

# A NEW ERA FOR GEPS: CHALLENGES FOR GENDER EQUALITY PRACTITIONERS

## Introduction

The success of gender equality plans (GEPs) depends on many factors: institutional buy-in, senior management support, human and financial resources as well as the organisational and structural context in which the GEP is being implemented. Within this context, gender equality practitioners are key agents of change tasked with the continuous work of implementing the GEP in their institutions. This policy brief offers recommendations to national authorities and the European Commission (EC) that highlight not only the critical role of the work that gender equality practitioners undertake in GEP implementation, but also the need to provide continuous support in various guises to ensure this work continues and progresses. The recommendations set out below reflect stakeholder discussions with gender equality practitioners across Europe.

National authorities, as key actors within the European Research Area (ERA), should aim to know the extent to which the Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) under their remit have (1) adopted a GEP, (2) implemented a GEP and (3) if these GEPs support structural change at institutional level. This should encompass an understanding of how this work is being completed and the barriers that prevent GEP implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, there can be a lack of understanding of what resources are available for the implementation of the GEP (in terms of staff time, expertise and budgets), but also the conditions under which gender equality practitioners work when implementing a GEP (e.g. do they work alone or in teams, where in the organisation are they located, and which challenges they face).

National authorities also play a central role in developing a monitoring and evaluation culture at national level among the institutions under their remit. Similarly, requirements, policies and guidance introduced by the EC will have a cascading effect and allow for effective comparison across the ERA. As such, the recommendations of this brief are aimed at national authorities and the EC in order to better link all three levels – institutional, national and ERA. Effective connection between all three levels is needed to contribute to successful GEP implementation.

This brief is one of three that support GEPs as the main policy instrument in the ERA to implement institutional and cultural changes to advance gender equality. These policy briefs underline the importance of GEPs as an eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe, especially in advancing the development of Framework Programme 10 (FP10). The Warsaw Declaration (2025) endorsed by all 27 EU member states, stresses the need to continue “empowering women and underrepresented groups in R&I”.<sup>1</sup> The first policy brief ([A New ERA for GEPs: An Active Role for the European Commission](#)) and the second policy brief ([A New Era for GEPs: National Level Monitoring and Evaluation](#)) define monitoring and evaluation in this context.

GENDERACTIONplus outlines the importance of institutional monitoring and evaluation and the role of gender equality practitioners in making the required interventions, collecting and analysing the data and identifying how to progress in the context of their own institutions and experience.

## Importance of gender equality practitioners as change agents

Gender equality practitioners in institutions are crucial change agents in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating GEPs. They bring specialised skill sets to this work. While institutional change can be understood differently depending on context, culture and policy, gender equality practitioners have a key role in stakeholder mobilisation and engagement, policy development and organisational culture to support institutional change through GEPs. However, these gender equality practitioners face resistances when carrying out their work hence these policies also need to incorporate support for change agents.

## Key feedback from Gender Equality Practitioners

In preparing these recommendations, feedback was gathered from 19 gender equality practitioners from 14 countries. Practitioners agreed that improved support for change agents in institutions is a key next step in advancing gender equality in the ERA, especially in a period where there is increasing de-prioritisation of gender equality work. Practitioners emphasised the importance of national authorities and national frameworks in ensuring institutions are accountable for advancing gender equality. It is critical that national and EU policies underline the responsibility for institutional change and mainstreaming, to avoid siloing gender equality work and gender equality practitioners. National authorities and the European Commission should work in collaboration with institutions to support GEP implementation, promote monitoring and evaluation and ensure that all three levels (institutional, national and ERA) are connected. As far as possible, national authorities and the EC should provide clarity for gender equality practitioners on how national and European requirements are aligned. Practitioners also agreed that a renewed focus on gender equality and GEPs is essential for FP10.

---

<sup>1</sup> | [Warsaw Declaration](#)

- **Areas of challenge:** While the GEP eligibility criterion has had a positive effect on national systems, persistent challenges remain for practitioners. Key among these is a lack of institutional support and a lack of necessary resources in relation to implementing GEP. Other challenges include how to effectively quantify and measure the impact of gender equality actions. There is a recognised need to retain a focus on women in research and innovation while also incorporating broader equality, diversity and inclusion goals and intersectional approaches. There is a need for greater understanding of how to implement, monitor and evaluate intersectional approaches at both the institutional and national levels and a need for greater clarity and guidance from the European Commission. There is also a need to move beyond the focus of achieving gender balance in research teams to fully incorporating inclusive gender analysis in research and innovation content.
- **Framework Programme 10:** Practitioners welcomed the introduction of the Horizon Europe GEP eligibility criterion, noting the significant impact it has had on national systems, including those where the GEP eligibility criterion existed prior. It was noted that the Horizon Europe criterion has assisted in elevating GEPs as a strategic institutional document. The Horizon Europe requirements and recommended areas have provided a common structure for GEPs and demonstrate the breadth of gender equality work. Practitioners recommended that renewed focus be placed on gender equality in FP10 and agreed there is strong potential to make the recommended areas mandatory. The Horizon Europe GEP eligibility criterion has demonstrated that this focus at the European level ensures that gender equality is prioritised on the national agenda.
- **Key enablers of progress:** It was noted that collective support from peers is important for building communities of practice at the national level. GEPs are most effective when there the workload is distributed and there is collective institutional responsibility for implementation, in combination with accountability from institutional leadership. Consequently, there is a need for more formal recognition of this work, considering that many are doing gender equality work outside their expected day to day duties. Improving capacity building by providing access to expertise and training was also highlighted as a key enabler of progress.

