

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Step 3: Setting up a Gender Equality Plan

After carrying out an initial [assessment of the gender equality state-of-play](#) in your organisation, you can start setting up the Gender Equality Plan. The findings of the initial analysis allow identifying the [areas of intervention](#) to be addressed in your Gender Equality Plan.

Not all areas can however be tackled at the same time, and some may be more pressing than others. Set out the priorities for your organisation considering this initial assessment as well as the available resources. Consider bringing together members of the team who carried out the [initial assessment](#) in the development of the Gender Equality Plan.

At this stage, it is crucial to involve [senior management and leadership posts](#) in the definition of the measures of the Plan. Their involvement will ensure a smoother and more effective implementation of the proposed measures.

When developing the Gender Equality Plan, keep in mind that it needs to be **holistic and integrated**. This means that the identified areas of intervention are interdependent. The Plan will address a variety of issues relevant for the whole community and organisational system. There are a few basic elements to be considered when setting up the Gender Equality Plan:

- Objectives
- Measures
- Indicators
- Targets
- Timeline
- Division of responsibilities

Below we explain how these elements are taken into consideration in the process of setting up a Gender Equality Plan:

Promote the participation of actors of all levels when defining measures and actions of the Gender Equality Plan.

You can envisage joint or separate dynamic workshops with senior management and leadership posts, human resources and communication staff, teaching and/or research staff, students, among others. You can use participatory or serious gaming techniques. See examples of exercises [here](#).

Try to understand the meaning of gender equality for these groups. Some formulations may cause discomfort or resistance. For instance, 'attracting more female researchers' for a certain discipline may be identified as a priority. However, this kind of sentences can pose challenges or instigate resistances. The text of a measure can, in many occasions, be adapted in order to address the institution's priorities while considering certain susceptibilities. For example, using the expression 'attracting talents' may be more widely accepted by the organisation's community. The meaning of certain concepts in the national language may play a role as well. Some terms may be less well received. For instance, the term 'gender balance' is used in some countries in order to increase cooperation and interest.

Be aware that the meaning of gender equality needs to be constantly negotiated throughout the implementation of the Plan.

A participatory approach will help defining meaningful measures to the actors involved, while respecting the organisational culture. It will boost the actors' willingness to implement the measures set out in the Gender Equality Plan.

Get inspiration from measures implemented by other organisations, but always consider your own institutional context.

No need to reinvent the wheel. There are very good and successful examples of measures and actions implemented by other organisations. However, a direct replication of such measures can be ineffective in your institution. It is important to assess the context in which these were carried out. Make sure to adapt these measures considering the specificities of your own [context](#). Check [the GEAR action toolbox](#) to get some inspiration on the areas that can be covered in a Gender Equality Plan. Additional [examples](#) are also provided in this tool.

Define SMART objectives, targets and measures for your Plan.

The objectives, targets and measures of your Gender Equality Plan are more likely to be successfully implemented if they are SMART:

- Specific – the objectives and measures should answer to basic questions: what, why, how, who, when and where.
- Measurable – establish quantitative and/or qualitative indicators and respective targets.
- Attainable – make sure the objectives and measures are not out of reach and that it can be achieved (even if requiring more efforts).
- Realistic – ensure that the objectives and measures are relevant for the organisation and that they are feasible within a certain timeframe and within the available resources.
- Time-related – indicate when the objectives and measures can be achieved.

Remember that the [EU emphasises the importance of targets for gender balance in decision-making in research](#). The Council of the European Union invited the Member States and institutions to strive for guiding targets for a more even gender balance for professors. The Council encouraged authorities to set up guiding targets, for example quantitative objectives, for a better gender balance in decision-making bodies including leading scientific and administrative boards, recruitment and promotion committees as well as evaluation panels. Have a look at the [Council Conclusions on Advancing gender equality in the European Research Area](#) (adopted in 2015) to know more about these targets.

Identify and utilise existing resources when planning the measures.

