

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Which stakeholders to involve and how?

Main section Videos and webinars Tools and resources

As a matter of principle, you should mobilise all stakeholders of your organisation in developing and implementing a gender equality plan (GEP). Their involvement, which can be direct or indirect (depending on the stakeholder profile), will create a sense of belonging that will help overcome **challenges and resistance** throughout the process. In this way, your GEP will represent the diverse needs of and situations in the different areas of your organisation (e.g. faculties, departments, disciplines, funding programmes) and promote bottom-up processes (i.e. activities are proposed and implemented not only at the top of the organisation, but also by employees or departments).

Although the organisational structures of European universities, research-performing organisations, research funding bodies and other public bodies differ, there are some similarities and the various types of stakeholders listed below can or should be involved in a GEP (if they are present in the institution). Their responsibilities need to be negotiated, mutually agreed on and made clear from the very beginning. Their cooperation and engagement are crucial for the successful development and implementation of a GEP (for more information and resources on impact, see '[Success factors](#) for gender equality plan development and implementation').

How to involve the stakeholders? During the GEP development phase, stakeholders can be involved through, for example, focus groups, workshops, group discussions, seminars, interviews, written feedback circles or one-on-one meetings with the team/person responsible for development of the GEP. To ensure further stakeholder involvement, you could think about establishing structures or processes that promote participatory, bottom-up or co-creation/co-design approaches or consider the local context. Examples are having GEPs or action plans in place at faculty level; providing faculties or departments with the option of choosing their own gender equality activities that fit their local context; or installing gender equality committees in which faculties, departments or other stakeholder groups (e.g. students, young researchers and unions) are represented. In addition, you could establish a gender equality network throughout the entire organisation.

How to address the stakeholders? Below you will find examples of speaking notes to support advocacy for gender equality. These short notes (usually no longer than two paragraphs) aim to provide convincing arguments to advance gender equality in organisations. They can be helpful for convincing a key staff member or colleague in just a couple of minutes of the benefits of working towards gender equality.

These notes are provided here for inspiration. They are tailored to address different staff profiles, including senior executives, managers and human resources (HR) teams. It is advisable to customise your own speaking notes and to make them fit your institution and the person(s) you will be addressing.

For more inspiration, watch the videos in tab 2 of this page and have a look at the further resources in tab 3. See also step 4 of the step-by-step guide to read about involving stakeholders in the implementation of the GEP. You can also find more information on building arguments to convince stakeholders in the ['Why' chapter of this gender equality in academia and research\(GEAR\) tool](#).

Internal Stakeholders

The process of developing a GEP should be led by the body or person explicitly dedicated to gender equality work, such as the gender equality team, officer/office or committee. If you do not have such structures in place, the process of establishing them can be part of the GEP. For more information on gender equality structures and bodies, their role and what should be considered when establishing them, consult the [action toolbox](#).

Other internal stakeholders that should be included by the gender equality body are senior management, middle management and leadership, research and/or teaching staff, administrative/non-academic units and staff (especially the HR department), and students.

Senior management

People in senior management are responsible for governing your organisation. While in higher education institutions they can be rectors or chancellors, in research organisations and funding bodies they can be board members (or chairs of the board) or directors. They have the power to make decisions that target the whole organisation and are therefore very important change agents when setting up and implementing a GEP. Thus, their support and commitment are invaluable assets that lead to [success](#) for example when engaging other stakeholders and overcoming resistance.

What is the role of senior management in a gender equality plan?

Publicly support the principle of gender equality in/for the organisation.

Publicly endorse and sign the GEP, and endorse the structure responsible for its implementation (e.g. gender equality team).

Make available sufficient financial and human resources to implement the GEP.

Participate in the GEP development process as stakeholders when invited by the unit responsible for the GEP.

Approve relevant documentation, procedures and activities supporting structural change towards gender equality in the organisation.

Request regular updates regarding the implementation of the plan and progress (monitoring results) towards gender equality.

