UN agencies. We sampled organizations active in very different issues areas, but paid particular attention to those working on development, human rights, and conflict – areas in which we planned to do additional qualitative analyses. While we were able to generate responses from the main UN agencies, the survey does not include the Bretton Woods institutions. A particular gap is the absence of the World Bank, where we were unable to elicit cooperation for the survey. This needs to be kept in mind when looking at the validity of our results for the issue area of development.

**TABLE 1**  
**Gender Experts by Organizations**

	Per cent	Number
<b>Inter-governmental organizations</b>		
International Labor Organization	14	16
UNWOMEN, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women	14	16
Food and Agriculture Organization	11	13
International Fund for Agricultural Development	4	5
United Nations Development Fund for Women	4	5
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	4	5
OHCHR-Office of the United National High Commissioner for Human Rights	3	3
UNHCR, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	3	3
United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations	2	2
United Nations Development Programme	2	2
UNHABITAT, United Nations Human Settlements Programme	2	2
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	2	2
World Health Organization	2	2
International Training Center-ILO	1	1
United Nations Children’s Fund	1	1
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	1	1
United Nations Population Fund	1	1
Other IGOs	4	5
<b>Total IOs</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>International NGOs</b>		
CARE, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere	8	9
Amnesty International	4	5
DCAF, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces	3	4

<sup>4</sup> The reason we can provide only an approximation of the total is because of organizations that preferred to distribute the survey themselves rather than allowing us direct access to their staff.

TABLE 1 – continued

	Per cent	Number
International Alert	2	2
Action Aid	1	1
Human Rights Watch	1	1
International Federation of the Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies	1	1
OXFAM, Oxford Committee for Famine Relief	1	1
Other INGOs or Mixed Organization	8	9
<b>Total INGOs</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>118</b>

Because our survey focused on large organizations, we were able to capture experts both at headquarters (often in the North) and those working at regional and country levels. Almost half of our respondents were based at international headquarters, more than a third at regional headquarters, and the rest in a range of countries around the world.

**Table 2** provides an indication of the regions where our experts were based primarily at the time of the survey. Outside international headquarters, most worked in the Asia/Pacific region and in sub-Saharan Africa. The “other” category includes mostly individuals who worked across regions.

7

TABLE 2  
Gender Experts by Primary Work Location

	Per cent	Number
International Headquarters	48	57
Asia/Pacific	14	17
Sub-Saharan Africa	14	16
Middle East/North Africa	3	4
Latin America/Caribbean	7	8
Europe	8	10
Other	5	6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>118</b>

Because gender expertise varies not only by organizations but also depends on the topics on which experts work, the survey sought to identify the issue areas in which gender experts had been active during the previous two years. **Table 3** provides a summary of the responses. The largest group of our respondents worked in the broad field of development (40), followed by human rights (33) and conflict (17). Twelve per cent identified as working primarily on agricultural issues, which is the largest response group, reflecting in part the large number of respondents from the FAO and IFAD. The survey also included experts in a diverse array of other fields, from health to refugees and trade.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Several additional categories were provided but received zero responses. These additional categories included: Age, Crime, Education, Finance, HIV/AIDS, Human Resources, Indigenous Peoples, Medicine/Medical Assistance, Personal Status Codes, and Population. Twenty-two respondents (19 per cent) did not identify a provided category.

TABLE 3 Gender Experts by Main Issue Area*		
Issue Areas	Per cent	Number
<b>Development</b>		
Agriculture	13	15
Development	13	15
Food, Hunger	7	8
Environment	2	2
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Human Rights</b>		
Violence Against Women	12	14
Labor (including social security & cooperatives)	9	11
Human Rights	7	8
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Security</b>		
Conflict and Peace	6	7
Security Sector Reform	4	5
Disaster	3	3
Humanitarian Action	2	2
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Other</b>		
Health	3	3
Finance	3	3
Migration	2	2
Children	1	1
Governance	1	1
Housing, Human Settlements	1	1
International Law (without human rights as a primary focus)	1	1
Refugees	1	1
Reproduction	1	1
Trade	1	1
Other (10 of which "gender mainstreaming")	11	13
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>118</b>

\*Note that the broad categories (development, human rights, security, and other) were constructed after the survey. This accounts for the fact that the categories development and human rights appear both as a general category and as a sub-category.

In sum, our survey of gender experts captures those active in a broad range of issue areas, organizations and geographical locations. However, given its focus on experts hired by international IOs and INGOs, experts in various headquarters predominate.

## WHAT IS A GENDER EXPERT?

Because the project sought to address the role of gender expertise at the international level, we defined gender experts as individuals who were at the time of the survey hired for gender-related work in inter-governmental and international non-governmental organizations (IOs and INGOs). This definition narrowed our population, excluding those who only worked for governments, regional organizations, regional or national NGOs, and/or in the private sector, though those in our population may have worked in any of these concurrently or previously. It also excluded movement activists that were not also earning an income through their work in IOs or INGOs. Our definition of gender experts thus presumed a certain level of professionalization.