The financial and human resources made available for gender equality work are usually scarce. Working in such conditions can be very challenging. Identify existing resources that can serve the measures you are setting up. Sometimes, small changes in existing procedures or services will help attaining the objectives set out without additional costs or much effort. Building on existing resources also has the advantage of promoting the institutionalisation of gender-sensitive and/or gender-specific procedures or activities

For example:

- ‘On-the-job training’ programmes are usually offered by organisations. An initial mandatory gender training could be offered within this programme at the beginning of each (academic) year in order to build capacities of newly appointed staff or to recycle knowledge and/or competencies of other staff members.

- The drafting of new (or renewing) organisational strategic documents is an excellent opportunity for integrating gender-sensitive or gender-specific measures in those documents.
 - When planning the conferences to be held by the organisation, make sure to include a provision requiring a balanced representation of women and men in the panels.
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Need inspiration?

- The EU-funded project STAGES shared its experiences regarding the integration and institutionalisation of gender equality in the organisations' strategic documents, provisions, and procedures. The [Guidelines for Structural Transformation to Achieve Gender Equality in Science](#) (pp. 42-45) provide some relevant insights.
 - More examples of awareness-raising and capacity-building activities can be found in the [action toolbox](#).
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Define the timeframe of the Gender Equality Plan, as well as a realistic timeline for its implementation.

The overall duration of the Gender Equality Plan needs to be defined (e.g. three years). Considering the proposed measures and the resources available, define the timeline to execute each of them. Do not forget to establish [specific monitoring](#) periods to report on the progress achieved.

Agree on clear staff responsibilities for each measure.

An agreement needs to be made on the team that is going to be involved in the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan. After having decided on the staff members that will collaborate in this assignment, clear responsibilities need to be defined. The Gender Equality Plan should clearly indicate 'who is responsible for what and when'. Here are recommendations on [who to involve in the Gender Equality Plan](#) and what the role of these actors can be.

Build alliances.

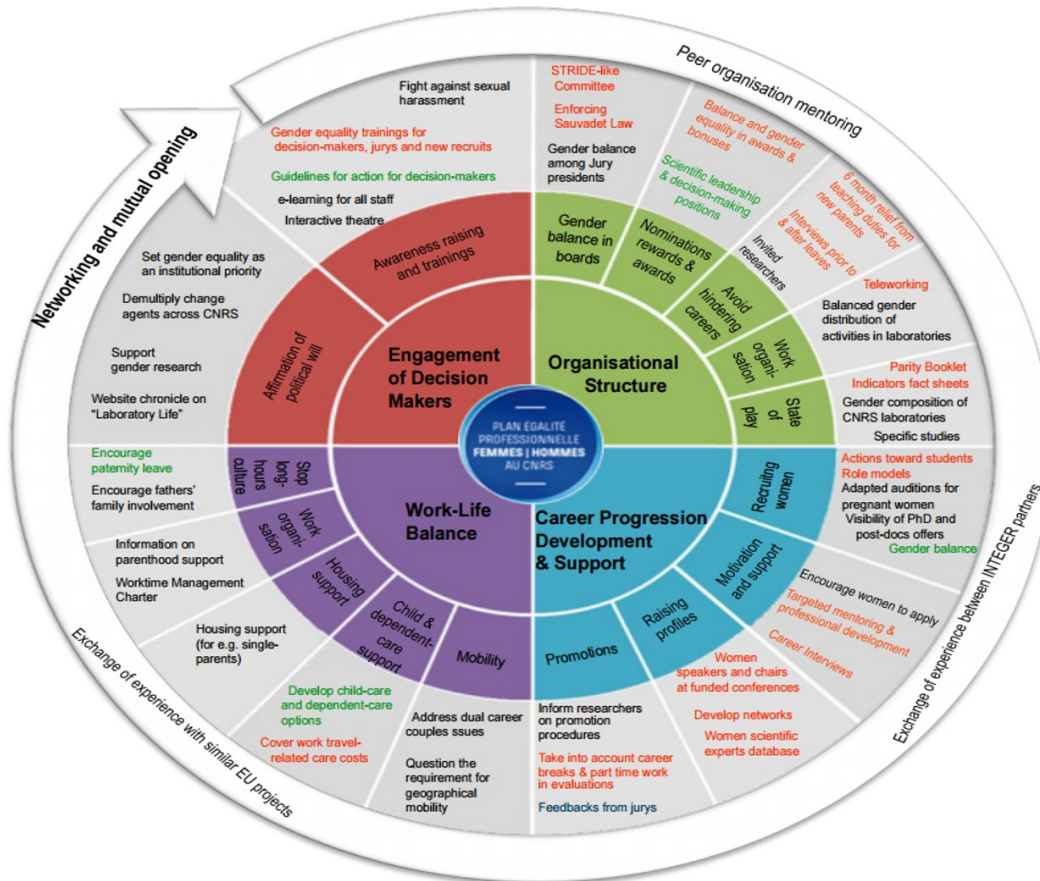
The Gender Equality Plan may include innovative and effective measures, but these will not work out if the Plan is not supported by stakeholders at all levels. Engaging stakeholders is primordial during the set up phase. The Plan needs to be understood as something more than a piece of paper. Invest time in explaining the [benefits of gender equality in research organisations](#). Adapt your speech according to the profile you are addressing. Take the time to explain what is in the Gender Equality Plan for targeted stakeholders, from top to down, down to top and from the outside. Please note that these efforts need to be continued throughout the implementation of the Plan.