Arguments for addressing senior management

International comparison

Example: In [country A], 70 % of research organisations such as ours have set up a GEP, and their performance in dealing with gender equality is regularly assessed. They now consider investing in gender equality as a strategic issue and a matter of competitiveness and excellence. So do some research agencies, which included scores to that respect in their reference evaluation frameworks. We should follow that example, and anticipate future trends in [country B].

Liability

Example: As stated by law, our institution is responsible for preventing and reporting on cases of sexual harassment. In accordance with EU directives, our national legislation has become very clear on this matter. We have reported cases of sexual harassment, but have no procedures or skills to comprehensively deal with it. This is, first of all, terrible for the victims. But if we want to avoid potential legal liabilities, we should invest in prevention through dedicated procedures, mechanisms and staff training.

Broader organisational change

Example: Our recruitment and internal evaluation procedures have been described as not being transparent by our policy authority. Meanwhile, our gender equality unit has detected gender bias in our recruitments and evaluations. Tackling the latter could be a good entry to challenge and upgrade our procedures!

Middle management and leadership

These stakeholders are in charge of the day-to-day management of your organisation's units, for example departments or research groups. In the context of research organisations, these stakeholders include faculty deans, heads of departments/institutes and directors of services. In the context of funding bodies, heads of departments and programme managers are relevant. They may have a closer relationship with teaching and/or research staff, students, or funding applicants and reviewers (depending on the organisation), and can thus be valuable allies in taking the messages of gender equality work to the local units and in the practical aspects of implementation.

What is the role of middle management in a gender equality plan?

Publicly support the GEP and its activities.

Participate in the GEP development/implementation process as stakeholders when invited by the entity in charge of the GEP to contribute their local perspective.

Ensure the practical implementation of the measures, procedures and activities required by senior management and listed in the GEP.

Ensure the integration of a sex/gender dimension in research and teaching in their unit.

Instruct the relevant units to provide information and data to monitor the implementation of the GEP and progress towards gender equality.

Arguments for addressing middle management

Valuing managers' contributions as agents of change and ability to create effective solutions

Example: Our institution has committed to high standards with respect to gender equality and our rector made a nice speech about this last week. And yet, without your knowledge of the organisation and of the people who work in it, we have no chance of succeeding. You are best placed to help us detect room for improvements in your area, and to co-create and test with us effective solutions. By participating in the next meeting, we can make sure that the issues and topics of your department are addressed and that your staff benefit from the actions.

Internal stimulation

Example: Since our communication department adopted a gender-sensitive communication, our institution has been quoted as an example at national level; female colleagues acknowledge that their work is better reflected; and news about gender equality issues, which are now more frequently displayed on the website, are the most tweeted and shared on Facebook. It would be great to trigger the same dynamics in our departments and faculties and to engage in discussion with students.

Referring to specific cases of management

Example: If we look at it objectively, the case of harassment we had to deal with last year has been extremely costly for us. The case was largely commented on within and outside the institution; we appeared to be insensitive and not proactive, and eventually our liability was mentioned in legal proceedings. We knew this could happen. Let's start dealing with this seriously, by securing expertise, investing in prevention and providing assistance.

For research organisations: access to funding and competitiveness

Example: Attention to the sex/gender dimension in research content, gender balance in teams and gender balance in decision-making is extensively referred to in Horizon Europe and this is reflected in the current work programme. Seriously tackling these issues in our proposals could increase our competitiveness and our chances of being funded. Researchers should be involved in this process. We know about training sessions to support the integration of gender equality and a gender perspective in proposals. Let's create awareness among researchers and project managers. In addition, having a GEP is now mandatory for all research organisations and public bodies that receive funding, so we should put that at the top of our agenda.

Internal synergies

Example: Our department of sociology has a rich record in supporting work–life balance among its academic staff. Did you know that a small fund was created to support childcare for those with parental responsibilities who wish to actively participate in international projects and conferences? It contributed to changing the lens through which getting engaged in dissemination and other activities requiring organisational mobility is perceived. Let's plan a meeting with management and a few researchers to learn from their experience!