## Recommendations

National authorities and the EC should utilise the potential for cascading influence to promote a supportive system for gender equality practitioners.

- The European Commission should make the Horizon Europe recommended areas<sup>2</sup> for GEPs mandatory in FP10 and require applicants to provide concrete information on the resources allocated to GEP implementation, in line with the GEP eligibility criterion.

---

2 | [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation\\_en#gender-equality-plans-as-an-eligibility-criterion-in-horizon-europe](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en#gender-equality-plans-as-an-eligibility-criterion-in-horizon-europe)

- The European Commission should establish an ERA-wide mutual learning forum for gender equality practitioners.
- The European Commission should provide support to gender equality practitioners and access to expertise in gender equality through the Gender Equality Competence Facility.
- National authorities should reinforce to RPOs under their remit the need to commit sufficient institutional resources to advance inclusive gender equality and to support gender equality practitioners in their work.
- National authorities should consider running a capacity building funding scheme to encourage innovative approaches to addressing gender inequality in RPOs under their remit.
- National authorities should continue to support RPOs under their remit to conduct monitoring and evaluation of GEPs.
- National authorities should encourage and facilitate mutual learning and communities of practice among gender equality practitioners at the national level. This could include knowledge sharing on competencies for gender equality practitioners in relation to implementation, monitoring and evaluation of GEPs
- To promote the mainstreaming of gender equality and recognition of this work, national authorities should reinforce to RPOs under their remit the need to incorporate gender equality work into staff performance evaluations.
- To promote and protect the wellbeing and mental health of gender equality practitioners and prevent burnout, national authorities should advocate for institutions to recognise the burden of gender equality work and for gender equality practitioners to receive support from their institution such as supervision.

## References

Campanini Vilhena, F. (2024) *Gender Equality Plans and Institutional Change: Pathways for Substantial and Sustainable Outcomes*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Deusto.

Council of the European Union: Council Conclusions on the New ERA, 13567/20, 2020, retrieved 12 March 2025 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13567-2020-INIT/en/pdf>.

Council of the European Union: Council recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, 13701/21, 2021, retrieved 12 March 2025 [https://era.gv.at/public/documents/4620/Pact\\_for\\_RI\\_26112021\\_EN.pdf](https://era.gv.at/public/documents/4620/Pact_for_RI_26112021_EN.pdf).

Council of the European Union, Virtual Conference "Deepening the ERA Through Gender Equality" (8-9 July 2021) and Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation, 12044/21, 2021, retrieved 12 March 2025 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12044-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

Council of the European Union: Warsaw declaration, retrieved 3 April 2025 [https://polish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/r5fa13v5/warsaw-declaration\\_final.pdf](https://polish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/r5fa13v5/warsaw-declaration_final.pdf).

European Commission: Gender equality in research and innovation, 2020, retrieved 12 March 2025 [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en)

European Commission: European research area policy agenda, 2021, retrieved 12 March 2025 [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec\\_rtd\\_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf).

European Commission: Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021 – 2022 General Annexes, 2022, retrieved 12 March 2025 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021-2022/wp-13-general-annexes\\_horizon-2021-2022\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021-2022/wp-13-general-annexes_horizon-2021-2022_en.pdf).

Rothwell, Jennie; Young, Julie Anne, GENDERACTIONplus D6.2 Guidance on establishment of gender equality plan monitoring systems at national authority level, 2024, retrieved 12 March 2025 [https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GENDERACTIONplus\\_D6.2\\_Guidance-on-establishment-of-GEP-monitoring-systems.pdf](https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GENDERACTIONplus_D6.2_Guidance-on-establishment-of-GEP-monitoring-systems.pdf).

Rothwell, Jennie; Wroblewski, Angela; Young, Julie Anne, GENDERACTIONplus D6.3 GEP impact evaluation system, 2024, retrieved 12 March 2025 [https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/GENDERACTIONplus\\_D6.3\\_GEP-impact-evaluation-system.pdf](https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/GENDERACTIONplus_D6.3_GEP-impact-evaluation-system.pdf).

## **CONTACT**

### **GENDERACTIONplus Coordinator**

Marcela Linková, PhD  
Centre for Gender and Science  
Institute of Sociology  
Czech Academy of Sciences  
Jilská 1  
110 00 Prague 1  
Czech Republic  
web: [genderaction.eu](http://genderaction.eu)  
email: [info@genderaction.eu](mailto:info@genderaction.eu)



GENDERACTIONplus is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101058093.

Views and opinions expressed here are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.