Gender experts have generally been discussed as a monolithic category. However, based on our prior knowledge of gender experts, we assumed differentiation among them and specialization along issue areas. Our survey supports this understanding. The majority of experts we surveyed were able to indicate a main area of focus in addition to gender. For them gender is only part of their expertise alongside strong training in fields such as agricultural economics or human rights, and they work to infuse gender into these areas. We propose to call these “gender-and experts,” i.e. they typically identify as experts in gender and something else. They reflect the international mandate to treat gender as cutting across all issue areas.

But not all of our respondents were able to assign themselves to an issue area. A closer examination of the 84 additional comments provided as a supplement to the survey question summarized in **Table 3** shows that 19 respondents identified gender mainstreaming/advocacy as their primary working area over the past two years. This group also accounted for 10 respondents in our relatively large “other” category in **Table 3**, suggesting that some gender experts do not specialize thematically. For them gender mainstreaming is the primary expertise. Much of their work is focused on policy development, monitoring, training and other mechanisms to implement gender mainstreaming. We propose to call these experts “gender mainstreaming experts.”

Early efforts at gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the focal point system in the UN often led to allegations that responsibility for gender mainstreaming was dumped on already overtasked female staff, adding to their main responsibilities and thus marginalizing the issue. Our survey contradicts this impression. Among both groups of experts, the vast majority (73 per cent) focused primarily on gender during their work day. In other words, for both groups gender was the central occupation – for some as they advanced gender mainstreaming, for others as they infused gender considerations into various issue areas.

While defining our population for the survey required that we specify *a priori* what it means to be a gender expert, we also were interested to learn whether our respondents embraced this identity. We asked whether they would identify themselves “as a gender expert (or gender scholar, advisor, practitioner, analyst, or other similar term suggesting an in depth understanding of issues of gender in one or more areas).” Eighty per cent answered this question in the affirmative. Many of the additional open-ended responses we received on this question reflected on terminology but broadly accepted a professional identity related to gender expertise.

For example:

*I would identify myself as a gender expert on a broad number of gender equality issues and also as an adviser/advocate.*

Or:

*An investment of a life time to understand the concepts and their application in conflict and post conflict zones at the professional level and the application in day-to-day life at the personal level makes one an “expert” – although I do not personally prefer using the term.*

Many preferred the term practitioner over the term expert. Others suggested gender advisor, gender analyst, gender officer, and gender scholar. A set of different terminologies appeared in the area of training, including gender and diversity trainer, and the more specialized Certified Participatory Gender Audit Facilitator.

Many of our respondents referred to their extensive experience as a justification for claiming gender expertise:

*I have over 15 years of international experience working on gender issues and women's empowerment.*

And:

*Have been working for over 25 years on gender equality, violence against women and related issues. I have a deep practical understanding of gender power relations, how it is supported by patriarchy and the impact that has on the lived realities of women's lives.*

Others in addition cited academic qualifications, their job profile, as well as recognition by others:

*I have a good understanding of gender economics and feminist economic theory. I work in areas that influence policy and actions to advance gender equality globally.*

And:

*I was hired because of my academic background in gender studies and gender forms the bulk of my work. Also, within the organisation, I have been involved in internal gender training and our team is a designated contact point for others wishing to mainstream gender into their work. I have been contacted several times in this capacity and have influenced the work of others who do not specifically work on gender.*

10

But some of our respondents also hedged their bets regarding a claim to gender expertise with statements suggesting they were experts only to a degree. Some recognized limitations deriving from the fact that there is considerable local diversity when it comes to gender equality issues:

*Working globally and regionally, it is impossible to be a gender expert of each context – the real experts are the people in the communities whose situation and power dynamics we try to understand – but I consider myself an expert to the extent that I know my way around the 'gender knowledge' that exists, am well embedded in the global gender and climate community... have published on the issue myself and am leading on gender and climate within my organisation.*

Others, gender-and experts in particular, hesitated to embrace the label gender expert because of how they saw knowledge of gender as embedded in a specific field:

*I am a gender expert to the extent that I have been working on this issue or related issues (i.e. VAW) for 15 years. That is not to say I understand all dimensions of the topic or am even familiar with specialized areas of gender (environmental, population growth, education, healthcare, etc.) outside of my own specialization – SSR, criminal justice, VAW, etc.*

The professional identity of some gender-and experts also often was filtered through their disciplinary training:

*I like to think of myself as a gender practitioner. My background is not gender related. I have a degree in Law and a degree in International Development but I have worked on gender issues since the tender age of 17. I have therefore accumulated valuable experience on the approach as it relates to development.*

And:

*I have dedicated my career to working on women in conflict contexts. While I also hope that I am a 'peace and security' expert, certainly my framework is rights, and more specifically, women's rights.*

In some cases, the disciplinary expertise outweighed gender expertise for gender-and experts:

*I identify myself as an economist who works on gender issues. I would prefer NOT to identify myself solely as a gender expert because I believe that my work is grounded in my discipline.*

In sum, working on gender equality in IOs and INGOs provides a source of professional identification. What it means to be a gender expert differs depending on whether the experts specialize on processes of mainstreaming or approach gender through issue areas. However, it is clear that gender expertise has become established as a distinctive phenomenon in international administration. Claims to expertise are based on experience, academic training and professional recognition. The following section further examines the trajectories that lead towards such recognition.