Research and/or teaching staff

Staff with research and/or teaching responsibilities can have a groundbreaking role in changing the way disciplines are taught and research is carried out. Integrating a sex/gender dimension into research and innovation (R & I) content and teaching opens up new vistas and creates new knowledge. Considering a sex/gender dimension in research can have a positive and powerful impact on society and can improve people's lives. Involving research and/or teaching staff in the GEP development process can also lead to a tailor-made GEP that represents the diverse needs of the different areas of the organisation and creates a sense of ownership. Perhaps there are also staff in your organisation who focus on gender research and can support the GEP team and implementation process with their knowledge and experience. Gender study researchers and scholars, and researchers who are part of structural change projects or networks, often play a vital role in developing GEPs. In addition, groups or representatives of certain categories of personnel (e.g. young researchers) should be involved.

What is the role of research and/or teaching staff in a gender equality plan?

Integrate a [sex/gender dimension in research and teaching](#).

Participate in the GEP development process as stakeholders when invited by the unit

responsible for the GEP to contribute their local perspective.

Actively participate in the initiatives organised within the framework of the GEP (e.g. training on gender-based violence, including sexual harassment).

Instigate change through debating the status quo of the organisation and proposing measures to promote structural change.

Organise activities that focus on integrating a sex/gender dimension into R & I content and/or contribute to promoting structural change to advance gender equality in the organisation.

Arguments for addressing researchers

Access to funding, competitiveness and mainstreaming gender knowledge among researchers

Example: As a research centre carrying out research on climate change, we participated in the international conference held in Paris. Policymakers and non-governmental organisations underlined the need to also address prevention and mitigation of climate change impacts from a gender perspective. This eventually materialised in the final agreement signed by 194 countries. We realised that nobody addressed this issue in our team, and that the societal impacts of climate change in general were underinvestigated at our institution. We learnt that cross-disciplinary workshops were organised by a local university to integrate gender in our fields of interest. We might consider hosting a session and strengthening our ability to address societal challenges and gender aspects in future project applications.

When planning our gender equality strategy, we realised that, across the university, gender was core to nearly 10 % of ongoing Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) theses, and that gender was a relevant category for about 40 % of theses currently being carried out. However, apart from fields related to social sciences and humanities, we found little evidence of gender-sensitive research. Why could we not use the pool of knowledge accumulated in some fields or departments to irrigate other areas of knowledge? This would enhance transdisciplinary, interdepartmental cooperation and knowledge circulation. It might also benefit our success rate in accessing public funding, which tends to decrease with growing competition.

Example: Attention to the sex/gender dimension in research content, gender balance in teams and gender balance in decision-making are extensively referred to in Horizon Europe and this is reflected in the current work programme. Seriously tackling these issues in our proposals could increase our competitiveness and our chances of being funded. So, let's get active and discuss the topic in one of our training sessions on gender in research and teaching.

Supporting women's contribution to knowledge production

Example: In a field such as ours, laboratory experiments are time-consuming, and international organisational mobility is a prerequisite for a successful career. Women might both be given fewer opportunities to contribute to their full potential and be discouraged by external factors (such as work conditions or selection and appraisal criteria) from fully participating. If we do not change this, it is unlikely that our targets in improving the sex balance in our institute will ever be met. More change is needed: we need to put in place active schemes to encourage women's participation in collaborative projects and also as project leaders. This implies making organisational mobility more inclusive and less costly. It may also require the better integration of career breaks or the provision of longer leave periods in their scientific careers for both women and men.

Awarding gender-sensitive research

Example: Let's reward research projects or papers actively contributing to mainstream gender knowledge across academic disciplines. All fields should be encouraged to contest, and the call for participation should be put in a way that is also appealing to researchers working in technical fields. The same should apply to awards. The idea would be to make integrating gender an incentive for excellent and innovative research. Hence, awards would not necessarily have to be related to gender issues or gender research itself, but to the fields of expertise of applicants. This is working well elsewhere. Why not here?

