Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Step 3: Setting up a Gender Equality Plan

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After carrying out an assessment of the gender equality status quo (see step 2) in your organisation, you can start setting up a gender equality plan (GEP).

When developing the GEP, keep in mind that this kind of plan has two functions. Firstly, a GEP is a formal document and you are free to structure and design the GEP according to your own needs and standards; there is no overall template to fill in. Consider that your GEP needs to fulfil the **Horizon Europe eligibility criterion** (find more information here). Secondly, the GEP reflects a process: developing a GEP means involving people, identifying and discussing challenges and potential measures with them, and thereby raising awareness of gender equality and gaining support for the implementation of the plan. These discussions and negotiations are an important step for awareness-raising, which is the starting point for structural and cultural change in research funding bodies.

The scope of a GEP for research funding bodies stretches from defining research priorities and funding programmes to defining eligibility criteria, application procedures, and evaluation and grant-awarding procedures. It can also include objectives and measures that aim to promote gender equality for employees, ranging from work–life balance to working culture or career progression and leadership.

The findings of the status quo analysis allow you and your team to identify the areas of intervention to be addressed in your GEP. To get from the data analysis to your objectives and the concrete measures you aim to implement, make use of the tools that have been developed so far (you can find them below). Be aware that the targets you are aiming for need to be linked to the overall strategic objectives of your funding body, as well as to national policies that might be relevant for your organisation.

At this stage, it is crucial to actively involve senior management and people in leadership positions to decide on the areas of intervention to be addressed and the measures to be identified in your GEP. Their involvement will ensure a smoother and more effective implementation of the proposed measures (to prepare a line of reasoning, find some arguments here). Consider also including the members of the team who carried out the status quo assessment (see step 2) in the development of the GEP.

However, not all relevant areas of intervention can be tackled at the same time, and some may be more pressing than others. Set the **priorities for your organisation** considering the status quo assessment of step 2; the available resources; and, of course, the Horizon Europe eligibility criterion. Link these priorities to other strategic targets of your organisation; this will increase their sustainability.

When developing the GEP, keep in mind that it must be **holistic and integrated**. This means that the identified areas of intervention are interdependent. The GEP will address a variety of issues relevant to the whole community and organisational system. There are a few basic elements to be considered when setting up the GEP: (1) objectives, (2) measures with indicators and targets, (3) timeline and (4) responsibilities.

Below we explain how these elements are realised in the process of setting up a GEP.

> **Promote broad participation when designing the gender equality plan**
> You can organise joint or separate dynamic workshops with senior management and those in leadership posts, programme management, human resources and communication staff, among others. It is possible to use participatory methods for involving these stakeholders, as suggested by the ACT co-creation toolkit ↗, 'Gender equality actions in research institutions to transform gender roles' (GEARING ROLES ↗) project and 'Supporting the promotion of equality in research and academia' (SUPERA ↗) project (you can find more resources on participatory methods in the 'Tools and resources' tab of 'Which stakeholders to involve and how').

A participatory approach will help you to set out meaningful measures for the people involved, while respecting the organisational culture. This will boost participants' willingness to implement the measures set out in the GEP. Moreover, it will increase awareness of gender equality among these groups.

Be aware that some formulations may cause discomfort. For instance, 'rethinking excellence' may be identified as a priority. However, this approach can instigate resistance. The description of a measure can, in many cases, be adapted in order to address the organisation's priorities while considering certain sensitivities. For example, using the phrase 'optimising the evaluation process' may be more widely accepted by the community. Be aware that the meaning of gender equality needs to be constantly framed strategically throughout the implementation of the GEP for various internal and external stakeholders.

Think about different levels of stakeholder involvement: you could consider a step-by-step approach to participation, as already implemented in some GEP projects. Get inspiration from CALIPER's Internal Engagement and Change Management Strategy Guideline ↗. In addition to a core team, you might set up a gender equality board or a hub as support structure and also use gender labs ↗ as time-limited, thematic and solution-oriented participation structures.

Identify a logic model

Embedding your GEP in a logic model can help you to plan objectives, interventions, desired outcomes and resources in more detail, covering internal (staff) and external (funding activities) spheres. It allows you to understand better how your different strategies and interventions will work towards the same goals, interact and reinforce each other. Based on the logic model you can also plan your monitoring and evaluation activities (see step 5). The 'Evaluation framework for promoting gender equality in research and innovation' (EFFORTI) toolbox ↗ allows you to plan your GEP or interventions in the framework of a logic model.