11

## HOW DOES ONE BECOME A GENDER EXPERT?

In seeking to ascertain who populates the social field established by gender experts, a first question to investigate pertains to conditions of entry. What are the prerequisites for becoming an expert? Does one have to have a degree in Women's/Gender Studies? What are the sources of gender expertise? Does one have to be a feminist?

### Becoming an Expert through Education

As with professionals more generally, gender expertise is acquired through education and training. Indeed, the gender experts in our survey were highly educated: Over 92 per cent had graduate degrees, with 27 per cent holding a Ph.D.

But in contrast to other forms of expertise becoming a gender expert does not seem to require training in a specific discipline. Very few of our respondents have degrees in Women's/Gender Studies. While Women's/Gender Studies is the second-largest category among the primary areas of specialization for gender experts, it accounts for only 10 per cent of our sample (see **Table 4**). More generally, gender experts hold degrees from many different fields. The largest category was International Law, which accounted for 11 per cent. International Relations and Development Studies followed Women's/Gender Studies with 9 and 8 per cent respectively.<sup>6</sup> Next are other social science disciplines (economics, anthropology, sociology, and demography) in addition to education and psychology. Together, these top disciplines account for 70 per cent of the experts in our survey. But our respondents had academic backgrounds as varied as mathematics, archaeology and literature, indicating relatively unstandardized entry into the profession.

<sup>6</sup> It might be reasonable to merge the category Peace and Conflict Studies with International Relations, in which case the majority of gender experts (i.e. 12%) have degrees in these fields.

**TABLE 4**  
**Areas of Primary Specialization (highest degree)**

	Per cent	Number
International Law (incl. Human Rights)	11	13
Women's/Gender Studies	10	12
International Relations	9	11
Development Studies	8	10
Economics (incl. Agricultural Economics)	8	9
Anthropology	5	6
Education	5	6
Sociology (incl. Rural Sociology)	5	6
Psychology	4	5
Population Studies/Demography	4	5
Business	3	4
Languages	3	4
Peace & Conflict Studies	3	4
Social Work	3	3
Literature	2	2
Agriculture (incl. Forestry)	2	2
Environmental Studies	2	2
Archaeology	1	1
African-American Studies	1	1
Change Management	1	1
Evaluation	1	1
Geography	1	1
History	1	1
Library Science	1	1
Mathematics	1	1
Political Science	1	1
Public Administration	1	1
Public Health	1	1
Public Policy	1	1
Religion	1	1
Theatre	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>118</b>

Getting a degree is not the only way to acquire academic knowledge about gender, however. Since gender issues have been mainstreamed extensively into some of the social sciences and humanities, more gender experts have taken gender-focused classes than completed degrees. **Table 5** shows that almost 30 per cent of our respondents took at least one gender-focused class at the undergraduate level. This figure increases to 43 per cent at the graduate level indicating some specialization over time. Moreover, almost 30 per cent of gender experts wrote a thesis on gender, mostly at the graduate level. And 13 per cent were able to cumulate their academic work into a certificate (see **Table 6**). While a significant portion of gender experts thus has received academic training in the field, this still leaves at least 40 per cent that never had any academic training in Gender/Women’s Studies.<sup>7</sup>

**TABLE 5**  
**Number of Gender Classes at University Level**

	None	1	2	3	4	5 or more	Total
Undergraduate Classes	83 (70%)	14 (12%)	7 (6%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	10 (9%)	118 (100%)
(Post-) Graduate Classes	67 (57%)	14 (12%)	10 (9%)	7 (6%)	1 (1%)	19 (16%)	118

**TABLE 6**  
**Other Gender Credentials by Degree Level**

	None	Associate’s	Bachelor’s	Master’s	Ph.D.	Total
Thesis	83 (70%)	0 (0%)	4 (3%)	22 (19%)	9 (8%)	118 (100%)
Certificate	100 (85%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	12 (10%)	1 (3%)	118 (100%)

This does not necessarily mean that these experts had never encountered academic knowledge about gender. As one expert commented in our survey:

*In my anthropology and sociology studies, gender was integrated into many of the courses, including theory and methods courses... I strongly agree that gender work requires training, but don't think that it is necessary to have a specialized certificate in this...*

At the other extreme, older gender experts went through university when Women’s/Gender Studies did not exist – either in its specialized or mainstreamed version. By definition, these experts would not have received academic training in Women’s/Gender Studies; instead they often helped found the field:

*When I was in college (master is social sciences) Gender/Women’s Studies did not exist; the word gender was not used the way it is now. My gender training came from individual academic research, networking with other researchers, conducting surveys, writing articles, etc. One of my early efforts was to promote Gender/Women’s Studies and introduction of these themes into the curriculum.*

<sup>7</sup> This figure is arrived at as follows: 67 of our experts never took a graduate course in Women’s/Gender Studies. Of these 10 took at least one undergraduate course and 9 wrote a gender-focused thesis. Making the conservative assumption that these are not the same people, this means that at least 48 (i.e. 67 minus 19; or 40.7%) of our respondents never got any formal training in Women’s/Gender Studies (i.e. they took no classes and wrote no thesis).

