



Impact of gender equality plans

across the European Research Area



August 2024

The study **Impact of gender equality plans in the European Research Area** analysed recent key policy developments regarding gender equality plans (GEPs) in research and innovation (R&I) organisations at the EU, national and institutional levels. It focused on analysing the impact that EU and national policies and programmes have had on GEP development and implementation, gender equality in R & I across the European Research Area (ERA) and R & I quality and efficiency. Among key findings are the following:

The influence of EU and national policies on the development and implementation of gender equality plans

EU and national legislation and initiatives targeting gender equality in R&I are among the most impactful drivers of GEP development and implementation. They legitimise efforts to address inequalities by signalling that gender equality in R&I is a key priority.

The introduction of the **GEP eligibility criterion** for all public bodies, higher education institutions, research-performing organisations and research-funding organisations in EU Member States and associated countries participating in Horizon Europe (through calls with deadlines in 2022 or later) was a key development and an impetus for change in the sector. The eligibility criterion contributed significantly to efforts to advance gender equality in R&I, by shifting having a GEP in place from a recommendation to a requirement for funding.

This **inspired institutions to strengthen existing gender equality or equality, diversity and inclusion policies** by setting up new GEPs and/or revising previous ones and caused **spillover effects on organisations not affected by the GEP eligibility criterion**, such as private research-funding organisations, some of which voluntarily implemented GEPs. At the EU level, the **GEP eligibility criterion established a shared definition of a GEP**, thus guiding national and institutional efforts consistently and meaningfully, and also facilitated access to tools and mutual learning.



Research and
Innovation

At the **national level**, policies that support the development and implementation of GEPs are critical in providing a foundation that **enables, and indeed compels, institutions to sustain efforts to promote gender equality and inclusiveness** in R&I. In the absence of such policies, institutions rarely introduce relevant measures on their own initiative. Policy and legal frameworks that require the implementation of GEPs – rather than just making recommendations – and impose sanctions for non-compliance result in more widespread GEP adoption. To have a sustainable and extensive impact on GEP development and implementation, and to avoid GEP implementation becoming a box-ticking exercise, policies should **include elements that inspire long-term commitment**, such as requiring annual recertification or establishing a tiered system to reward progress.

Notwithstanding the progress made over the past decade, **further actions are needed**, such as increased support for the development of GEPs that are inclusive to inequalities that intersect with gender, the establishment of robust monitoring frameworks and continued provision of dedicated resources, support tools and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

The approach to **inclusive gender equality** in R&I proposed by the European Commission in the framework of the new ERA ‘acknowledges that other characteristics such as racial and ethnic origin, disability, socioeconomic background or sexual orientation interact and can reinforce intersectional and specific forms of discrimination that may limit the impact of measures focused only on one characteristic’ ⁽¹⁾.

In the new ERA, the design, implementation and monitoring of **inclusive GEPs** faces a variety of **challenges**, including:

- limited understanding of inclusive approaches to gender equality and GEPs
- limited understanding of how general gender equality principles could be transformed into concrete actions
- securing buy-in from key stakeholders at the right time in the process
- limited robust, systematically collected and disaggregated data that take into account intersectional aspects
- insufficient financial, human and organisational resources, or resources lacking sustainability
- limited commitment to achieving inclusive GEP objectives from the top-level leadership of R&I institutions and to accountability for outcomes
- fragmented actions supporting inclusive GEP objectives, lacking sustained political and policy support



1 European Commission (2022), 'Towards inclusive gender equality in research and innovation', Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (https://apre.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/KI0122349ENN_en.pdf).

Key enabling factors for the effective implementation of gender equality plans in research and innovation institutions and organisations

A number of factors enable the effective implementation of GEPs at the national and institutional levels in the R&I sector:

EU and national levels

- well-developed legal, institutional and policy framework that provides a set of favourable conditions supporting GEP implementation, confers symbolic legitimacy and creates a legal obligation to set up strategies to improve gender equality
- policy dialogue, coordination and consensus leading to a shared and accepted definition of a GEP and its requirements
- availability of targeted financial and capacity-building support, as well as sustained policy exchange and mutual learning opportunities
- large-scale awareness-raising activities across the whole sector
- establishing and developing data collection and monitoring systems that support institutions in implementing effective GEPs
- raising awareness of pre-existing effective initiatives that display the benefits of GEP implementation in R&I as strong incentives for GEP uptake

Institutional level

- introducing evidence-based approaches to drive an accurate understanding of needs relating to (inclusive) gender equality, to inform the development and implementation of GEPs
- embedding gender equality principles and GEPs in institutional policies, governance structures, and communication and management activities
- establishing dedicated structures responsible for GEP implementation or sustainably embedding GEPs into existing governance structures
- presence of sufficient resources and gender expertise to ensure that institutions are prepared for the bureaucratic challenges entailed in GEP development and implementation
- engaging different types of stakeholders in GEP implementation (from high-level decision-makers to human resources staff, equality/diversity officers, faculty members and students)
- development of both internal and external networks, which support the sharing of best practices
- visible and lasting commitment from senior leadership, particularly in contexts where there are cultural barriers or less advanced national policy frameworks on gender equality

