

## U7+ Intergenerational Roundtables

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Part Two: Social Sciences to Tackle the Global Gender Gap

Co-hosted by Sciences Po (France) and Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique (Morocco)

Convened by Northwestern University and the U7+ Student Leaders Board

Event Summary by Valeria Dimitrova, University of Ottawa

This summer, students, faculty and staff from 20+ different universities from 13 countries convened together virtually for the second U7+ Intergenerational Roundtable to discuss [how the social sciences can help tackle the global gender gap](#). This roundtable was co-hosted by Sciences Po and Mohammed VI Polytechnic University and was convened by Northwestern University and the U7+ Student Leaders Board.

The U7+ Alliance is a network of global universities (40+ institutions) whose presidents first met in Paris in 2019 and then virtually again last year. The idea for a series of three U7+ intergenerational roundtables was conceived by student leaders within U7+ who convened at the inaugural [U7+ 2020 Worldwide Student Forum](#) last year. This idea was endorsed by university presidents at the U7+ Summit in November 2020.

The roundtable began with special guest speaker Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, a preeminent political figure and former minister of women's rights in France. She was also the first woman to serve as a minister of education, higher education and research in the French government. During her presentation she echoed the French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir stating, "never forget that it will only take a political, economic or religious crisis for the rights of women to be called into question. These rights are never granted. You will have to remain vigilant throughout your life." She emphasized how the pandemic is currently shedding light on existing inequities that have been previously studied; and how education is important at all levels, especially to inform the public.

Afterwards the panel of graduate students, faculty and staff of the co-facilitating universities shared their presentations before all participants split into small groups of four to six people to have discussions moderated by the U7+ student leaders. Finally, all participants gathered to share a summary of each of the small discussions. Here are some takeaways and recommendations from the second intergenerational roundtable:

- **Both men and women should work together in advocating for gender equality.** In Dr. H el ene P erivier's presentation she highlighted how men and women tend to be segregated in different fields of education and work. As a solution to this problem, all discussion groups highlighted the importance of creating equal opportunities based on men's and women's potential and abilities rather than gender in order to eliminate the gender gap. But men also have to be on board. "We cannot do it with just women alone. We need to cooperate with men and everybody in society" students said.
- **Universities should offer more equitable support (funds, resources etc.) for young women, especially early mothers.** As mentioned in Carolin Beck's presentation, education is important for gender equality. At the very least secondary education is recommended for women since it can affect future job opportunities, family well-being and investments. Students suggested that "the U7+ should offer scholarships to young women who had to drop out of school because of early motherhood. Universities should help support them in returning to school which will help improve their literacy moving forwards."
- **Offer training for parents to be better role models for their children.** During the early developmental stage, children learn and internalize gender norm stereotypes observed in their family. Attention should be paid not only to how we raise girls, but also how we raise boys in society. Universities can support parents in deconstructing their own gender stereotypes that they may have and perhaps don't even realize it. Participants agreed that "parents should model gender equality from a young age."
- **Universities need to expand their reach beyond higher education.** Participants recommended that universities expand outside of academic education to management, pre-education for the workplace, and development of genders as well. "Universities are not only to train future workers but also *future citizens*, thus they have a really key role to play in gender inequality" participants said.
- **The U7+ Alliance should actively lobby for policy changes and parental leave.** Sexual division of labour and the fact that women are often responsible for family issues results in them struggling in their work life. Given the U7+ two-fold design of working within the university community but also having an impact at the political level (i.e., decisions and policy making), the U7+ should put forth better policies around working

mothers, better opportunities for both parents to have children and designing workplaces around that. Participants agreed that “we should use the pandemic as an opportunity to do better and to change.”

- **Perceptions of traditional leadership qualities need to change.** Universities must break the conception that leaders are often exclusively male dominated roles with masculine qualities. They should instead add different qualities previously thought to be female characteristics, such as someone who builds consensus. Dr. Bouchra Rahmouni mentioned that only 22 of 195 countries (11%) currently have female leaders. So, there is still room for improvement.
- **Suggestion for universities to promote intersectional mentorship, role modeling and a culture of giving back.** Intersectionality acknowledges many different dimensions of people such as ethnicity, disability, social class etc. Having diverse women who become leaders is one step towards gender equality. The next step, as mentioned in Fatima Zahra Bouzouba's presentation, is for those same women to mentor and inspire others to become leaders, professors, chiefs or other positions of great responsibility. Dr. Rahmouni recommended taking advantage of two tools in particular: (1) Social innovation to help find solutions to exclusion and employment isolation/discrimination against women; (2) Corporate social responsibility in order to channel corporate social responsibility to fund and support women in poor empowerment initiatives and projects.
- **More rigorous research on gender equality is needed.** At our current rate, we won't reach gender equality until 2277, according to Dr. Rahmouni. However, further research and actions for change are much needed.

The third and final intergenerational roundtable will be hosted on June 29, 2021 and will discuss [Science and Technology Innovation for a Sustainable Future](#).