These points are all well taken. Yet, it can make gender experts vulnerable to challenges to their authority if their expertise needs no formal credentials. Indeed, among our respondents not having academic training was a major source of insecurity about their expert status. Among the 20 per cent of respondents who did not call themselves experts, a salient reason was their lack of specialized training or of an academic degree. In the words of one respondent:

*I would not classify myself as an expert but someone who has worked in this area for several years on programmes with continual acquisition of knowledge on gender.*

Or, in the words of another:

*I never studied “gender” as a specific area nor have I obtained academic qualifications in this area. However, through my in-depth work in [my organization’s gender unit] I developed the reflex in my daily work of taking into account the different situations that women and men most often find themselves in and trying to identify the most appropriate way of addressing this inequality... Although I would not qualify myself as a “gender expert”, I know that I am recognised by many colleagues as very knowledgeable about gender issues.*

Or, yet another:

*I don’t have a depth understanding on gender as I never studied this topic in an academic way. My interest in gender issues is much more a consequence of a personal commitment, complemented by gender trainings and sensitization provided by the NGO I am currently working with.*

14

While many of the professionals working as gender experts thus have acquired valuable skills and are recognized for their expertise, the absence of academic training generates insecurities about their expert status.

### **Becoming an Expert on the Job**

The majority of our experts said that they acquired expertise through their own efforts and through training outside academia. These different forms of acquisition of expertise are detailed in **Table 7**. Learning on the job was important for almost all experts (77 per cent) and a large percentage (60 per cent) also indicated that they taught themselves through independent research. In other words, a lot of gender expertise is acquired in an informal manner and through individual, non-structured effort. Yet organized training programmes are a salient source of knowledge on gender in addition. Experts seemed to extensively take advantage of training offered by their current and former employers and of programmes offered by the UN and NGOs. In contrast, university short programmes and executive education type of offerings appear to be somewhat less popular, or perhaps less available.

**TABLE 7**  
**Types of Gender Training (multiple mentions possible)**

	Per cent Who Mentioned	Times Mentioned
Learned on the job	77	90
Self-taught through independent research	60	71
From Current Employer	58	68
From Other or Past Employer	35	41
UN training programme	33	39
NGO programmes	22	26
University Short Programmes/Executive Education	16	19
Other	9	10
None	3	3

Our survey results suggest that experts largely consider their employers to be supportive of their work. Almost 80 per cent of our respondents stated that the approach, understandings, or priorities of their organizations had helped them to effectively integrate a gender perspective into their work. Yet, 10 per cent of our respondents still encountered opposition and resistance to gender mainstreaming, indicating that their organization had inhibited the effective integration of a gender perspective more than not, or inhibited it greatly (see **Table 8**).

15

**TABLE 8**  
**Influence of Organization's Approach, Understandings or Priorities on Effectively Integrating a Gender Perspective**

	Per cent	Number
Inhibited it greatly	6	7
Inhibited more so than not	4	5
Inhibited it about as much as it facilitated it	12	14
Facilitated it more so than not	33	39
Facilitated it greatly	45	53
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>118</b>

Given the small number of respondents from each organization we cannot draw any conclusions about which employers are perceived to be more supportive of gender experts. Indeed, those who responded positively on this question came from a broad range of organizations.

### Becoming an Expert through Feminist Activism

Because feminist movement activism was a key force introducing gender mainstreaming into IOs and INGOs, being a gender expert often is associated with being a feminist. In our survey 61 per cent of respondents considered themselves to be feminists. Narrative comments showed that for some feminism and gender expertise were integrally related, as in the case of one who referred to “years of experience as a feminist activist, as gender mainstreaming expert and as an NGO-manager.” Another respondent similarly saw her activism and her policy work as a singular affair:

*I have been working on women's rights issues for about 40 years. When gender analysis started to be developed and used in different domains (late 1980s) I worked with this in the area of sexual and reproductive health. Subsequently my approach has been to locate gender role, analysis, dimensions, inequalities etc. within the more useful framework of human rights. I would describe myself as both an activist and policy analyst in the domain of sexual and reproductive health.*

Yet another of our respondents explicitly saw her feminist activism as formative for developing her expertise:

*My interest and passion for women's issues made me venture into gender work. My volunteering work while I was still an adolescent ignited the passion to work in the development sector. My expertise comes not by formal training but mainly by my work in the field with disadvantaged groups and indigenous communities with whom I lived.*

16

But the connection between feminism and gender expertise is complicated. Sociological literature suggests that experts gain authority by claiming objectivity, which requires that they distance themselves from political and financial interests (e.g. Freidson 2001). In contrast, feminist scholars have criticized abstract notions of objectivity and have argued for a “strong objectivity” that recognizes all knowledge as situated and derived from a point of view (e.g. Harding 2004; Haraway 1988). These epistemological tensions also resonate in the comments of self-identified feminists who disliked the label expert.

