

A NEW ERA FOR GEPS: NATIONAL LEVEL MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Introduction

The objective of this policy brief, aimed at national authorities (NA)¹ is to provide sustainable and effective recommendations for the national monitoring and evaluation of gender equality plan (GEP) implementation. These recommendations reflect current practices and lessons learned in the monitoring and evaluation of inclusive gender equality and structural change initiatives. Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) may also find some of the recommendations applicable to their own work. As key actors within the European Research Area (ERA), national authorities should aim to know the extent to which the Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and RFOs under their remit have (1) adopted a GEP, (2) implemented a GEP and (3) if these GEPs support structural change at institutional level. National authorities also play a central role in developing a monitoring and evaluation culture at national level among the institutions under their remit.

This brief is one of three to support the implementation of GEPs as the main policy instrument in the ERA to implement institutional and cultural changes to advance gender equality. These policy briefs underline the need of having GEPs as an eligibility criterion, in higher education, in Horizon Europe and also in advancing the development of Framework Programme 10 (FP10). In the context of this brief, monitoring is a continuous process of data collection and subsequent analysis. As a second step and based on monitoring, evaluation seeks to understand if the outcomes and outputs of a GEP are having the impact expected by comparing the outputs with the initial outlined aims and

1 | We use the terms national and national authorities throughout, but this policy brief also addresses regional authorities and other bodies and their responsibility in advancing gender equality and monitoring and evaluating GEPs. It is also recognised that there are differing national structures for R&I and gender equality across Member States.

objectives. The purpose then, of monitoring and evaluating GEPs at national level, is to have an overview of GEP implementation, identify gaps where intervention might be needed and to also analyse and use the collected data to drive forward successful implementation. By understanding how institutional GEPs are progressing, NAs can create a culture for the successful monitoring and evaluation of GEPs.

Work carried out by the GENDERACTIONplus Policy Community of Practice has highlighted that GEP monitoring and evaluation by NA in many member states (MS) and associated countries (AC) is hindered by structural and resource constraints i.e. lack of expertise, lack of strong indicators and poor data systems. Efforts to monitor GEPs by national authorities remain inconsistent and fragmented, with some countries relying on ad hoc studies rather than systemic solutions. There also remains the risk of backsliding in gender equality.

The need for greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluation

This policy brief is backgrounded by the 2021 [Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation \(R&I\)](#) which advocates for using existing and newly developed tools, such as GEPs, to facilitate systemic institutional change and remove institutional barriers. This also supports active and participative monitoring and evaluation to ensure continuous improvement. In alignment with the Ljubljana Declaration, [the Pact on R&I in Europe](#) underlines priorities for joint action in support of the ERA and includes a provision to monitor and evaluate national gender equality policies and plans in R&I. The four inter-linked outcome deliverables of [Action 5 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022–2024](#) reflect the key priorities of the Pact. These actions and outcomes outline the commitments made by the EU to support gender equality initiatives in R&I, in particular supporting monitoring and evaluation at all levels.

GENDERACTIONplus has published [guidance on the establishment of GEP monitoring systems at national level](#) (D6.2) and [guidance on establishment of evaluation frameworks at national level](#) (D6.3). Both reports highlight the need to ensure that monitoring and evaluation are integral parts of professional GEP implementation by institutions, that greater emphasis should be placed on the European Commission (EC) of the importance of monitoring and evaluation of GEPs and that dedicated resources and mutual learning are key to successful monitoring and evaluation. In D6.3, GENDERACTIONplus calls on MSs to take an active role in advancing the goals of the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 at a national level. To support this, the reports (D6.2 and D6.3) also call on the EC to provide guidance for national authorities and responsible bodies in developing strong approaches to national level monitoring and evaluation that are reflective of country-specific contexts. This guidance should also provide a consistent baseline for benchmarking across the ERA in alignment with the mandatory building blocks defined in the General Annexes of Horizon Europe. This guidance should be accompanied by training/instructions for national authorities.

