

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Portugal

COUNTRY: Portugal

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

Portugal has several statutory provisions aimed at promoting gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men. As of September 2021, however, it has not adopted any corresponding laws, including for higher education institutions (HEIs) and research organisations. As a country that effectively fulfils its human rights and inclusion commitments, Portugal has prioritised intervention in gender equality issues through the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination. Promoting equality between women and men is one of the fundamental tasks of the government^[1].

Policy framework

The public policies for non-discrimination on the grounds of sex and equality between women and men were operationalised by the fourth [National Plan for Equality, Gender, Citizenship and Non-discrimination 2011-2013](#) and the fifth [National Plan for Equality, Gender, Citizenship and Non-discrimination 2014-2017](#).

Only one plan has resulted from the Council of Ministers Resolution no. 61/2018 (21 May), designated the [National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030](#). “[Portugal + Igual \(ENIND\)](#)”. The plan was launched in 2018 at the start of a new programmatic cycle and is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is supported by three action plans: (1) Action Plan for Equality between Women and Men (PAIMH); (2) Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (PAVMVD); and (3) Action Plan to Combat Discrimination on the basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sexual Characteristics (PAOIEC). These three action plans set out measures for the first four-year period (2018-2021), followed by a monitoring and reviewing process ahead of the next four-year period. Three monitoring reports have been produced, in [2018](#), [2019](#) and [2020](#).

The three action plans integrated in ENIND are based on four axes, which are defined as the major goals of global and structural action by 2030:

Integration of the dimensions promoting equality between women and men and combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sexual characteristics in governance at all levels and in all domains;
Full and equal participation of women and men in the public and private sphere;
Egalitarian, inclusive and future-oriented scientific and technological development;
Elimination of all forms of violence against women, gender and domestic violence, as well as violence against LGBTI people.

For the first time, ENIND addresses gender equality in higher education and research and innovation (R&I). In general, the measures encompass:

Renewal of the protocol between the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) and the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) to promote calls addressing the national scientific community for research and development (R&D) projects in gender, social relations and policy;
Integrating a gender equality perspective in higher education by promoting studies and integrating, evaluating and accrediting specific criteria for HEIs and research organisations;
Integrating a gender equality approach in curricular and extracurricular higher education programmes;
Supporting the implementation of effective voluntary gender action plans in research organisations.

ENIND is the main gender equality instrument at national level to consolidate progress and plan future government action. It is formally coordinated by CIG, supported by technical commissions created to monitor the three operational action plans. CIG is also tasked with ensuring the implementation of provisions of certain general laws, such as Law no. 26/2019 (28 March), which foresees a minimum threshold of 40 % of women and men as senior leaders in direct and indirect State administration (including in HEIs).

In 2008, CIG signed a protocol with the FCT to fund research projects that deepen multidisciplinary knowledge of gender social relations. This protocol is still being enforced. The annual budget is defined in a public competition announcement. In 2020, “Gender Research 4 COVID-19” (special support for research projects on the impact of the health emergency caused by COVID-19 on gender inequalities and violence against women and domestic violence) was launched within the scope of the existing protocol between CIG and the FCT. The proposed projects followed several thematic lines: (1) gender and labour market during and in the post-crisis period of COVID-19; (2) COVID-19, daily life, stereotypes and gender roles; and (3) COVID-19 and violence against women and domestic violence^[2]. The studies are expected to contribute to knowledge on different COVID-19 impacts, as well as response and intervention tools.

Other stimulatory initiatives

The L’Oréal Portugal Honour Medals for Women in Science were launched in 2004, in partnership with UNESCO’s National Commission and the FCT. They recognise and support early-stage women scientists pursuing research projects in the areas of health and the environment. The prize is still awarded and the 2021 edition is now open for applications^[3].

In 2016, the Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) launched the Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo Award (PMLP) to promote the relevance of gender equality at IST and to recognise the crucial role of women in all areas of engineering. The prize aims to raise awareness among the IST scientific community, counteract stereotypes about technological jobs, and combat gendered patterns of segregation in professional positions^[4].

In 2017, the “Engineers For One Day” project was launched. It recognises the low numbers of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas and seeks to combat sex-based and gender-based segregation in professional positions. This project is an initiative of the State Secretary of Citizenship and Gender Equality and is led by CIG, IST and the national engineering body. It aims to show young women students that engineering and technology are not only male domains. The fifth edition of this initiative is expected to include 40 schools and has the support of 25 public and private partners^[5].