One concern pertained to the connotations of final authority and closure conveyed by the term expert. In the words of one respondent, who called herself a feminist “proudly, loudly, and openly” and who also self-identified as an expert:

*But I hate the word expert – so I would use it for job hunting purposes but I am always learning and finding new information...*

Another concern pertained to the way in which the term expert seems to privilege those distant from the grassroots.

*My experience comes from my deep and close work at the grassroots level rather than only from the textbook. I have worked in tribal and socially disadvantaged areas on gender issues which has built my foundation for my work. My interest in the subject led me to read and learn from other sources. Today I am recognised in my institution as a grassroots person with strong analytical and gender sensitive programming skills globally.*

But our sample also showed that almost 40 per cent of gender experts rejected the label feminist. In our interviews, many of these non-feminist gender experts implicitly recognized that the label weakened their authority, indicating that they found it “unhelpful” in a professional environment, thought it was “irrelevant” to their work, and in some cases rejected feminism for being “too extreme.”

In our survey, we did not define feminism, but treated it as an identity category. In other words, we called experts feminists if they called themselves feminists. Conversely, a non-feminist would be someone who rejected the label feminist. Accordingly the understandings of the contents of feminism may differ significantly among our experts, and there is reason to believe that ideas that some would call feminist others wouldn't. Responses to our question regarding the insights feminism offers for understanding gender-related effects, problems and solutions need to be interpreted in this light (see **Table 9**). Almost all of those who embraced the term feminist considered feminist knowledge useful, compared to about half of the non-feminists. The reasons could lie in different interpretations of what feminist knowledge is. Alternatively, their identity as experts may push the non-feminists to engage with pertinent ideas but to want to distance themselves from a political movement.

**TABLE 9**  
**Can Feminism Offer Insights to Better Understand Gender-Related Effects, Problems and Solutions in your Field?**

	Almost Always	The Majority of the Time	Rarely	Almost never	Total
Feminist	41 (57%)	28 (39%)	3 (4%)	0 (0%)	72 (100%)
Non-feminist	5 (11%)	19 (41%)	19 (41%)	3 (7%)	46 (100%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46 (39%)</b>	<b>47 (40%)</b>	<b>22 (19%)</b>	<b>3 (3%)</b>	<b>118</b>

17

Note: The difference between 96% feminist experts who found feminism to offer insights almost always or the majority of the time and 52% non-feminist experts who found feminism to offer insight almost always or the majority of the time is statistically significant. (Chi square = 28.93; p < .001)

In sum, there is no standard path for becoming a gender expert: Experience and activism are sources of motivation and knowledge for many. Highly educated, gender experts also gain knowledge about gender from their academic studies, although only few hold degrees in Women's/Gender Studies. Many also have undertaken efforts to teach themselves. A final, major source of knowledge are employers, who provide both on-the-job and formal training.

### WHAT IS GENDER EXPERTISE?

Expertise is an individual attribute that emerges from individual efforts, such as activism, education, and training. But expertise also is collective in the sense that experts hold common understandings about the contents of their expertise. Probing the contours of a field of knowledge requires a discursive analysis of documents and language, which we provide in other parts of our project. However, the survey included a question on how often gender experts considered certain issues in their work. The responses say little about the actual content of the work of gender experts, but they allow us to gauge the degree of overlap in their work (see **Table 10**).

**TABLE 10**  
**In Your Work on Gender, How Often Do You Consider the Following? (In per cent)**

	Always or Nearly Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never or Nearly Never	Total %
Women or girls	93	5	0	2	0	100
Inequality Between Men and Women	88	8	1	2	1	100
Gendered Power Structures/Relations	73	20	5	1	1	100
Particularities of Local Contexts	72	19	6	2	1	100
Discrimination in Society	69	19	9	2	1	100
Discrimination in Laws/Policies/Programs	68	26	5	1	0	100
Socially Constructed Differences	68	24	7	2	0	100
Hierarchical Gender Divisions of Labour	63	19	14	3	1	100
Inequality Within Groups of Men and/or Within Groups of Women	56	25	14	3	2	100
Men or Boys	43	33	14	9	1	100
Patriarchy	38	28	16	9	8	100
Age	38	30	21	6	5	100
Race or Ethnicity	34	32	22	7	5	100
Class	28	29	25	12	6	100
Biological or Natural Differences	25	16	31	18	10	100
Sexual Orientation	16	17	26	19	22	100
Femininity	14	14	31	25	16	100
Masculinity	11	23	27	25	14	100
Masculinities	11	20	25	27	17	100
Femininities	11	14	25	31	19	100

What is perhaps most striking about this table, is the high degree of agreement in the topics that gender experts address, although they work in very different issue areas and institutions. The vast majority identify women and girls, inequality, gendered power relations, the particularities of local contexts, discrimination, socially constructed differences, gender divisions of labour, intragroup inequalities, and men or boys as topics that they consider in their work frequently.<sup>8</sup> Structural categories, such as gender divisions of labour and gendered power structures/relations appear almost as often as liberal feminist categories, such as inequality and discrimination. Over two-thirds of our respondents also identified patriarchy as a topic, a term typically associated with radical and socialist feminist understandings of gender relations.