Administrative/non-academic units and staff (especially human resources departments)

While administrative units and staff are the focus of GEP efforts in some organisations (e.g. funding bodies, public bodies), they may be overlooked in universities or research-performing organisations. However, including their perspective and expertise leads to a GEP that covers the needs of the whole organisation, and is crucial for the implementation and dissemination of the GEP. Therefore, administrative staff should be included in participatory GEP development processes.

Besides the HR department, other important departments are communications or public relations departments for awareness-raising and dissemination purposes, legal and financial departments for feasibility questions, and research support departments or quality/development departments responsible for teaching and curricula in order to integrate the sex/gender dimension into research and teaching. However, this very much depends on the structure of your organisation. In addition, union representatives or work environment units can support the cause. Funders should pay special attention to their R & I analysis department for materials and statistics or the innovation department to rework funding schemes (depending on their structure, of course).

The HR department, responsible for managing the human resources of the organisation, is key to promoting structural and cultural change towards gender equality. This department can promote unbiased and fairer procedures and measures that contribute to achieving a gender-balanced composition of the organisation's staff. In addition, it can implement measures that ensure equal career progression and a balanced reconciliation of work and family life.

What is the role of human resources staff in a gender equality plan?

Participate in the GEP development process as stakeholders when invited by the unit responsible for the GEP or coordinate development/implementation of the GEP if the working group is located in the HR department.

Collect and report on sex-disaggregated data on the organisation's staff in a systematic way and deliver relevant data that can be used as a basis for GEP development.

Develop gender-sensitive and gender-specific **indicators** to monitor progress towards gender equality in the organisation.

Review and/or create **recruitment and selection measures and procedures** that contribute to a gender-balanced composition of the organisation's staff at all levels.

Review and/or set up measures aimed at a better reconciliation of professional and family life and working and caring duties, and a more gender-sensitive organisational culture.

Review and/or introduce a [harassment prevention policy](#) and a [complaints procedure](#).

Arguments for addressing human resources staff

Valuing human resources management as core to any process of change

Our institute applied under this gender equality scheme upon the initiative of our director. We have made a series of commitments and emphasised the work of our gender equality unit. Our chances to be selected are high. We have to be conscious that we are expected to challenge some of our processes, notably regarding recruitment and career management. Our director and her/his team cannot make this change happen without the support, expertise and assistance of the HR management department. And no action related to career management can be planned and undertaken without your knowledge of the institution. Should we establish a pilot group with your department to diagnose needs and potential challenges with respect to gender equality? We might also envisage how this gender equality scheme can fit with your current modernisation efforts regarding HR management.

Securing gender expertise to increase knowledge

Example: Our data collection is quite exhaustive on aspects such as hiring, career breaks and access to lifelong learning. But, except for staff categories, we produce little sex-disaggregated data. And yet, we know that career opportunities differ for our women and men staff, depending on their position, the scientific discipline and other factors. These differences are regularly discussed informally during talks with social partners and in management meetings in each department. It would be more appropriate to carry out a proper diagnosis to start solving potential issues from the actual situation, not from subjective perceptions or standpoints. Producing such a diagnosis requires external expertise. We have plenty at hand in the department of gender studies, including people working on career management and gender equality in the workplace. Shall we convene a meeting on this?

Challenging bias in recruitment and appraisal

Example: We are very selective about the profiles of applicants. We try to value different skills and experiences, yet we tend to receive fewer applications from women candidates, and our women staff have slightly lower chances of being promoted. I think we should put this under consideration in the next review of our process. Perhaps an external audit would be useful to identify potential gender bias? Are our job announcements appealing irrespective of the sex of candidates? Do we pay enough attention to career breaks and to different experiences in research and research management? Let's clarify this.