Within the scope of ENIND, the Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions (GE-HEI) project was launched in 2019. It promotes gender equality in HEIs and seeks to understand the factors contributing to inequality at universities. It then makes recommendations to establish gender equality criteria as part of the assessment and accreditation of HEIs and study programmes, both by the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) and by institutions seeking to improve their internal quality policies. The initiative is funded by the European Economic Area (EEA) Grant Funding Mechanism 2014-2020. The consortium consists of the Directorate General for Higher Education (DGES) as the coordinating body, as well as the Institute for Gender, Equality and Difference at the University of Iceland (RIKK), the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (CIEG), and the A3ES, as partner institutions^[6].

Key actors

CIG falls within the remit of the State Secretary for Citizenship and Gender Equality^[7] and is the official body responsible for implementing public policies to promote gender equality. Together with dedicated national technical committees, CIG develops and monitors ENIND. Although the strategy does not specifically target academia and research, some initiatives are linked to R&I. CIG has established cooperation protocols with the FCT and with other universities to integrate gender equality in research. The FCT is the Portuguese public funding agency that supports science, technology and innovation in all scientific domains, under the responsibility of the Ministry for Science, Technology and Higher Education. In addition to the cooperation protocol, the FCT recognised Gender Studies as an eligible category for research funding in 2017.

In 2017, CIG was appointed as Operator of the Conciliation and Gender Equality Programme, together with the Norwegian Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud (LDO), under the EEA Grant Funding Mechanism 2014–2021. Aligned with ENIND, this programme funds innovative and structural projects to develop gender equality and work-life balance in Portugal. The funds are available for public and private entities, including HEIs and research organisations.

The Commission for Equality at Work and Employment (CITE)^[8] is another institutional body that coordinates and implements ENIND. CITE's mission is to pursue equality and non-discrimination of women and men at work and in vocational training. It collaborates in the application of related legal and conventional provisions, as well as of those relating to the protection of parenting and the reconciliation of professional and family life, in the private, public and cooperative sectors. The Ministry of Education has been involved in the implementation of measures of the National Plans for Equality, Gender, Citizenship and Non-discrimination, specifically those related to education and research.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Before 2016, few HEIs had set up Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). Under the National Strategic Reference Framework (QREN) – in particular, the Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH) – the University of Beira Interior (UBI, Covilhã), the University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD, Vila Real), and the Higher Education School of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto (ESE-IPP, Porto) received funding to create their GEPs and thus became pioneer universities in gender mainstreaming.

In general, all three GEPs follow a four-step approach, characterised by (1) an initial assessment, leading to (2) the development and (3) implementation of the plan, followed by (4) monitoring and evaluation. Although all three universities developed a GEP, only UBI ensured its implementation and subsequent evaluation (through additional funding). Various challenges emerged, including the perception that gender equality is irrelevant, as well as resistance from teaching and non-teaching staff.

In 2015, the Gulbenkian Institute of Science (IGC) participated as associated partner in the EU project “Leading innovative measures to reach gender balance in research activities” (LIBRA). No actions have been taken to date.

More recently, other Portuguese HEIs have initiated studies/activities in the context of gender equality and the implementation of GEPs in academia and research, under the Horizon 2020 programme “Science with and for Society” (SwafS):

“Gender Equality Plans for Information Sciences and Technology Research Institutions”, EQUAL-IST: University of Minho;

“Systemic Action for Gender Equality”, SAGE: ISCTE, University Institute of Lisbon (IUL);

“Promoting gender balance and inclusion in research, innovation and training”, PLOTINA: ISEG, University of Lisbon;

“Supporting the Promotion of Equality in Research and Academia”, SUPERA: CES, University of Coimbra;

“CHAlleNging Gender (In)Equality in science and research”, CHANGE: University of Aveiro

“Supporting and Implementing Plans for Gender Equality in Academia and Research”, SPEAR: NOVA University Lisbon;

“Gender Equality Actions in Research Institutions to traNsform Gender ROLES”, GEARING-Roles: IGOT, University of Lisbon;

“Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together”, RESET: University of Porto.

To date, only the University of Minho, CES - University of Coimbra, IGOT - University of Lisbon and NOVA University Lisbon have set up their GEPs, with the others still carrying out their work. The IST, which belongs to the University of Lisbon, has established its own GEP, as does the International Iberian Nanotechnology Laboratory (INL), neither of which have received external funds to do so.