In contrast, a minority of gender experts listed femininity/ies or masculinity/ies as topics that appeared in their work frequently. This is surprising since virtually all of our respondents indicated that they dealt with socially constructed differences, and in feminist theory the notion of social construction is associated with theorizing masculinities and femininities. Similarly, we find it surprising that 41 per cent of experts frequently considered biological or natural differences in their work because such differences are often associated with essentialist understandings

<sup>8</sup> We use the term "frequently" to merge the categories "always or nearly always" and "often" that appear in the table.

of what it means to be a woman or man. These seemingly contradictory findings are difficult to interpret; probing their meaning requires additional, qualitative research.

Ideas of intersectionality, a salient concept in feminist theorizing that seeks to overcome essentialist constructions of women as unitary, also figure in the work of gender experts. More than 80 per cent of our respondents indicated that they considered inequality within groups of men or women frequently. In these considerations, the particularities of local contexts played a central role with over 92 per cent reporting that this was a topic often or always. The categories of age, race/ethnicity, and class similarly are prominent, though somewhat less so, with about two thirds dealing with these issues. Sexual orientation comes up as the stepchild of status distinctions; yet it is still a frequent topic for 33 per cent of our respondents.

With regard to methods, gender experts extensively practice consultation with stakeholders. The vast majority of our respondents said that they have at least some contact with stakeholders, and more than two thirds specified that they always or often were able to engage in such consultation (see **Table 11**). While a survey cannot capture the quality of the consultations, it does indicate that there is some agreement among experts on the need for and desirability of consultation and participation.

**TABLE 11**  
**In Your Work on Gender, How Often Are You Able to Consult With Intended Beneficiaries, Subjects of Your Research, and/or Individuals Affected by Your Work?**

Always or Nearly Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never or Nearly Never	Total %
36 (31%)	41 (35%)	31 (26%)	9 (8%)	1 (1%)	118 (100%)

In sum, the survey paints a picture of considerable agreement among gender experts regarding a core of topics and methods. Given the research instrument, the picture remains somewhat superficial, but it does lend support to the suggestion that gender experts orient their work on each other, that together they construct the outlines of a field.

**GENDER EXPERTISE: A LOOSELY STRUCTURED FIELD**

Gender experts not only share knowledge. Collectively, they also establish expertise as a social phenomenon. Experts, employing organizations, universities, and professional associations constitute gender expertise as a social field structured by rules and standard repertoires, and ordered by hierarchies and power relations. Structures and orders guide the practices of gender experts and define the realm of what it is possible for them to achieve. This section describes some aspects of the way in which the field of gender expertise is structured, exploring distributions of influence and networks.

**Distributions of Influence**

As in any professional field, influence is distributed unevenly in the field of gender expertise. In order to gauge hierarchies, we asked our respondents to name (a) three academics or texts and (b) three gender experts hired by IOs and INGOs, whose contributions they have found most influential and most useful in their work on gender. The answers provided a sense not only of the work considered important but also of the distribution of prestige in the field.

TABLE 12  
Most Influential Gender Scholars

Name	Times Mentioned	Institution	Country
Kabeer, Naila	11	LSE	UK
Moser, Caroline	8	Manchester	UK
Butler, Judith	6	UC Berkeley	US
Agarwal, Bina	5	New Delhi	India
de Beauvoir, Simone	5	Sorbonne (but mostly non-affiliated)	France
Nussbaum, Martha	5	Chicago	US
Elson, Diane	4	Univ. of Essex	UK
Chinkin, Christine	3	LSE	UK
Cornwall, Andrea	3	Sussex	UK
Scott, Joan	3	Princeton	US
Beneria, Lourdes	2	Cornell	US
Boserup, Ester	2	ECE (but mostly non-affiliated)	Belgium
Charlesworth, Hilary	2	ANU	Australia
Cockburn, Cynthia	2	City University, London	UK
Doss, Cheryl	2	Duke	US
Goetz, Anne-Marie	2	NYU	US
Hashimoto, Hiroko	2	Jumonji University	Japan
Heise, Lori	2	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	UK
Kandiyoti, Deniz	2	LSE	UK
Mohanty, Chandra	2	Oberlin	US
Seguino, Stephanie	2	University of Vermont	US

Of the 176 academics mentioned by our respondents, only 21 were mentioned more than once, indicating a wide dispersal of understandings of influence (Table 12). With 11 mentions Naila Kabeer, an economist at the London School of Economics, heads the list by a distance. Kabeer is followed by Caroline Moser (8 mentions) and Judith Butler (6 mentions). Bina Agarwal, Simone de Beauvoir, and Martha Nussbaum follow with 5 mentions each.