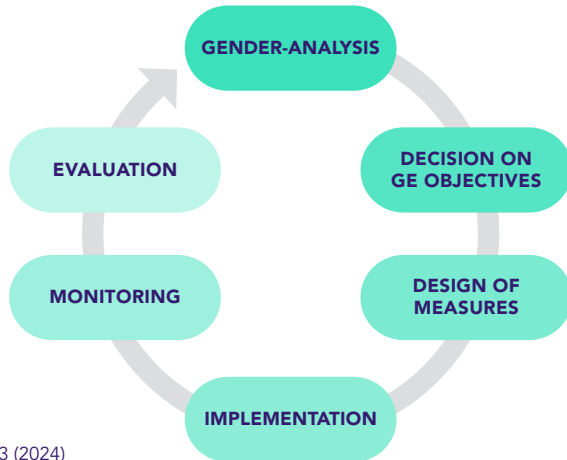
Pathways to monitoring and evaluation

GENDERACTIONplus survey findings demonstrate that the Horizon Europe GEP eligibility criterion has had a catalytic effect on gender equality work at national level, including an increase in the number of RPOs with a GEP. Accordingly, the Horizon Europe process-related requirements and recommended thematic areas for GEPs are important building blocks to underpin the successful and sustainable adoption of monitoring and evaluation.² The survey also found that in some MS, RFOs played a role in the implementation of national GEP requirements and encouraged RPOs to adopt GEPs. In some MS, RFOs collect data relating to GEPs and collaborate with national authorities. There is a need for continued reflection and consideration of the role of RFOs in GEP implementation. National authorities and RFOs should set the Horizon Europe requirements as the minimum standard for GEPs in their respective countries and R&I communities, which would create increased opportunity to benchmark effectively across the ERA. National authorities should call on the EC to ensure that these three levels (institutional, national and ERA) are strongly aligned in order to better support the collective responsibility at these three levels for monitoring and evaluation of GEP implementation.

As highlighted by GENDERACTIONplus survey findings, widening countries are less likely to have a national requirement for institutional GEPs. Additionally, the data demonstrate that countries with a national requirement in place are not taking a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation of GEPs. As such, the steps in a successful policy cycle outlined in the figure below may be incomplete.

Figure 1

Complete cycle for the development and implementation of gender equality policies



Source: Wroblewski, Angela D6.3 (2024)

² | [Horizon Europe GEP requirements.](#)

While national level monitoring and evaluation are focused on the adoption, implementation and impact of GEPs, they are not intended to assess the merit of individual institutional GEPs or the performance of individual institutions in relation to gender equality. However, where a lack of progress or considerable challenges are identified by an institution through the monitoring and evaluation process, national authorities can seek to put measures in place to support institutions such as strategic advice or capacity building measures.

National authorities can adapt existing practices and learnings in the development of national monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Lessons learned from peer evaluation can be useful in providing valuable insight and space for mutual learning. A number of EC funded projects have developed tools and methodologies for monitoring and/or evaluation of gender equality initiatives at institutional level. One such project is CASPER, whose aim was to assess the feasibility of introducing an award and/or certification system on gender equality in research and higher education institutions in Europe. It should be noted that GENDERACTIONplus has [called on the EC](#) to follow up on the validated scenarios and policy recommendations of the CASPER project. The impact driver model, created in CASPER, allows for comparison across RPOs by using specific indicators. The outcome allows for self-assessment, capacity building and insights into the change process. This impact driver model provides a template of indicators which recognise differing contexts and stages of GEP implementation. While the model is targeted at the institutional level, national authorities can also make use of this model for national monitoring purposes by encouraging RPOs to use the model.

Recommendations

- **Greater emphasis must be placed by NAs on the importance of monitoring and evaluation of GEPs.** As a first step, NA should communicate the purpose of monitoring and evaluation and set clear minimum standards for GEPs, aligned with the Horizon Europe requirements and recommended thematic areas. This will ensure that RPOs under their remit have a GEP that meets both national and European requirements and can be effectively monitored across the institutional, national and ERA levels.
- **NAs should continue to support institutions under their remit to conduct monitoring and evaluation of institutional GEPs.** NAs should provide RPOs with the required financial resources to enable capacity building, expertise and access to learning opportunities to support RPOs to effectively monitor and evaluate their institutional GEPs.
- **NAs should engage the leadership of institutions under their remit for advancing GEP implementation.** NAs can leverage their direct relationship with senior management to underline the leadership responsibility for monitoring and evaluation, and to ensure that change agents within the RPO are supported in this task.
- **NAs should develop a national monitoring system to establish that GEPs are being implemented, and targets are being met.** This system should include potential for evaluation pathways.
- **NAs should seek to develop a national evaluation framework.** This will be used to assess if GEPs are having the intended effects on advancing gender equality. Guidance suggested in GENDERACTIONplus D6.3 could be adapted to country specific contexts.

- **NAs should implement existing tools and methodologies for monitoring and evaluation and make relevant adjustments for the national context.** This should include how best to ensure participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation through participatory work on the development of monitoring indicators as early as possible in the process.
- **NAs should publish regular monitoring reports.** These should include results of national monitoring, highlight promising practices as well as areas of common challenge and include data on institutions that have a GEP in place. This encourages transparency but also facilitates mutual learning across countries.
- **NAs should provide guidance on intersectional approaches** to equality work that are tailored to their national context and include consultation with underrepresented groups. While work on intersectional approaches to gender equality may be at an early stage, monitoring and evaluation should be taken into account when designing initiatives to address intersectional inequalities.
- **NAs and RFOs should seek to identify gender equality monitoring and evaluation expertise in their respective country or seek to address skill gaps through capacity building and comprehensive training.** Consideration should be given on how to further build this capacity through mutual learning, peer evaluation systems and the promotion of common ERA wide standards for monitoring and evaluation.

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