

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

What is a Gender Equality Plan

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With the introduction/start of Horizon Europe, the European Commission made gender equality plans (GEPs) a basic requirement for participation in its research framework programme. It defined GEPs as:

a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through a process of structural change.

This policy instrument strives to sustainably transform organisational processes, cultures and structures within the field of research and innovation (R & I) to combat and reduce gender imbalances and inequalities. It should be holistic and comprehensive in the way that it addresses the whole organisation, engages all relevant stakeholders and tackles several gender equality issues in your organisation. Therefore, GEPs should not focus only on promoting career opportunities and equal access to resources for one gender; rather, they should be inclusive and target women and men in all their diversity.

Consequently, a GEP is a systematic and strategic instrument that establishes priorities and concrete objectives (based on a thorough status quo assessment), and the specific measures that will be implemented to improve gender equality within organisations and in the field of R & I. The timelines of the measures to be implemented and for measuring progress and success should be included in your GEP. You should also take into account that GEPs are to be designed as tools promoting reflexivity and learning by encompassing monitoring and evaluation activities. Finally, a GEP needs to establish clear responsibilities for different activities and to specify the general governance and leadership accountability for steering the GEP implementation and for the GEP's progress and results.

See also the additional paragraphs of this section for more characteristics of effective GEPs.

The process of developing and implementing a GEP can be broken down **into six different steps**, each requiring specific types of activities and interventions.

Step 1: getting started. In this step, you will need to familiarise yourself with the GEP concept and how it fits with your organisation and the specific context of your organisation. You also need to identify and approach potential allies and supporters of a GEP in your organisation.

Step 2: analysing and assessing the status quo in your organisation. In this step, sex-disaggregated data is collected and organisational procedures, processes and practices are critically reviewed to detect any gender inequalities and their causes.

Step 3: setting up a GEP. In this step, you will need to identify objectives, set your targets and measures to remedy the identified problems, allocate resources and responsibilities, and agree on timelines.

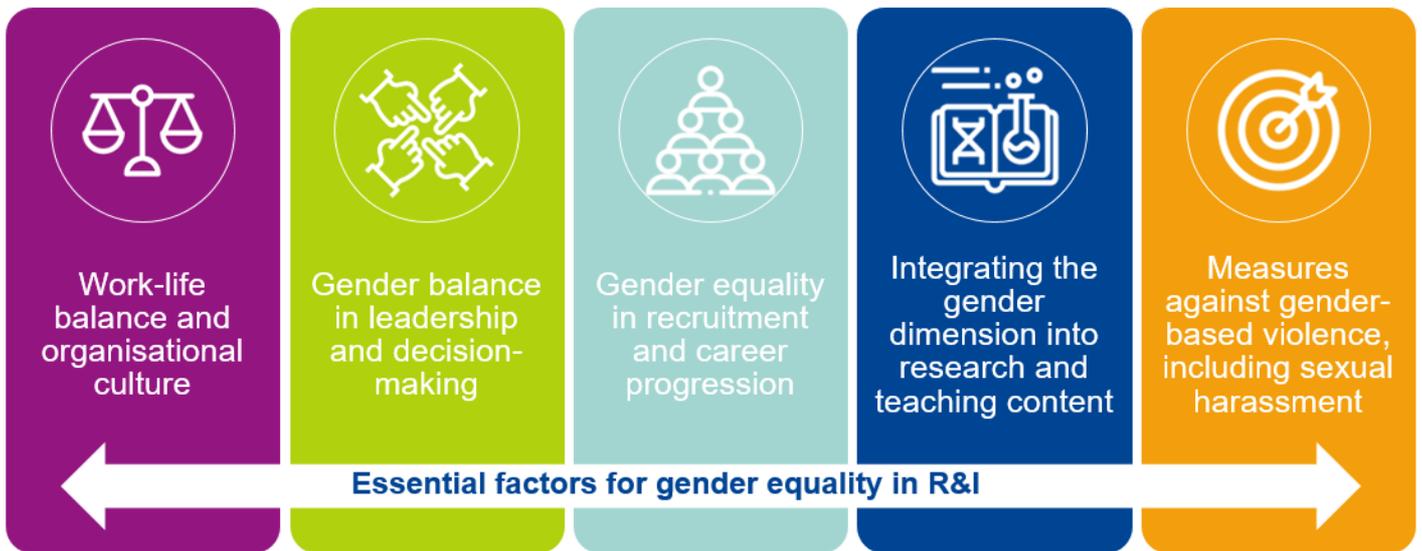
Step 4: implementing a GEP. In this step, you will implement the planned activities and undertake outreach efforts to gradually expand the network of stakeholders supporting the GEP implementation.

