

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Luxembourg

COUNTRY: Luxembourg

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

The government plays an important role in ensuring gender balance in research organisations in Luxembourg. The Fund for National Research (FNR) (Law of 31 May 1999, amended by the Law of 27 August 2014) and the organisation of Public Research Centres (Law of 29 December 2014) are both required to have gender-balance on their Board of Directors (at least 40 % of the underrepresented sex). This gender balance rule also applies to the Scientific Advisory Boards that advise the Board of Directors on scientific matters. Article 25 of the Law creating the University of Luxembourg (2003) provides for the role of a Delegate for Women's Questions to be created to assist the Rectorate in promoting women's careers. In 2018, a Gender Equality Officer was appointed to collaborate with University employees to identify and address barriers to gender equality. They assist the Rectorate in building and implementing a gender equality policy. The Gender Equality Officer also contributes to discussions in national and international organisations. As per the University Regulations (*Règlement d'Ordre Intérieur*), the Gender Equality Officer chairs the Gender Equality Committee. The main activity of the Gender Equality Officer and Gender Equality Committee is the creation, revision and implementation of a Gender Equality Plan (GEP). The GEP promotes gender diversity in research and academic careers, supports women (as the underrepresented gender) in leadership positions, and ensures that University staff training, promotion and evaluation procedures are gender-responsive.

The Law of 15 December 2016 incorporated the principle of equal salaries in the Grand Duchy's legislation for both the private and public sectors. Differences in salaries for women and men carrying out the same tasks or work of equal value are therefore illegal. In addition to administrations and public sector institutions, private sector companies may take part in the Ministry's programme of positive actions on a voluntary basis. An independent survey analyses the degree of equality between women and men within the participating body and an improvement plan is then jointly drawn up.

Policy framework

The government uses its financing power as a lever to improve gender equality in research organisations. The Ministry of Research and Higher Education collaborates with the management boards of research institutions, but does not interfere with their internal structures (e.g. executive position, recruitment). Rather, it establishes rules on the organisation of research organisations and signs multiannual “Performance Contracts” with the Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology (LIST), the Institute of Health (LIH), the Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) and the National Research Fund (FNR). These aim to ensure gender balance on research organisations’ boards. The exception is the University of Luxembourg, which is governed by a specific 2003 law that contains no provisions on gender balance, nor are any foreseen by the new GEP in 2021.

In 2015, Luxembourg established a new Ministry of Equality between Women and Men, making it the only EU Member State with a ministry exclusively dedicated to gender equality. Its missions and initiatives focus on legal and factual equality between women and men. One of its main tasks is to implement gender mainstreaming in the Grand Duchy's political structures. The fight against gender stereotypes in all domains is part of that policy.

The Ministry of Equality (MEGA) included the integration of gender in research as a transversal issue within the University of Luxembourg in its action plans for 2006-2009 and 2009-2014. However, this was not implemented by the University until 2015. Since 2015, the MEGA's action plan emphasises a gender mainstreaming approach to education and research. The Ministry of Research and Higher Education is responsible for ensuring the integration of a gender perspective in these areas, through Gender Equality Officers. In 2021, the University of Luxembourg formulated a programme for provisional implementation measures of the gender equality policy. The programme included six areas for new measures: raising awareness (implicit bias training invites faculties and institutes to set gender objectives using gender-aggregated statistics); staff composition (gender-proofing academic recruitment, mentoring programme); work-life balance (childcare provision); workplace climate (zero tolerance for harassment); inclusive communication (adapting language to gender inclusion); and teaching and research (interdisciplinary seminar series on gender).

Other stimulatory initiatives

Prior to October 2015, Luxembourg had not set up any other stimulatory initiatives for gender equality in research.

Since 2015, the Ministry of Equality between Women and Men and the University of Luxembourg's MediaCentre has collaborated to develop gender policy based on scientific evidence. As part of that work, they created a series of web talks where experts discuss their perspectives on gender stereotyping to raise awareness of stereotyping and challenge traditional gender conceptions.

The National Gender Working Group (WG) in public research brings together representatives from all four Luxembourg public research institutions and the FNR. The four areas of focus are: gender data monitoring; gender diversity surveys; best practices in recruitment; and best practices in internal promotion.

LIST launched a diversity and inclusion initiative. Members of LIST and the WG work on the project, which includes the creation of a diversity and inclusion roadmap, the development and implementation of a GEP, the development of measures towards more inclusive jobs, and awareness-raising and employee training on topics such as unconscious bias or intercultural communication.

The FNR has gender balance requirements in place for its funding programmes RESCOM (speaker balance) and ATTRACT (gender parity in the applications submitted per institution).

The non-profit organisation Women in Digital Empowerment (WIDE) has received FNR support for initiatives such as Girls in ICT. The initiative aims to empower and encourage girls and young women to consider careers in the growing field of ICT, enabling individuals and business to benefit from improved women's participation in the ICT sector.

The FNR's *Chercheurs à l'école* sees researchers visit high schools to talk about their research and life as a scientist. For almost a decade, this activity has given women scientists the chance to normalise the concept of the woman scientist directly. Despite some shifts in perception, many children still associate men with the term "scientist".