Improving work–life balance

Example: Work environments that pay greater attention to work–life balance are reported to attract more talented researchers and staff and to retain them longer. The quality of time spent at work is also meant to enhance productivity and work relationships. Last but not least, as women and men still have to cope with family duties to different extents, improving work–life balance can help women to move up the career ladder and achieve their full potential. We have developed new tools to select and evaluate people, and to help them develop their skills. And yet, we have paid little attention to work–life issues. A survey or a forum could help us in assessing whether this has had an impact, and to collect innovative ideas about a gender-friendly work organisation.

Arguments for addressing social partners

Improving working conditions through tackling gender inequality

Example: Gender equality is not only about complying with legal requirements or individual cases. It also sheds light on working conditions, all along the career path. Recruitment, appraisal, lifelong learning, evaluation, career management tools: all these aspects can be considered from a gendered perspective and/or have (negative) gender impacts. Challenging gender bias can help us to challenge other biases about personal circumstances and to unravel intersecting inequalities.

Gender equality matters for all categories of staff, beyond traditional cleavages between permanent and non-permanent staff, academics and non-academics, etc. It is an objective that can create engagement, but also resistance, which is better overcome when social partners are engaged. A gender equality unit can often be perceived as external to social dialogue, but actually it can be an ally. As we are designing a GEP, we would like you to be a full part of the process, and share your knowledge about working conditions and work relationships with all engaged stakeholders.

Enhancing social dialogue by achieving gender equality

Example: It depends on the context, but dialogue with trade unions and other staff representatives can be quite formal. Be it framed by the law and/or by a collective agreement, it does not always provide space for assessing the status of gender equality, or to be innovative.

As we are launching what is meant to be a modernisation of our processes and ways of doing things with regard to gender equality, let's use this opportunity. Let's use it as a tool for modernising our social dialogue and making it more inclusive. In addition, gender bias or prejudices rely upon deeply entrenched stereotypes. This requires new ways of sharing ideas and communicating with each other. Co-creation and experience-based or participatory techniques can help us to highlight problems and reach consensus about solutions.

Arguments for addressing staff

Tailored gender equality plan

Example: We are currently in the process of developing our GEP and its main goals and fields of action. We envisage a GEP that benefits the entire organisation and reflects the different situations in the institutes and departments. Therefore, we would like to include you in our discussions and are very interested in your perspective and input. Come to our meeting next week and make sure your concerns and issues are on the table.

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Students

Higher education institutions have a major responsibility in instructing their students at all levels (from bachelor to PhD levels). Firstly, students can be integrated as beneficiaries of gender equality work, which includes, for example, raising their awareness regarding gender-relevant issues in all disciplines and subject areas, not just gender-based violence and sexual harassment, and career progression for students interested in following the academic career path. In addition, students also need to be encouraged and taught to integrate and apply a gender perspective in and to their research, as they may become teachers or researchers themselves. Raising students' awareness and sensitivity about gender equality contributes to changing attitudes, behaviours and culture at the higher education institution and in other spheres of their lives. They might also have gender biases and/or be a source of resistance, which needs to be taken into account and specifically addressed, if necessary. Secondly, some students or a group of students can also be drivers in the change process. Their perspectives and involvement can be informal, but can also be formally considered in the GEP, and their responsibilities can be strengthened by involving them as stakeholders in the GEP development and implementation process (e.g. student representatives, student mentors for future or first-year students).

What is the role of students in a gender equality plan?

Active participation in the initiatives organised within the framework of the GEP as beneficiaries (e.g. training on unconscious gender bias and activities on gender-based violence, including sexual harassment).

Integration of the sex/[gender dimension into research](#) (e.g. master's and PhD theses).
Providing their perspectives in a participatory GEP development and implementation process.

Taking on responsibilities with regard to gender equality work (e.g. student representatives as members of committees, student mentors for future or first-year students).