What is perhaps most telling about the list of influential academics is the salience of British scholars. Eight in the list of top-21 scholars work at British institutions, the same number as those affiliated with universities in the US, a much larger country and one which one would expect to provide hegemonic leadership. It appears that British rather than US institutions – the London School of Economics (LSE), the University of Sussex, and its affiliated Institute for Development Studies (IDS) – provide the environment for academic gender expertise to flourish.<sup>9</sup> LSE is the current and former home of four of the most influential academic gender experts in our survey (Chinkin, Kabeer, Kandiyoti, Moser). Sussex houses one (Cornwall), but two (Goetz and Kabeer) taught there previously. Top-ranking British experts tend to straddle academia and practice – most also consulting with international organizations. Top-ranking US experts more-often tend to be known for their

<sup>9</sup> The Labour government set up IDS in the 1960s/70s as a think tank on development studies. IDS houses an MA in Gender and Development and is the home of some large-scale research projects on the issue. Movement of personnel between LSE and IDS is frequent and has been described as resembling an “invisible college” (Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, personal conversation).

theoretical contributions (Butler, Nussbaum, Scott, Mohanty), but not exclusively. Only three of the top 21 academics are from non-Anglophone countries: Belgium (Boserup), France (de Beauvoir), and Japan (Hashimoto). And only one (Agarwal) is located in a country in the South (India), a former British colony.<sup>10</sup> While this provides an indication of Anglophone hegemony in the international governance of gender, it is important to remember that our survey was conducted in English only.

**TABLE 13**  
**Top Producers of Gender Experts – Universities**

Name	Country	Number
Melbourne	AUS	3
Graduate Institute, Geneva	Switzerland	3
LSE	UK	3
Sussex	UK	3
Cornell	US	3
Harvard	US	3
Australian National University	AUS	2
Tor Vergata University	Italy	2
Universita di Padova	Italy	2
Erasmus University	NL	2
University of Witwatersrand	South Africa	2
Universidad Complutense, Madrid	Spain	2
University of Geneva	Switzerland	2
Cambridge	UK	2
University of Reading	UK	2
Warwick	UK	2
Boston University	US	2
Columbia	US	2
Johns Hopkins	US	2
Yale	US	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>46</b>

21

No doubt, some of the accumulation of symbolic capital on display results from the fact that the top scholars identified come from universities that produce gender experts, who in turn are likely to identify their teachers as influential. LSE and Sussex appear among the top five schools at which our respondents earned their highest degree, next to Cornell, Harvard, Melbourne, and the Graduate Institute, Geneva (see **Table 13**). From the non-Anglophone world, Italian, Dutch, Spanish and Swiss universities make it into the top providers of degrees for gender experts. Regarding universities from the South, only the South African University of Witwatersrand ranks among the top producers of gender experts in IOs and INGOs. The vast majority of experts in our sample were trained in the US and UK. The two countries together produced 40 per cent of all experts. Two host countries of international agencies, Italy and Switzerland followed at a distance with 7 and 6 per cent respectively (See **Table 14**).

<sup>10</sup> Kabeer was born in East Pakistan, but her academic work and career have been in the UK.

TABLE 14  
Top Producers of Gender Experts – Countries

Name	Country	Number
US	22	26
UK	18	21
Italy	7	8
Switzerland	6	7
Australia	5	6
Netherlands	4	5
Canada	3	3
France	3	3
India	3	3
Spain	3	3
Chile	2	2
Philippines	2	2
South Africa	2	2
Sweden	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>93</b>

With regard to gender experts inside the organizations we expected that certain individuals would emerge as leaders in particular issue areas. The data do not confirm this expectation. **Table 15** lists the 25 most influential gender experts inside organizations (i.e. those who were mentioned at least twice). When we looked at where the respondents who nominated these individuals were situated, we found that most of our top experts are influential in multiple issue areas. We again encounter some academics who also are consultants: Naila Kabeer emerges at the top here as well, and Anne-Marie Goetz's status no doubt is related to the visibility of her academic work even before joining UN Women. But influential individuals inside organizations also gain authority from their office: The high rankings of both Michelle Bachelet, Head of UN Women at the time of the survey, and Doris Bartel, Senior Director of the Gender and Empowerment Unit at CARE, are no doubt related to the status they held in their organizations and their recognized leadership. When it comes to influence in non-academic networks, issue areas may matter less than organizational affiliation.