Step 5: monitoring progress and evaluating a GEP. Through monitoring and evaluation activities you will assess the implementation process and the progress achieved against the aims and objectives identified in your GEP. Findings from the monitoring and evaluation exercise(s) allow you to adjust and improve your interventions.

Step 6: what comes after a GEP? Based on the results of steps 4 and 5, you need to develop a new GEP that builds on your experiences, learnings and achievements and that also ensures the sustainability of the efforts started in previous GEP implementation rounds.

The **eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe** sets out GEPs as including mandatory and recommended building blocks:

- 1 mandatory process-based elements, which represent standard minimum components of action plans to promote gender equality;
- 2 recommended content-related elements, which are key gender equality issues that a GEP should seek to address.



Source: How to prepare a successful proposal in Horizon Europe: Horizontal Aspects , presentation by Pepin, A., European Commission, 21 April 2021, Icons - © Flaticon

For more details on the Horizon Europe eligibility criterion, see the the section ‘[Horizon Europe gender equality plan eligibility criterion](#)’ and the [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#) on GEPs and the [Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans](#), both published by the European Commission.

The *Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans*, published by the European Commission, stipulates that, if organisations already have other strategic documents in place, these can be considered as equivalent to a GEP. However, it is advisable to review these plans and strategies to find out if they comply with the recommendations and advice compiled in this toolkit and to update them accordingly to ensure full alignment and effectiveness.

Besides the Horizon Europe eligibility criterion, which establishes the basic requirements for a GEP to set an effective and sustainable change process in motion, there are several other relevant features of a GEP that you should know about before you start developing and implementing your GEP.

A gender equality plan should be holistic and engage the whole organisation

A GEP needs to **engage the whole organisation** to trigger structural and cultural change effectively. This means that you should actively engage a broad set of organisational stakeholders (see 'Which stakeholders to involve and how'), ideally in the status quo assessment and planning phases of a GEP. In addition, it is also important that you try to link the GEP to other important strategic ventures of your organisation (such as internationalisation strategies, research excellence strategies, open-access and open data strategies), as it allows the effective integration of gender equality into discussions and change processes, and engages stakeholders.

The gender equality plan needs to be tailored to your organisation

A GEP that aims to trigger structural and cultural change within your organisation is an intervention in **a complex system**. Although there are similarities between organisations in R & I, the following will vary between organisations: the specific status quo of gender equality; the experiences of gender equality work and/or organisational change processes in general; and the legal, policy and sociocultural contexts. Therefore, your GEP can be inspired by and build on the experiences of other similar organisations, but it **needs to be tailored to your organisation**

Develop and implement your gender equality plan through participatory efforts

Stakeholder engagement is an important prerequisite for a successful and effective GEP, but beyond that a GEP should be developed and implemented through participatory strategies and efforts. This means that GEP objectives should not be established by a small group within the organisation (e.g. the top management or a gender equality group); rather, it is advisable to develop a GEP through co-creation and co-design efforts, as this will increase the legitimacy of the GEP and the support of the GEP by different staff categories and, consequently, will ensure effective and sustainable GEP implementation. Please be aware that participatory efforts and stakeholder engagement should continue throughout all steps of a GEP.

Framework for an effective and sustainable gender equality plan

An effective GEP that drives structural and cultural change towards gender equality in your organisation should work at five levels. Considering these levels in the main steps of the GEP cycle (status quo assessment (step 2), setting up a GEP (step 3), implementing a GEP (step 4), and monitoring and evaluation (step 5)) will enable you to set out a holistic GEP promoting sustainable change.

Structure. Your change process should focus on organisational policies and practices that govern, for instance, hiring, promotion and research assessment and provide evidence on how they may or may not contribute to gender inequalities in your organisation. In addition, ground your gender equality work in formal organisational

structures and governance mechanisms.