Arguments for addressing students (representatives)

Tailored gender equality plan

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Study conditions

Example: As a university, we strive for a study environment in which everyone has equal opportunities. We want to ensure that students on our campus do not have negative experiences because of their gender and receive an education that takes into account different life realities. Therefore, we would like to include students in the development and implementation of our GEP. We would appreciate your attendance at our meeting next month to discuss possible ways for students to get involved.

External stakeholders

Even though a GEP focuses on one organisation, the stakeholder group may not be limited to the boundaries of your organisation. Depending on the organisation, the group of external stakeholders can be quite broad and can include the following: audit organisations (e.g. the human resources strategy for researchers (HRS4R) or Stifterverband in Germany); gender experts, consultants or advisory boards; gender research project partners; individual personal contacts in the academic community; non-governmental organisations (e.g. on violence against women); or (inter)national networks (e.g. university or funding bodies networks). Depending on the national context, political stakeholders, such as ombudspersons or ministries, can be valuable stakeholders as well.

External contacts and networks for exchange

Learning from and being inspired by others can be highly valuable for development and implementation of a GEP, although you should not forget that everything has to be adapted to your own context. Exchange can happen between individuals (e.g. with a gender equality officer of another organisation) or in a group setting such as (gender equality) networks, for example communities of practice. The exchange with external stakeholders and networks can also represent an opportunity to spread ideas, impulses and information on gender equality more broadly in order to have increased impact on the academic and/or political system.

What is the role of external stakeholders and networks in a gender equality plan?

Provide mutual support and inspiration and exchange knowledge, expertise and experiences.

Provide an outsider's perspective.

Develop joint initiatives (e.g. national events, policy lobbying) that have more impact (on the academic system).

Arguments for addressing external contacts and networks for exchange

Exchange and learning potential

Example: We are currently developing our first GEP. I heard you are in the same situation at the moment. Would you be open for an exchange? I think we could learn from each other's experiences and maybe brainstorm on current issues.

Synergies

Example: We have adopted our first GEP and would like to organise a panel discussion on gender-based violence, including sexual harassment in academia. What do you think about joining forces and organising an event for both of our universities? Or maybe a national event?

Arguments tailored to funding bodies' stakeholders

While funding bodies have some overlaps with the stakeholders of universities or other research organisations (i.e. senior management, middle management, HR departments and non-academic staff) and can use some of the abovementioned arguments, there are aspects of the set-up of funding bodies and the arguments used that are different. For example, while the main source of data (i.e. on staff) at a university or other research institution is the HR department, in funding bodies it is the unit holding all data on the funding process (i.e. on applicants and reviewers), such as the R & I analysis department. This also means that these departments, as well as the reviewers, applicants and their research institutions, are of great importance as external stakeholders. For more information on how to integrate gender equality in your funding body, please consult the [step by step guide for funding bodies](#) and the [action toolbox section](#) [action 'Gender-sensitive funding procedures'](#).

Arguments for addressing Stakeholders involved in the funding process

Unconscious bias

Example: Even though we, as an organisation, are already committed to the cause of gender equality, it is still threatened by our own assumptions about what women and men are like. If an applicant speaks very loudly and sells their research very convincingly, you might say 'HE is confident', while if it is a women applicant you might ask 'Why is SHE so loud?' We should tackle this issue immediately and organise unconscious bias training for our reviewers.

Responsibility of funders

Example: As research funding bodies, we (partly) shape researchers' careers by distributing public money. Thus, eligibility and assessment criteria need to be designed in a fair and inclusive manner, avoiding any discrimination based on sex/gender, age, discipline, ethnic background or working time. A person who has cared for two children for 7 years following a PhD will not be able to publish as many papers as a person without any care obligations. Many other funding bodies, such as the EU, the DFG [Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft] in Germany or Science Foundation Ireland, are taking up this mission of shaping research in a more inclusive way. How about we have a meeting next month to see where our funding programmes already consider this and to identify and discuss where we can become even more inclusive?

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 **about the GEAR tool** or jump directly to the **'Why' chapter** of the GEAR tool.