Achieving structural and cultural change requires selecting interventions that foster change at different levels of your research funding body and at each step of the funding cycle (see here). Therefore, your GEP should make use of multiple strategies and interventions to put a change process into motion. These different strategies and interventions should be coordinated and reinforce each other so that, for instance, changes at the structural level are supported by activities at the cultural level.

Get inspired by other organisations

There is no need to reinvent the wheel: there are some successful examples of measures implemented by other research funding bodies. However, a complete replication of such measures can be ineffective in your organisation. It is important to assess the context in which these were carried out. Make sure to adapt the measures considering the specificities of your own context (see step 1) and your own status quo assessment (see step 2). Look at the gender equality in academia and research (GEAR) action toolbox (section on gender-sensitive research funding) to get some inspiration on the areas that can be covered in a GEP, and browse through examples from other organisations here.

Establish specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-related objectives, targets and measures for the gender equality plan

Now it is time to describe your selected measures in more detail, as basis for discussion and in order to fine-tune them within your organisation and ensure commitment. Another option is to discuss them first and then lay the outcomes of these negotiations down in the GEP document.

The objectives, targets and measures of your GEP are more likely to be successfully achieved and implemented if they are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-related (**SMART**).

Specific. The objectives and measures should answer the following 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 they can actually be achieved (even if requiring more effort).

Realistic. Ensure that the objectives and measures are relevant to the organisation and that they are feasible within a certain time frame and within the available resources.

Time-related. Indicate when the objectives and measures can be achieved.

Remember that the Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans defines a GEP as 'a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through institutional and cultural change'. When defining the targets and measures of your GEP, keep your funding cycle in mind and consider the recommended content-related (thematic) GEP building blocks for internal and external stakeholders:

work–life balance and organisational culture;

gender balance in leadership and decision-making;

gender equality in recruitment and career progression;

integration of the sex/gender dimension into research and teaching content;

measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

Find inspiration on how to establish SMART objectives under the tab **'Tools and resources'**. Note that there will be more information on how to identify useful indicators in step 5 on **monitoring and evaluation**.

Identify and utilise existing resources

The financial and human resources 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 to attain the objectives set out without additional costs or much effort. Building (parts of) your GEP on existing resources also has the advantage of promoting the institutionalisation of gender-sensitive and/or gender-specific procedures or activities.

Some examples are as follows.

'On-the-job training' programmes are usually offered by organisations. An initial mandatory gender training could be offered within this programme to build capacities of (newly appointed) staff or to improve the knowledge and/or competences 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 into those documents, for example when defining research funding priorities or adopting the evaluation framework (e.g. by reflecting on joining the Declaration on Research Assessment initiative ⃝).

When planning the peer-review panels make sure to aim for a balanced representation of women and men in the panels.

Overall, however, the implementation of the GEP will not work without additional resources. Start defining and negotiating these resources during the phase of GEP development. Use the Horizon Europe eligibility criterion and any applicable national regulations as arguments. Moreover, consider possible external resources as well (e.g. local or national partnerships), as suggested in step 1 ('Find support'). Find inspiration on identifying and utilising resources under the tab 'Tools and resources'.

Establish the time frame of the gender equality plan and a timeline for its implementation

The overall duration of the GEP needs to be established (e.g. 4 years). Consider that a short time span means frequent negotiations for the next GEP, perhaps using up a lot of resources. A longer time span, on the other hand, may not allow flexible responses to current needs. It may also be strategically wise to coordinate the time frame of the GEP with that of the organisation's strategy development.

Considering the proposed measures and available resources, establish the timeline for executing each of them. When planning the time frame, take into account that not all measures can be implemented at the same time, and that some measures are mutually dependent. For example, it is necessary to establish a gender equality officer first, before that officer can set up gender equality monitoring and submit annual reports.

The 'Promoting gender balance and inclusion in research, innovation and training' (PLOTINA) project provides an Excel document for designing your own GEP, creating annual work plans, following up on the implementation and gathering qualitative results for the measures implemented. You may need to adapt the document to your specific requirements and needs.

Do not forget to establish specific **monitoring periods** for reporting on the progress achieved (see step 5 to learn more). Progress reports should be discussed in decision-making bodies in your organisation and the top management should be held accountable for the results.

Keep in mind that a GEP is not static, but evolves continuously. The organisation, the people and the priorities can change drastically from one moment to the next, so be flexible. The negotiation of the relevance of gender equality in relation to the different measures and stakeholders involved is a constant process.