All universities and research organisations carried out an initial assessment to understand the gender equality status in their institutions. The assessments followed distinct approaches, including quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The GEPs were then developed. Prominent categories of measures in the GEPs target work-life balance and organisational culture, gender balance in leadership and decision-making, gender equality in recruitment and career progression, integrating gender into research and teaching, and monitoring and evaluation. Less common are measures focusing on raising awareness and building capacity in respect of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

There is no specific law for gender equality in universities and research organisations. However, Portugal has made significant efforts to create tools/instruments, approaches and initiatives to integrate dimensions of gender equality into organisational structures and measures, as well as research content, in the last five years. ENIND has a broader vision than its predecessors, which, together with European Research Area (ERA) efforts in recent years, has proved fundamental in stimulating and supporting national development.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Monitoring progress towards gender equality

UBI was the first Portuguese university to develop a GEP and is recognised for its pioneering work in this regard. A thorough initial assessment (2010-2011) of the gender equality state-of-play at the university preceded the development of the GEP. One of the measures in UBI's plan concerns gender-disaggregated data on teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as students. Since 2012, annual Gender Equality Reports are used to monitor UBI's progress towards gender equality^[9]. These reports are publicly accessible and build on the initial pre-GEP assessment. The reports consider gender balance in terms of disciplines taught, data on decision-making and leadership positions, gender pay gap, use of measures to reconcile professional and personal life (e.g. flexible working hours), gender analysis of the utilisation of leave, and information on the numbers of students, disaggregated by sex and faculty.

After 2016, more national HEIs participated in European consortia to support the implementation of GEPs. The monitoring process was extended to other universities, such as the University of Minho, which had already reported on the first year of GEP implementation^[10]. Although IGOT - University of Lisbon and the University of Coimbra planned annual reports to monitor GEP implementation, no reports are available as of September 2021.

Reconciliation of professional activity and personal/family life

The promotion of equality between women and men and non-discrimination is one of the spheres of activity of IST (part of the University of Lisbon). IST launched an innovative measure at national level in 2016 to facilitate the reconciliation of professional activity and personal/family life. The initiative exempts professors who have taken parental leave (at least 100 days) from teaching duties, with the possibility of hiring non-permanent staff in departments with a lack of teaching staff. This measure aims to facilitate women and men to balance their job and family life, as well as encouraging parents (women and men) to take parental leave^[11].

In 2018, within the scope of the EU-funded SAGE project, ISCTE-IUL formalised a family-friendly policy that saw meetings scheduled between 10:00 am and 4:30 pm to facilitate work-life balance.

Integrating the topic of gender into teaching

The doctoral programme in Gender Studies is a joint endeavour of the University of Lisbon (through its Institute of Political and Social Sciences) and Nova University Lisbon (NOVA FCSH and NOVA Law). Created in 2018, it is the first and only doctoral programme of its kind in Portugal. It aims to contribute to the establishment of Gender Studies as an autonomous area of scientific research and advanced training, preparing researchers, professionals, senior staff and managers to critically analyse topics related to gender and to intervene in the economic and social spheres, as well as social and political activities^[12].

Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

In the context of the SAGE project, a woman was elected Rector of ISCTE-IUL in 2018. The Rectorate has since been composed of four women and three men.

Law no. 26/2019 (28 March) which foresees a minimum threshold of 40 % of women and men as senior leaders of direct and indirect state administration. As a result, various HEIs set out measures in their GEPs that targeted the governing and management bodies of different teaching and research units to comply with this law (e.g. University of Coimbra, ISCTE-IUL, IGOT University of Lisbon).

Footnotes

[1] Article 9, subpara. H, Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (1976), see Decreto de Aprovação da Constituição - Diário da República n.º 86/1976, Série I de 1976-04-10| DRE.

[2] <https://www.fct.pt/apoios/GenderResearch4Covid19/index.phtml.en>

[3] <https://www.fct.pt/apoios/premios/loreal/index.phtml.en>

[4] <https://tecnico.ulisboa.pt/pt/viver/dia-a-dia/diversidade-e-igualdade-de...> (in Portuguese).

[5] <https://www.cig.gov.pt/area-igualdade-entre-mulheres-e-homens/projetos/e...> (in Portuguese).

[6] <https://gehei.dges.gov.pt/en>

[7] <https://www.cig.gov.pt/>

[8] <https://cite.gov.pt/inicio>

[9] http://www.igualdadedegenero.ubi.pt/index.php?option=com_content&view=ca... (in Portuguese).

[10] <https://equal-ist.eu/gep-in-the-university-of-minho-portugal/>

[11] <https://tecnico.ulisboa.pt/pt/noticias/campus-e-comunidade/tecnico-imple...> (in Portuguese).

[12] <https://www.iscsp.ulisboa.pt/pt/cursos/oferta-graduada/doutoramentos/est...> (in Portuguese).