Personnel. Each organisation has a specific sociodemographic structure. Make sure that you are familiar with this structure of the staff working in your organisation (or the students receiving training or the applicants applying for grants or stipends) and that your GEP takes this structure into account.

Power. Each organisation has a formal, but also an informal, structure of power and influence. As already described in step 1, mapping stakeholders in your organisation is important to identify those who are potential allies or possible gatekeepers. Keep the power relations within your organisation in mind when you are designing and implementing a GEP, and when you are engaging stakeholders.

Culture. Organisations also have a specific culture, which is more than just the working culture and climate; it is also visible in the values and messages communicated internally and externally, for instance how women and men are represented on an organisation's website and in other communication materials or how gender equality is valued in these communications.

R & I context. What are the societal and policy contexts and the regional, national and international policies governing gender equality in R & I? What are the main features of the regional and national R & I system in which your organisation is embedded? How can you make use of these framework conditions to strengthen your GEP and to gain support for your objectives?

Ground your gender equality plan in a change model

Ideally, a GEP should be anchored in a **change model** or a theory of change that links the identified issues and causes of gender inequalities in your organisation to specific activities, targets and desired outcomes. It is a logic intervention model of how structural and cultural change should be achieved through a GEP in your organisation. Make sure that your GEP uses different levers to initiate and sustain the change process – a GEP focused narrowly on a single issue is very likely to have only limited effects. Consult [step 3](#) on how to design an effective and sustainable GEP. Find out more about logic models for driving change in the toolbox (v2.0) produced by the EU-funded project 'Evaluation framework for promoting gender equality in research and innovation' ([EFFORTI](#) [↗](#)).

Take advantage of an intersectional approach to your gender equality plan

With the European gender equality strategy for 2020–2025, the Commission will enhance gender mainstreaming by **systematically including a gender perspective in all stages of policy design in all EU policy areas, internal and external**. The strategy will be implemented **using [T](#) intersectionality** – the combination of gender with other personal characteristics or identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination – **as a cross-cutting principle**.

Addressing other inequalities that intersect with gender may provide efficient leverage for change and can also inspire comprehensive measures and strategies. It should also be considered that this requires more analytical resources and data, and a broader range of expertise, than tackling gender separately from other inequality issues.

Promoting sustainability starts during gender equality plan development

Sustainable change towards better gender equality, diversity and inclusion is the result of a successfully implemented GEP. Therefore, sustainability needs to be considered throughout GEP development and implementation. This is an ongoing, continuous activity and effort, but it is not necessarily separate from the other GEP implementation activities. Rather, promoting sustainability should be an integral part of your day-to-day activities, and a lot of the advice and suggestions compiled in the gender equality in academia and research (GEAR) tool will enhance the sustainability of your GEP: engaging stakeholders and securing leadership commitment, selecting a mix of specific measures aimed at cultural and structural change at different levels of your organisation, and monitoring and evaluation activities. All these activities will contribute to a sustainable impact of your work on your organisation.

Sustainability is therefore more than just the sum of all parts or activities of your GEP. Read more on sustainability in [step 6 of the step-by-step guide](#) and in the section '[Resistance and common challenges – and how to overcome them](#)'

Consider the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality in your gender equality plan

As reported, the **COVID-19** pandemic has had a significant impact on the working conditions and productivity of researchers and on gender inequalities in R & I, as well as in society at large. Therefore, consider whether your GEP provides an opportunity to review the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality in your organisation, to anticipate and prevent the effects of COVID-19 on gender equality or to take measures to mitigate its challenges and impact. Some measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality are included in the [GEAR action toolbox](#). In addition, you can also use the discussions about gender equality, working conditions and the new ways of working that have emerged as a result of the societal and economic impact of COVID-19 as a lever for change. Although COVID-19 is causing societal and economic stress and crises, it is also an opportunity for promoting organisational change to adapt to new circumstances and to advance working conditions and working cultures.

In order to view **videos and webinars** or further **tools and resources** on the topics in this section,

switch between the respective tabs. Otherwise, click below to continue to the next section and learn more about the **terminology and definitions** used in the GEAR tool.