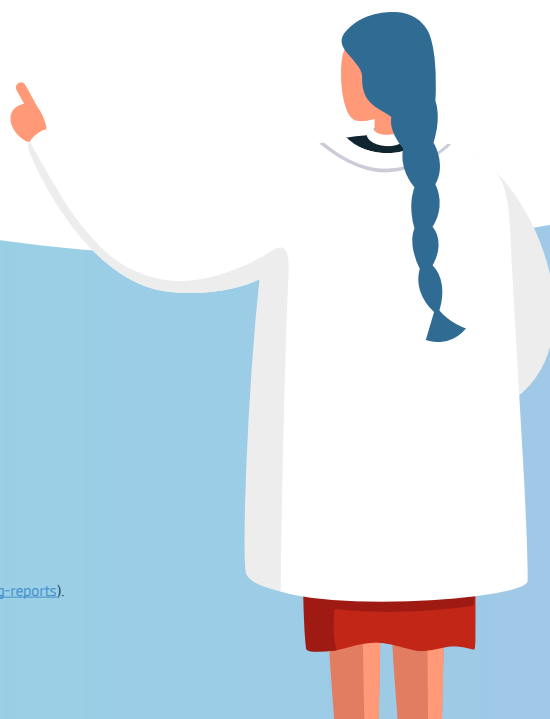
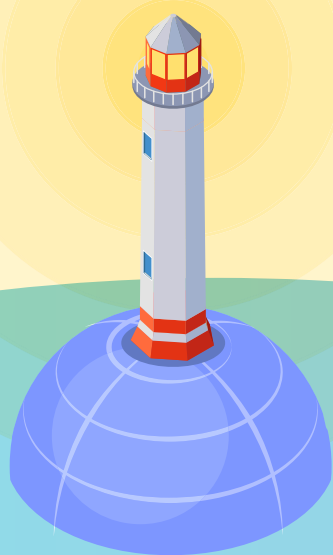


Monitoring frameworks for tracking the progress of gender equality in research and innovation

The importance of a monitoring framework dedicated to measuring gender equality and the impact of GEPs in R&I is twofold. Firstly, **the proper development of a GEP entails the use of robust, representative data**. Secondly, consistently collected, comparable data allow for **the evaluation of GEP implementation and progress** over time. EU- and international-level sources can provide only limited insights on how GEPs are implemented and on their impact, as well as insights into topics such as gender-based violence and intersecting forms of discrimination. The study revealed the following:

- There has been **progress on the number of countries regularly collecting data on gender equality in the R&I sector at the national level**. However, **there are inconsistencies across countries** in how indicators are measured and what information is collected.
- The limited data collection from EU-funded projects and initiatives provides a **snapshot of the situation at a given moment in time** and, while valuable, quickly becomes out of date.
- **The lack of data regarding gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, and diversity characteristics** is pervasive and problematic.
- Awareness and understanding of the **complex intersections between gender and other characteristics** and their outcomes for individuals in R&I is still limited, despite progress in recent years.

To address these data gaps, **there is a need to agree on a common set of EU-level indicators that are endorsed by Member States and associated countries**. The new **ERA Monitoring Mechanism** will be updated to assess progress towards 2022–2024 ERA policy agenda goals and will also assess progress in terms of ERA Action 5: ‘Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness’. The first EU- and national-level ERA monitoring reports, however, already provide some insights on progress across the European R&I system ⁽²⁾.



² See the European Research Area Platform for the reports (<https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/era-monitoring-reports>).

Impact of gender equality plans and related policies on research and innovation

The evidence base on the **impact of GEPs on gender equality** in R&I is still limited. Furthermore, it is difficult to identify changes that have resulted solely from GEP implementation, as, in many instances, these occurred at the same time as broader social or policy changes. Nevertheless, **the study identified that GEPs have led to a number of positive outcomes on gender equality in institutions:**

- improved data collection on gender equality indicators such as women's representation and increased gender mainstreaming efforts
- improved work–life balance among personnel
- greater coverage of the topic of gender in research content
- improved labour and working conditions for women and improvements in the hiring, career progression and representation of women in senior and leadership positions
- improved knowledge creation, dissemination and capacity building
- development of more equal organisational cultures, positive institutional and structural changes and improved international collaboration
- indications of reduced rates of sexual harassment, discrimination and gender stereotyping

However, the breadth of the transformation and the level of impact depends mainly on the institution and on the GEP implemented, and also on the existence of a robust monitoring framework that can capture change.

In the R&I sector overall, there is evidence that suggests a number of **positive outcomes on R&I quality, efficiency and productivity** following GEP adoption, such as the increased productivity of an institution, which may in turn increase its visibility and prestige; improved management and teamwork; enhanced research production and research innovation; and the establishment of national and international networks.

The benefits of GEPs cannot be overstated, as – according to the European Institute for Gender Equality – it is expected that **closing the gender gap in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics alone would increase employment in the sector by around 1 million and increase gross domestic product at the EU level** ⁽³⁾.

Conclusion

This study found little evidence of potentially negative impacts. What was identified in the research was that **it is primarily women who take responsibility for the development and implementation of GEPs**, which places an additional burden on women that may reduce the time that they have available for their research or academic work. The second negative consequence identified was **a limited focus on other vulnerable groups**. This demonstrates the need to place **greater emphasis on the development of inclusive GEPs** (a priority action in the new ERA) that incorporate measures to support individuals from various disadvantaged groups, particularly those who face compounded inequalities.

³ European Institute for Gender Equality (2017), 'Economic benefits of gender equality in the EU: How gender equality in STEM education leads to economic growth', Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/economic-benefits-gender-equality-eu-how-gender-equality-stem-education-leads-economic-growth/>).