TABLE 15

**Most Influential Gender Experts Hired by IOs and INGOs by Issue Area**

Name	Institution	Development	Human Rights	Security	Other	Total
Kabeer, Naila	Consultant	1	3	0	3	7
Bachelet, Michelle	UN Women	0	1	0	3	4
Bartel, Doris	CARE	1	1	0	2	4
Goetz, Anne Marie	UN Women	0	0	3	1	4
Quisumbing, Agnes	IFPRI	3	0	0	0	3
Vann, Beth	Consultant	0	0	3	0	3
Barker, Gary	ICRW	0	0	2	0	2
Burns, Kate	OCHA	0	0	1	1	2
Byanyima, Winnie	UNDP	0	0	0	2	2
Connors, Jane	UNHCHR	1	0	0	1	2
Cox, Elizabeth	Consultant	0	0	0	2	2
Crowley, Eve	FAO	2	0	0	0	2
Elson, Diane	Consultant	0		0	1	2
Fontana, Marzia	Consultant	1	0	0	1	2
Hodges, Jane	ILO	0	0	0	2	2
Martinez, Elisa	Consultant	1	0	0	1	2
Montano, Sonia	ECLAC	0	1	0	1	2
Moser, Caroline	World Bank	0	0	0	2	2
Pillay, Anu	GenCap	0	2	0	0	2
Razavi, Shahra	UNRISD	0	1	0	1	2
Robinson, Mary	UNHCHR	0	2	0	0	2
Sandler, Joanne	UNIFEM	1	0	1	0	2
Smyth, Ines	Oxfam GB	0	0	1	1	2
Valasek, Kirsten	DCAF	0	0	2	0	2
Wilde, Vicky	CGIAR	2	0	0	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>63</b>

## Professional Associations and Networks

Professional associations and networks can play an important role in not only establishing expert authority but also in structuring a field. Sixty-seven per cent of our respondents indicated that they were members of a group, network, community, movement, scholarly institution, or association related to their work as a gender expert. While this indicates a high level of organization, there is very little overlap between the kinds of groups and networks to which our respondents belong. The largest overlap was with regard to AWID, the Association for Women's Rights in Development, making AWID the closest there is to a professional network of gender experts working internationally. However, only 6 of our experts indicated that they belonged to AWID, and AWID self-identifies as a feminist advocacy and movement organization rather than a professional network.<sup>11</sup> The next largest group was GenCap, the Gender Standby Capacity roster run by the UN's Inter-agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Assistance and the Norwegian Refugee Council; three of our experts reported that they belonged to this network. The vast majority of our respondents listed participation in employer-related groups and networks.

Professional associations and networks provide sites for an exchange of ideas and for developing shared understandings about what the field's expertise consists of. They allow for discussing expectations with regard to methods and the application of gender expertise. They also offer possibilities for training and for a socialization into the field. Moreover, professional associations can help develop a field's symbolic capital. They create peer-approved standards of quality, define curricula, and bestow recognitions and honours. The absence of shared professional associations and networks among gender experts may be problematic from this perspective.

## CONCLUSION

Our survey shows that gender experts exist as a professional category and gender expertise as a professional field. It paints a picture of expertise as weakly standardized and the field as loosely structured. There are multiple paths of entry into the field; and while 10 per cent of experts have degrees in Women's/Gender Studies, overall there are no clear academic entry requirements beyond generally at least a Master's degree. With regard to the structure of the field, it is possible to identify the outlines of an unequal distribution of influence, but this is not very pronounced: Gender experts find a broad range of individuals influential. Experts do not share a strong professional association, which may weaken their opportunity to develop common standards of knowledge, entry, and quality.

Gender expertise thus can be described as an emerging field whose contours are far from settled. While there appears to be a common problem definition, generally the field operates at the intersection of different social science disciplines. This openness can be an asset because it allows for a continued influx of new ideas. But it can also create competing loyalties for gender-and experts in particular. More problematically, gender expertise is struggling to establish its boundaries from the demands of the feminist movement and from the demands of employers. Again, this can be an asset: Movement activists can link experts to the grassroots, providing them invaluable access to the situated knowledges. And employers have played a seminal role in establishing gender expertise. However, depending on employers to provide core training and to define the professional networks of experts is problematic. It threatens the autonomy of a form of knowledge that should be independent of the political missions of IOs and INGOs. Widespread critiques of gender mainstreaming for allowing IOs to co-opt gender equality goals to their agendas are connected to this dearth of independence. Similarly, while gender experts are "programme professionals" (Wilensky 1964), i.e. they identify with the goals of a programme that has its origins in a social movement, they need independent spaces that allow them to problematize such programmes. The complicated relationship of experts to feminism, identified in narrative comments provided in the survey, suggests the need for such a space. Enhancing the professional autonomy of gender experts should be a priority for those seeking to increase their authority in international governance.

<sup>11</sup> AWID is described on its website ([www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)) as "an international, multi-generational, feminist, creative, future-oriented membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights."

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**Programme on Gender and Global Change**

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies  
Chemin Eugène-Rigot, 2 | P.O. Box 136 | 1211 Geneva 21 | Switzerland  
**T:** +41 22 908 57 00 **M:** [pggc@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:pggc@graduateinstitute.ch)

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