Key actors

The Ministry of Higher Education and Research establishes rules on the organisation of research organisations. It signs multiannual “Performance Contracts” with each, including a rule to ensure gender balance on their boards.

MEGA focuses on raising general public awareness of the consequences of an imbalanced or discriminatory representation of women and men in the professional and public sectors.

The FNR is the main funder of research activities in Luxembourg. It invests (public funds and private donations) in research projects in various branches of science and the humanities, with an emphasis on selected core strategic areas. It also supports and coordinates activities to strengthen the link between science and society and to raise awareness of research. Finally, it advises the Luxembourg Government on research policy and strategy.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

The University of Luxembourg recently prepared a Gender Action Plan, which is embedded in the “National Gender Strategy for Research and Innovation (2015-2021)”. The Plan focuses on facilitating conditions that promote a gender-balanced institution. Examples of actions include awareness-raising seminars with policymakers, measures increasing the percentage of women in the academic staff, mentoring at all levels (BA, MA, PhD and post-doctoral), gender seminars for all students, integration of the gender dimension in research and teaching, networking at national and international level, and gender-sensitive data collection.

The Internal Regulation of the University of Luxembourg was adopted in 2004 and is renewed on a yearly basis. It established the introduction of gender delegates in each faculty. Although a Gender Mainstreaming Committee was set up as early as 2009, it was only officially formalised in 2014 in the Internal Regulation of the University. It is composed of gender delegates from all faculties, the human resources department, a Personal Delegation representative, and a student representative. Chaired by the University’s Gender Equality Officer, the Committee’s mandate is to promote gender equality in all faculties, in the human resources department (promotion, harassment, power relations), and in research and teaching.

LIST, LISER and the LIH are all implementing the legal provisions relating to gender balance on their administration boards (a target of 40 % for the underrepresented sex).

The LIH has adopted rules on candidate applications that aim to ensure gender-balance within the Collaborative Council (Scientific Advisory Board): “The LIH promotes equal gender representation in the Collaborative Council. To this end, the Chief Executive Officer or their representative will make sure that, on the day of closing the nominations, among the applications received, each sex is represented by at least 40 % in both categories of employees. Should this not be the case, the Chief Executive Officer, or their delegate, will notify the staff through bill posting on the same day and will accept additional applications from the underrepresented sex until a rate of 40 % is achieved, respectively, over a maximum period of three working days.” This measure has led to a gender-balanced Collaborative Council.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Annex 2 to the Internal Rules of the University of Luxembourg contains a “Convention to improve the reconciliation between family life and research activities”. The Convention was signed in 2005 and remains valid. It provides that, after legal maternity leave (two to three months), a full-time working parent may reduce their teaching activity to 20 %. This rule applies to full-time teachers and researchers until their children attend preschool. Reserved childcare spots are also available to personnel members and students, as are breastfeeding rooms in each University building. The Convention also addresses the issue of prohibiting access to laboratories for pregnant women, changing the safety regulations and implementing a system of support (office and technical assistants) since October 2015.

In 2021, the Ministry for Equality between Women and Men set up an Observatory for Equality. The Observatory is tasked with collecting, assembling and creating data indicators on gender equality in various fields: domestic violence, work, decision-making for women and men, work-life balance, education, financial means and resources, and health. Already, it has created 25 indicators for domestic violence, and 10 for employment. The Observatory is currently working on the topic of work-life balance and decision-making for women and men. Its website is updated regularly for public and specific use. The aim of the Observatory is to create a legal, impactful basis for governmental decision-making. The stakeholder institutions it contacts to gather data become increasingly aware of the importance of gender-based data and try to include such specific indicators in their own data organisation and production. Such data acquisition thus raises awareness across all kinds of organisations and sectors. Currently, the Observatory is collaborating with LISER on a study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality, and on a study with the University of Luxembourg on the psychological impact of COVID-19 on women and men. Both projects will provide data and statistics on the gender-specific impacts of the pandemic. These data can be used by the Observatory and integrated into existing and/or new indicators.

LIST leads the project “Gender-aware education and teaching” (Gender4STEM), which is a co-funded Erasmus+ project. Launched in 2017, it partners with six experts in gender, technological and learning issues: Consulio (Croatia), VHTO (Netherlands), SMART VENICE (Italy), FUNDATIA PROFESSIONAL (Romania) and Women in Digital and LIST (Luxembourg). Gender4STEM seeks to spark greater interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines among girls by supporting teachers to step-up their gender-fair teaching practices. Although initially created for teachers, the Gender4STEM platform is also relevant for school psychologists and counsellors, as well as career guidance advisors. They are invited to use the self-assessment tool to determine whether their teaching practices are gender-fair, and can receive personalised recommendations for teaching materials. They can also take part in the Gender4STEM hands-on blended training, which raises awareness of conscious/unconscious gender bias in their teaching. In addition, they can apply any of the 100 teaching materials available on the Gender4STEM platform in their classroom. The project has been recognised as a good practice by Erasmus+.