

## Gender Equality Plans in Horizon Europe

The move from Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe is 'an evolution, not a revolution', as the European Commission's slogan states. Plans for the new framework programme were first presented by former Commissioner for Research Carlos Moedas, and Director-General for research and innovation Jean-Eric Paquet. The slogan comes from the LAB-FAB-APP report, also called the Lamy report, which set the scene for Horizon Europe.

While the slogan is true, it is also crucial to remember that important changes have been made in the rules and participation requirements for Horizon Europe that organisations need to be aware of and adapt to in the coming year. One of these changes is that the beneficiaries of the new FP are required to have a Gender Equality Plan – the plans will become mandatory for public organisations, research organisations and higher education establishments starting from the 2022 calls onwards. It is therefore important that organisations start to prepare as early as in 2021. This way they can be ready when the requirement is enforced.

Gender equality has an important place in the policies of the European Commission. With the new framework programme, this is reaffirmed, and new regulations will be put in place to ensure wider uptake across the EU. The three objectives that were set back in 2012 in the ERA Communication framework remain the same, and will be reinforced through a more unified approach. These objectives were gender equality in scientific careers; gender balance in decision-making; and integration of the gender dimension into the content of research and innovation.

The EC has thus proposed to include a new eligibility criterion that applies to public bodies, research organisations and higher education establishments from EU Member States and Associated Countries. This criterion states that these organisations will need to have a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in place at least by the time of concluding a Grant Agreement following the calls for proposals published in 2022. The application forms may include a self-declaration question on GEP in 2021 as well. The GEP must have the following process-related elements:

- **Publication:** a formal document signed by the top management, published on the institution's website and widely disseminated within the institution.
- **Dedicated resources:** committing resources and gender expertise to implement it. Earmarked funding could be available for staff positions such as Equality Officers or Gender Equality Teams, or organisations may reserve the working hours of existing staff (academic, management, HR) for equality work.
- **Data collection and monitoring:** disaggregated sex/gender data on personnel (and students for the establishments concerned) across all staff categories, and annual reporting on gender imbalances based on the indicators; comprehensive evaluation approach.
- **Training:** awareness raising/training on gender equality and unconscious gender bias for staff and decision-makers; information and dissemination material, workshops or working groups dedicated to specific topics.

Content-wise, these are the areas that should be covered by GEPs:

- **Work-life balance and organisational culture.**  
Examples: parental leave policies, flexible worktime arrangements.
- **Gender balance in leadership and decision-making.**  
Examples: introducing gender quotas for evaluation panels or decision-making bodies.
- **Gender equality in recruitment and career progression.**  
Examples: unconscious bias training for HR managers, inclusive language for job vacancies, fair evaluation for employees.
- **Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content.**  
Example: get inspiration from the case studies and methods developed by the EC ["Gendered innovations" Expert Group](#).
- **Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.**  
Example: having in place a code of conduct or an intervention protocol in case of complaints.

Fortunately, organisations do not have to invent these plans from scratch. Excellent resources and tools have been developed by the projects funded under the “Science with and for Society” part of Horizon 2020. For example, the [GEAR action toolbox](#) provides step-by-step advice from getting started, performing an analysis, setting up the GEP, implementing the plan, monitoring and evaluating it, and the following steps to promote gender equality in the organisation.

The EC also has a plan to launch a pilot GEP knowledge and support facility to develop guidance, online trainings, mutual learning workshops, and establish a network of national contact points on the GEPs.

To be up to date on the latest news on gender equality strategy, follow the EC's website on [gender equality in research and innovation](#). The GEPs will not be the only gender mainstreaming measure in Horizon Europe: gender will be set as a cross-cutting priority, and is also stated as a specific issue in the first [strategic plan](#) adopted by the EC on 15 March.



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This article is based on the Bridge2HE training: Introducing Gender Issues and the Gender Equality Plan in Horizon Europe. The author would like to thank Mina Stareva, DG RTD, for her excellent presentation. Any mistakes are the author's own.