Agree on clear staff responsibilities for each measure

An agreement needs to be made on the team that will be involved in the implementation of the GEP. After having decided on the staff members who will collaborate on this assignment and who will have the decision-making powers necessary for implementation, clear responsibilities need to be set out for implementing measures. The GEP should clearly indicate 'who is responsible for what and when'. Here are recommendations on who to involve in the GEP and what the role of each person can be.

Build alliances and expand your network

The GEP may include innovative and effective measures, but these will work only if the GEP is supported by internal stakeholders at all levels and when external stakeholders are committed as well. Engaging stakeholders is indispensable during the set-up phase. The GEP needs to be understood as something more than a piece of paper. Invest time in explaining the benefits of gender equality in research funding organisations. Adapt your argumentation to the addressee. Take the time to explain what is in the GEP for targeted stakeholders: top down, bottom up and from the outside. Involve other funding bodies, external organisations and experts in order to increase the visibility of the GEP within and outside the institution so that the engagement of leaders is enhanced. Note that these efforts need to be continued throughout the implementation of the GEP (see step 4).

Keep in mind that engaging stakeholders is a continuous activity: it starts with convincing senior management and those in leadership posts to have a GEP for the organisation, but it does not end there. Keep on engaging stakeholders in order to build stronger alliances. Have in mind that other research funding bodies also work on optimising their assessment procedures, and the people reviewing for you might be doing a similar job in another funding organisation or talking to colleagues engaged there. This might lead to some exchange of experiences and fruitful discussions, which also helps to increase awareness of gender issues.

Find inspiration on building alliances under the tab 'Tools and resources'.

Potential preparatory activities at the level of the whole research funding body, including relevant external stakeholders

Before you start digging into specific activities related to grant allocation processes, consider some preparatory activities at the level of the whole research funding body. These might help you to raise awareness and understanding regarding gender equality issues, and facilitate the work on making the grant allocation process fairer later on.

Awareness raising. If your funding body has not been active in gender equality work so far, it is helpful to raise awareness about the topic by inviting experts from other funding bodies or from national authorities to share their experiences and learnings. Having sex-disaggregated data (on applicants, grantees, panel members) available often helps to understand the problem.

Capacity building. Training for top management, programme management, scientific officers, gender equality officers and other staff is relevant in order to be able to perform gender equality work. To promote the importance of gender equality, specific training courses and workshops should be run. Training can cover issues such as unconscious bias, how to develop a GEP or gender-sensitive language. In addition, reviewers need to be trained regarding gender-neutral assessment practices and how to assess the integration of the sex/gender dimension in research and innovation projects. Support materials, such as videos and online tutorials, can be used. Building specific internal capacities is indispensable for carrying out gender equality work internally, as well as externally (e.g. for applicants, panel members and reviewers).

Support. Support from top management needs to be demonstrated by publishing a strategic commitment on gender inclusiveness on the organisation's website and by integrating gender equality targets into all strategic documents.

Budget is crucial. Check how much funding budget is allocated to which disciplines (see step 2). It could be relevant to increase the budget for disciplines with a greater share of women or to create specific calls for fields in which women are the majority.

Last but not least, research funding bodies are also employers. Providing flexible work schedules or developing parent-friendly workplace options is crucial for internal career development. Have a look at the other parts of the GEAR tool to get inspiration for such activities.

Start thinking about sustainability

The resources for promoting structural change towards gender equality are limited and neither is the duration of your GEP. Most of the changes to be implemented are expected to have a long-term impact. To ensure the sustainability of gender equality measures, it is important to embed practices in the normal routines and procedures of the organisation and to anchor them structurally. This can be done by introducing new functions, such as a gender equality officer, and changing existing routines and procedures in the organisation, or by structurally complementing them with new ones.

Keep in mind that your first GEP will not be your last one. Institutional change towards gender equality in an organisation is a long-term endeavour.

If you are interested in general **tools and resources** that can support you in developing your GEP ⬈ click on the tab 'Tools and resources'. Moreover, the SPEAR video on step 3 tells you all you need to know about developing a GEP.

SPEAR Gender equality in academia. EIGE's GEAR tool step 3 ⬈

You can find webinars about developing a GEP in the tab 'Videos and webinars'. Otherwise, click below to continue to the next step and learn how to implement your GEP. You can also go back to the previous step. ⬈