

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

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As summarised in a 2018 [policy brief](#) by the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation, various studies have shown the existence (and persistence) of implicit gender bias in the evaluation of research and performance. Different gender roles are associated with women and men, and a different value is given to each: evidence shows that the same piece of work is assessed as superior if it is believed to be by a man. Furthermore, the notion of excellence in science is gendered: excellent researchers are often considered those who dedicate all their time to science, who are willing to work late or at weekends, or who relocate in order to support their research. Part-time work or career interruptions, such as in the case of parental leave, do not fit into this profile. What is more, the prevalent perceptions of gender roles do not just affect men; rather, they also affect women – and somewhat in a more problematic way. The so-called impostor syndrome is one way in which one's own belief system can adversely affect a researcher's career. It may lead to women opting out of competitions or even career paths due to perceived inadequacy (despite proper qualifications), especially when they are working in a field dominated by men.

Recruitment, selection and career progression support measures aim to ensure that women and men get equal chances to develop and advance their scientific careers. Measures are needed to avoid and undo the systematic and structural discrimination of women along their career paths in research. **Critically reviewing existing selection processes and procedures at all stages and remedying any biases** are important steps for ensuring gender equality in academic and research careers. Furthermore, public bodies and research funding bodies also need to consider how their policies and funding programmes can promote gender equality in research careers (see the chapter on [gender-sensitive research funding procedures](#) for more information).

Read the sections below for a list of potential measures to tackle this issue, to get additional tips on what to consider and to see examples of practices in other organisations.

Consider these measures for addressing the issue in your gender equality plan

A gender equality plan (GEP) may include a review of procedures and implementing respective measures in the following areas.

Recruitment and promotion.

Establishing **codes of conduct** for recruitment and promotion. Clearly established principles can increase transparency and help avoid unconscious biases. The [European Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#) is a well-established example.

Involving **gender equality expertise** in recruitment and promotion committees. Gender equality officers and/or gender scholars can report whether equal consideration has been given to candidates of all genders, including the type, frequency and quality of the questions asked, or in the case of promotion processes, the remarks made about candidates for career progression and any gender biases observed.

Providing **unconscious bias training** for recruiters, reviewing the **language used** in advertisements and **being aware of language biases** in recommendation letters (see the section on [training and raising awareness](#)).

Preferring open and publicly advertised recruitment and selection procedures over closed ones.

Increasing the number of potential women candidates **by broadening the disciplinary range of recruitment in fields where women are under-represented.**

Proactively identifying women in under-represented fields, including active scouting of women through, for example, field-specific internet sites.

Using **standardised curriculum vitae (CVs)** and undertaking **blind assessment of CVs.**

Ensuring that search and appointment **panels are gender balanced**, or, if not possible, **including a minimum number of women.**

Increasing accountability by requiring departments and committees to justify recruitment and promotion shortlists that do not include women.

Agreeing on a policy of **re-advertising** if there are no women in the applicant pool.

Evaluation and appraisal criteria.

Accounting for the time frame / period for the achievements and the **intensity of work** carried out.

Accounting for career breaks and subtracting leave periods when assessing research output; also, placing appropriate value on non-traditional career paths, for example getting particular kinds of training, unusual undergraduate degrees and

different job experiences.

Assessing research **quality rather than quantity**, and not relying on journal-based metrics.

Assessing **soft skills** as well as research outcomes, such as being a project leader in a research project successfully concluded.

If defining criteria in a new, unbiased way is not possible, it should be considered whether biased criteria can be given a smaller weight.

Ensuring that administrative responsibilities, student supervision and marking workloads are **transparent and valued** alongside research outputs.

Considering **organisation-wide workload planning models** to promote transparency and fairness, by enabling an equitable and transparent spread of workload among academic staff that is consistent between departments.

Note that gender equality in recruitment and career progression is **not an isolated topic** and hence should be addressed in GEPs in synergy with other measures. In particular, measures to ensure gender balance in decision-making and in measures promoting work–life balance and a good organisational culture are likely to intersect with policy measures on recruitment and career progression.

Get some tips on what to consider when implementing measures

Consider the following points on implementing measures to promote gender equality in recruitment and career progression.

‘Unconscious’ or ‘implicit’ bias unintentionally influences judgements and opinions about others. It is very important to be aware of your own biases. Likewise, it is highly relevant to organise training for those involved in selection processes to avoid unconscious or implicit gender bias interfering in decision-making.

A **gender pay gap** results from variances in contractual conditions and terms of employment, of which the effects are cumulative over time and most often disadvantageous to women.

While **quotas** are generally seen as effective in bringing forward an improved gender balance, quotas tend to evoke significant resistance. Try introducing voluntary targets first and closely monitor the effects.

In a number of countries, the so-called **cascade model** has been introduced, following the German example. In this model, the institutions set targets for the proportion of women at each qualification level on the basis of the proportion of women at the level immediately below.

While it is generally accepted that **'merit' and 'excellence'** are key criteria for the assessment of candidates for academic positions, these concepts **are not gender-neutral**.

To generate excellent research requires excellent researchers. This implies both attracting them, and recognising, fostering and promoting them. But throughout the EU, gender still plays an inappropriate role in selection. The more transparent the procedure, based on explicit criteria, the more successful women are likely to be. Excellent male candidates have nothing to fear from transparency! (Rees, 2015) [↗](#).

The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) strives to improve the evaluation of researchers and their outputs through new tools and processes in research assessment that use metrics responsibly and promote transparency and consistency in decision-making. Find out more about DORA [here](#) [↗](#).

In order to get more detailed information and guidance on how to promote gender equality in recruitment and career progression, check out the resources provided in the **tab 'Tools and resources'**.


Get inspired by what other organisations have implemented


Here are some **examples of measures** implemented in other organisations (note that they will open in a new window):

action research with regional workshops on the promotion of gender equality in regional research and innovation (R & I), University of Tampere, Finland,
'career restart', Masaryk University Grant Agency, Brno, Czechia,
'cascade' measure, Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium,
development of cross-curricular study programmes, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, Malta,
Enterprise Ireland 2020 action plan for women in business – fuelling growth through diversity, Enterprise Ireland, Ireland,
gender advisors in recruitment boards and commissions, National Centre for Scientific Research, France,
gender coefficient in the full professor programme, Polytechnic University of Catalonia, Spain,

gender equality in the national R & I funding programme FUSION, Malta Council for Science and Technology, Malta,
GenderLab, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark,
implementation of target 3 of their gender equality, Research and Innovation Foundation, Cyprus,
Irène Curie fellowship programme, Eindhoven University of Technology, the Netherlands,
long-term development goal on 'gender equality and rights of women and girls', Riga Technical University, Latvia,
mentoring scheme, University of Naples Federico II, Italy,
small grant scheme for female scientists in technical sciences, National Centre for Research and Development, Poland,
supporting young mother researchers, National Research, Development and Innovation Office, Hungary,
WeAreHERE (peer-to-peer approach to enrolment of female students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines), Politecnico di Torino, Italy.

You can find further inspirational examples in the following sources.

the European Institute for Gender Equality (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](#).