

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Gender Equality Plan development and implementation

Main Section Videos & Webinars Tools & Resources

In this section of the action toolbox, we highlight two fields of action that we consider crucial for the development and implementation of a gender equality plan (GEP), and which have the character of a cross-cutting issue:

- engaging stakeholders;
- developing structures to support gender equality work.

Engaging stakeholders

An effective GEP is a strategic document that engages the whole of the organisation. GEPs require the support and official commitment of senior leaders, but work best when developed with the active engagement of the entire organisation.

To structurally embed gender equality within the organisation, it is necessary that the widest possible circle of stakeholders is receptive to this change. In order to make gender equality work effective, it is therefore paramount to engage with these stakeholders, vertically as well as horizontally. You can engage the whole organisation throughout the development of a GEP, in the initial status quo assessment ([see step 2 of the step-by-step guide](#) ) , when establishing aims and objectives, when reviewing and establishing new ways of working and when communicating the plan more generally. To get more information about who to involve and how, see [the chapter on stakeholder involvement](#) , which clarifies that stakeholder engagement requires messages and communication targeted to the stakeholders' specific needs. It is also important to mention that stakeholder involvement does not end with having developed the GEP: you also need to continue these activities during the implementation of the plan ([see step 4 in the step-by-step guide](#)).

Outreach activities go from the top to the bottom of an organisation, as well as across departments, schools and disciplines. Even alliances and outreach beyond the institution can help to strengthen and legitimise internal change.

To implement the GEP, it is important to think about who to involve where / in which step. We recommend a step-by-step approach to participation, as already implemented in some GEP projects, such as CALIPER ([see step 3](#)). You will need stakeholders in the core team to also be active regarding implementation. And there will be stakeholders you want to involve in other forms of supporting structures, such as gender equality boards, hubs, [gender labs](#) or networks.

Developing structures to support gender equality work

First, a GEP needs to be structurally anchored and supported in your organisation at different levels, for example through a unit, office, core team or department that is mandated to foster implementation of structural changes towards equality (see also the section on [success factors](#)). On a broader level, support structures such as gender equality boards, hubs or gender laboratories are also necessary to support the structural change process, as experiences from projects such as 'Supporting the promotion of equality in research and academia' ([SUPERA](#) or CALIPER show. The examples provided below reflect the different forms and roles support structures can take.

A gender equality function or core team provides a focal point and source of expertise for the development and implementation of a GEP. Where a dedicated function is not appropriate, for example in smaller organisations, organisations should still consider in which way the implementation of a GEP will be organised and ensure that there is a clear focal point with expertise to coordinate and drive the work.

The aim of these structures is to **make gender equality more independent of passionate individuals and personnel changes**, and thereby ensure sustainability. Furthermore, these structures and bodies have their responsibility and budget clearly laid out, and they are anchored in the overall governance structure of your organisation.

Such structure may already exist in your organisation. If not, its creation can be one of the measures of your GEP. In the meantime, there can be a task force or working group of research and/or administrative staff to deal with the development of the first GEP.

In any case, the unit or task force responsible for developing and implementing the GEP needs **dedicated resources and expertise** to do so. This is also required by the [Horizon Europe criterion](#) . Organisations should consider which types and what volume of resources are required to support an ongoing process of sustainable organisational change to promote gender equality. Resources will be needed throughout the whole GEP cycle, including the status quo assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring and review, and to support specific measures. Furthermore, staff time capacities may be earmarked to engage personnel from across the organisation in various steps, for example reviewing existing data and practices, identifying areas in need of attention and establishing the GEP's objectives, conducting data analysis, and participating in working groups.

For institutionalising gender equality in your organisational structures and supporting the core team, you might establish a gender equality board/committee, a hub or gender laboratory. These supporting structures can ensure that gender equality issues permeate the governance and structure of the organisation. [H2020 Gender Equality Plan Projects Cluster Event – Report on key findings](#)  recommends that 'committees should consist of a balanced group of representatives (all genders, representing all status groups, academic and technical staff, different fields of knowledge, as well as people with particular experience regarding equality issues), this will ensure an appropriate representation of all organisation members'.

