

# Gender Equality in Academia and Research

## European Institute for Gender Equality step-by-step guide: research funding organisation landing page

### Introducing gender in the work of research funding bodies

This section addresses research funding bodies that want to develop a gender equality plan (GEP) in order to increase gender fairness in research funding and to comply with the [GEP eligibility criterion of Horizon Europe](#) . The following questions are briefly discussed below.

Why is gender relevant for research funding bodies?

What can be done to promote gender equality: where can you become active within your organisation and when addressing researchers and other external stakeholders such as applicants, reviewers or panel/board members?

Why do you need a GEP?

The aim is to provide a practical guide for research funding bodies that want to implement a GEP and to improve their evaluation and grant allocation processes.

### Why is gender relevant?

When allocating grants, research funding bodies enable and foster researchers' careers by distributing public funds. This money needs to be allocated in a fair and inclusive manner, avoiding any discrimination based on sex/gender, age, discipline or ethnic background.

With regard to equal chances, the success rates of women and men applicants are usually discussed. At European level, according to [She Figures 2021](#) (p. 257), the funding success rate for women is still 3.9 percentage points lower than that for men. Lower success rates for women mean lower chances of conducting their own research, developing their independent research programme, publishing a research paper or patent, and applying for further funding or leading positions in the science system. Research funding bodies have a shaping role when it comes to setting the research agenda by pushing new research topics or addressing societal challenges. When asking researchers to systematically analyse data by sex and other social categories or to apply an interdisciplinary research approach when including the sex/gender dimension in research content, research funding bodies can establish new quality standards to foster research excellence.

Recently, the discussion has been extended to the wider research and innovation ecosystem and the phase prior to applying for funding. Research funding bodies are invited to provide incentives to research organisations, including universities, for addressing gender equality in a systematic manner, including the integration of the sex/gender dimension into [research](#) content and teaching and encouraging more women to apply. By this, research funding bodies can also inspire other research organisations to enhance their policies on gender equality and inclusion. This is even more relevant as we observe a considerable difference between the proportion of women applicants and the proportion of women in the pool of potential applicants. In addition, research funding bodies would be well advised to address potential women applicants and research organisations more actively to increase the pool of applicants.

Research organisations in particular have a gatekeeper function through sponsoring, selecting and supporting (potential) applicants.

Research funding thus enables careers and determines who carries out what kind of research. Who gets funded depends on merit and excellence, which are often perceived as neutral concepts measured by metrics and indicators, such as publications, citations or impact points.

Research has revealed various bias factors, however. In addition, unconscious bias in the assessment of projects and applicants has been discussed intensively in recent years, focusing on who assesses (how panels/boards are composed), what is assessed (which criteria are identified), how assessments are carried out (in which way is the peer-review process organised, how are criteria applied) and how final funding decisions are taken.

## **What can be done?**

Research funding bodies have already actively addressed potential bias factors and implemented policies and measures to mitigate gender bias and improve the impact of their funding schemes on gender equality. They can become active at two levels.

First, funding bodies have the potential to exert leverage on their beneficiaries and stakeholders, for example by setting assessment criteria or by monitoring funded projects. If you want to get an overview of potential measures, have a look at '[Gender in research funding – the funding cycle](#)'. Gender may play a role at each level of such a funding cycle.

Second, to be able to deal with gender issues, research funding bodies need to become active at an internal level. Gender capacity-building activities are required to enable staff members to specify gender equality measures for applicants or reviewers, or to address stakeholders in a gender-sensitive manner. It is also important to set gender-specific targets and raise awareness, as well as to act as an authentic role model.

More information on specific internal measures for research funding bodies, such as allocating a funding budget, training staff and building capacities, and on the relevance of gender equality in regard to external stakeholders (applicants, reviewers and panel/board members) can be found [here](#).

More concrete examples from and experiences of other funding bodies are collected [here](#).

For internal measures (such as staff career development, combating sexual harassment, internal decision-making), the step-by-step guide [for research-performing organisations](#) and the [other general resources](#) of this gender equality in academia and research (GEAR) tool can be reviewed.

## Why do you need a gender equality plan?

While research-performing organisations have implemented GEPs for several years, this is a rather new approach for research funding bodies. A GEP is a formal document that presents all gender activities in a systematic manner, starting with the status quo in the organisation. To develop this final document, objectives and measures need to be planned, discussed and negotiated within each organisation, which is why GEPs also equal an internal change process. More general information on GEPs can be found [here](#).

To be eligible for Horizon Europe, funding bodies need a GEP, as specified by the European Commission in its [Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans](#) [↗](#). If you are interested in finding further information about the five European Commission topics and further requirements, click [here](#).

While the European Commission publication refers to funding bodies in some parts, this European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) step-by-step guide concerns the systematic implementation of gender activities: it describes the **entire GEP process** from planning to the final evaluation specifically for funding bodies. This guide is thus a first attempt to support research funding bodies in the systematic implementation of gender activities, as required by the eligibility criterion of Horizon Europe.

In [step 1](#), you will find information on how to prepare for a GEP in the specific context of research funding bodies. The assessment of the status quo as a starting point for planning measures in your research funding body is described in [step 2](#). In [step 3](#), you learn what needs to be taken into account when you set up a GEP, while, in [step 4](#), it is pointed out what is relevant for the implementation of your GEP. In [step 5](#), you will become familiar with indicators that can be used to set up the monitoring process. Finally, [step 6](#) illustrates what comes after the completion of your GEP.