Need inspiration?

- Check out examples of '[speaking notes](#)' to support advocacy for gender equality.
- The webinar "[Introduction to Gender Equality Plans](#)" (2020) is part of the capacity building program developed by the EU-funded [Gender Equality Academy project](#). It aims at exploring the concept of institutional change for Gender Equality in research performing and research funding organisations, and how Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) can be a mean for implementing it in view of achieving the three main ERA objectives.
- The Toolbox designed in 2019 by the EU-funded EFFORTI project, provides the user with the necessary tools to understand 'how' gender equality measures are supposed to work and deliver the desired impact.
- The EU-funded SAGE project proposes short Guidelines for the implementation of gender equality plans to help GEP implementing organisations to plan and manage their GEP process and lower organisational resistances to change.
- The EU-funded project STAGES shared its experiences regarding the engagement of leadership. The [Guidelines for Structural Transformation to Achieve Gender Equality in Science](#) (pp. 35-39) provide some relevant insights:
 - Align the Gender Equality Plan to the emerging strategies and key policies of the institution
 - Involve individual leaders directly in the Plan as active players and not just as institutional counterparts
 - Involve external organisations and experts in order to increase the

visibility of the Plan within and outside the institution so that the engagement of leaders is enhanced.

- Here is a visual representation of the Transformational Gender Action Plan Wheel adopted by the French research organisation CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). Check page 62 of GENDER-NET's Report about [plans and initiatives in selected research institutions to stimulate gender equality and enact structural change](#) for better readability and for a deeper understanding of their work.



- [More examples.](#)

Start thinking about sustainability.

The resources to promote structural change towards gender equality are not unlimited and neither is the duration of your Plan. The changes to be implemented are expected to have a long-term impact. To ensure the sustainability of gender equality actions, it is important to embed practices in the normal routines and procedures of the organisation. This can be done by changing existing routines and procedures in the institution or by structurally complementing them with new ones.

To keep in mind

- The set-up phase can be the most challenging and time-consuming phase. Attempting to build a Gender Equality Plan that is meaningful for the whole organisation will require efforts and will take time. But... there is a moment that you need to move on!
- A Gender Equality Plan is not static: it evolves on a continuous basis. The organisation, the people and the priorities can change drastically from one moment to the other. Be flexible. The negotiation of the meaning of gender equality in relation to the different actions and stakeholders involved is a constant process.
- Work towards an organisational culture that is sensitive to a variety of gender identities. Avoid the trap of adopting a heteronormative approach or an understanding of gender as a dichotomy women-men.
- Engaging stakeholders is an unceasing activity: it starts with convincing senior management and leadership posts to have a Gender Equality Plan for the organisation, but it hardly ends. Keep on engaging actors in order to build stronger alliances.

"Devoting too much of the available time to planning is probably counterproductive. Even after a careful planning, so many things change rapidly (and go on changing continuously), that it is better to start after a basic appraisal, not to waste precious time. " (Marina Cacace, L'Assemblea delle Donne per lo Sviluppo e la Lotta all'Esclusione Sociale (ASDO), evaluator of the EU-funded STAGES project)"

Click below to continue to the next step and read some advices on how to implement your Gender Equality Plan. You can also go back to the previous step.