Get some tips on what to consider when implementing measures Useful information in terms of engaging stakeholders

It is important to have the explicit support from the top level of the organisation from the beginning. Such support increases the perceived legitimacy of the measures.

While work towards gender equality can start with a small group of motivated people, it is important to gradually and continuously reach out and widen the group of involved people.

Know your institution, talk with people, understand what existing structures do and can do, identify where potential allies are and where resistance may be encountered. Start by building strategic alliances and seek win–win situations.

Creating a feeling of ownership is key to engaging stakeholders in the work towards structural change for gender equality.

To engage stakeholders, it is paramount that they know the gender equality objectives and the initiatives being taken. Therefore, internal communication and visibility are crucial.

Internal legitimacy can be acquired by gaining external support through alliances with stakeholders outside the organisation. Think, for example, about research organisations with an outstanding reputation for gender equality, internationally recognised gender equality experts, or participation in an EU-funded project that supports the implementation of inclusive GEPs.

Useful information in terms of developing gender equality structures

Whichever structure is established, it is important that its mandate is endorsed by the top of the organisation, which optimally also supports gender equality activities publicly.

The closer structures are situated to the top of the organisation (e.g. reporting directly to the top management), the more authority they will have and the more effective they will be.

Structures need adequate (human and financial) resources and power to work effectively.

Experience has shown that a gender equality function works best if organised as a team, rather than just one person working alone.

Depending on the size of the organisation, at least one person (or more in large organisations) in the gender equality function should have a permanent mandate, be funded internally and, if possible, be dedicated exclusively to promoting gender equality. In smaller organisations, team members may also be representatives of different departments who devote a certain amount of their time to gender equality.

The gender equality function should be staffed internally to ensure that there is knowledge of how the organisation works. However, it can also be helpful to institutionalise external knowledge (e.g. in the form of an advisory board) in order to ensure a source of expertise independent of organisational and hierarchical dynamics.

A dedicated gender equality function benefits from incorporating expertise in gender equality and change management, and being organised in a way that it can work with the whole organisation. For example, a gender equality function would benefit from being led by a member of the senior executive team and being part of an office or function with responsibility for strategic projects or organisational change, such as a strategic planning directorate or executive leadership office.

It may be useful to institutionalise networks linking the central level to the local level (e.g. gender equality committees or representatives at departmental level) to facilitate the flow of information and promote a bottom-up approach to address unmet needs. Particularly in large structures, decentralised gender equality work in the form of gender focal persons networks, for instance, is known to be a condition for successful implementation; for this reason, it is encouraged in EU-funded GEP projects.

Where a dedicated gender equality function is set up and able to take the lead on the GEP, it will still be important to emphasise that promoting gender equality is the responsibility of all staff.

Get inspired by what other organisations have implemented

To learn about how other organisations planned and implemented their GEPs, see the examples below:

GEP 2019–2020, Central European University, Hungary/Austria,

GEP 2019–2023, Estonian Marine Institute of the University of Tartu, Estonia,

GEP 2020–2027, Estonian Research Council, Estonia,

GEP, Academy of Finland, Finland,

GEP, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia,

GEP, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark,

GEP, University of Warsaw, Poland,

GEP, VRVis, Austria,

GEP development, Plovdiv University, Bulgaria,

GEP development, Vilnius University, Lithuania,

GEP development and implementation, University of Rijeka, Croatia,

implementing and monitoring a GEP, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Slovenia.

You can find further inspiring examples in the following examples:

EIGE provides a section on [good practices](#) for various relevant topics;

the EU-funded project 'Promoting gender balance and inclusion in research, innovation and training' (PLOTINA) provides a [library of actions](#) , focusing on issues such as career progression and work–life balance, but also the integration of sex and gender in teaching curricula;

these sustainable measures were already mentioned in the first version of the gender equality in academia and research (GEAR) tool and are still in [place](#) .

If you want to learn more about how you can adjust these measures for your own purposes and how to implement them through a GEP, read the step-by-step guide for [research organisations, universities and public bodies](#),  or the step-by-step guide for [research funding organisations](#).