



EQUAL4EUROPE

GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

Best practices in adopting effective, impactful, and sustainable GEP

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AB	Advisory Board
CA	Consortium Agreement
DoA	Description of Action
EC	European Commission
EC-GA	Grant Agreement
EQUAL4EUROPE	Gender Equality Standards for AHMSSBL institutions throughout Europe
ESG	Executive Steering Group
CO	Project Coordinator
PM	Project Manager
WP	Work Package

1. INTRODUCTION

The following report contains **best practices and recommendations for adopting and implementing effective, impactful and sustainable Gender Equality Plans in research institutions.**

The EQUAL4EUROPE consortium consists of six partner universities with a focus on Arts, Humanities, Medicine, Social Sciences, Business, and Law (AHMSSBL) (Esade, ESMT, IEDC, INSEAD, RSM and UNIBA), one accreditation organization (EFMD) and one independent monitoring organisation (Nehem). The EQUAL4EUROPE project is financed by the European Commission which promotes research and innovation on gender equality through the Horizon 2020 programme.

The main expected impact of the **EQUAL4EUROPE project** is to achieve long-term sustainable institutional change through the adoption and implementation of Gender Equality Plans in the six performing research institutions, by developing specific gender equality measures for Arts, Humanities, Medicine, Social Sciences, Business, and Law (AHMSSBL) research institutions in the areas of (i) removing barriers to recruitment, retention and career progression of female researchers, (ii) addressing gender imbalances in decision-making bodies and processes, (iii) integrating the gender perspective in research and in innovation content and (iv) raising awareness and, in essence, mainstreaming gender equality.

The report **draws on the experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium** in adopting and implementing Gender Equality Plans in the six research institutions and **identifies best practices and recommendations for adopting and implementing effective, impactful and sustainable Gender Equality Plans.** In this sense, this report has been elaborated using the feedback provided by the EQUAL4EUROPE partners on their experience with the adoption and implementation of Gender Equality Plans in their institutions (see Annex for a template for data collection).

It is important to note, however, that the following are just recommendations or best practices identified based on the particular experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium. Although the aim of this report is to share the knowledge derived from this experience, there is no guarantee that these recommendations or best practices will be successful in other settings or contexts. **Sadly, when it comes to gender equality - and other world-wide social challenges - there are no magic formulas nor effective-guaranteed measures.**

The report is structured in **five sections**. The first section focuses on the effectiveness and impact of Gender Equality Plans. Drawing from the experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium, this first section identifies which types of gender equality measures have resulted most effective and which have not. The second section focuses on challenges and resistances that occur when adopting and implementing Gender Equality Plans. Using as a starting point the report [Engaging stakeholders and tackling resistances to mainstream gender equality in AHMSSBL research institutions](#) adopted by the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium in 2021, this section presents specific strategies and best practices to engage with relevant stakeholders as a way to overcome the different challenges and resistances that occur when implementing gender equality measures. The third section of the report focuses on the sustainability of the Gender Equality Plans and, using the experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium, includes recommendations of measures to guarantee the sustainability of gender equality measures and to raise awareness on gender equality. The experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE is that raising awareness on gender equality is the best strategy to guarantee the effectiveness and sustainability of gender equality measures. Finally, the report finalises with a section dedicated to the main conclusions and an Annex with a Template for data collection.

2. EFFECTIVE AND IMPACTFUL GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

The first section of the report focuses on the **effectiveness and impact of Gender Equality Plans**.

The **experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium** in adopting and implementing Gender Equality Plans in the different research institutions has generated interesting knowledge on the measures and processes that are most effective and impactful.

In this sense, drawing from the experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium, this first section identifies which **types of gender equality measures have resulted most effective and impactful** and which, on the contrary, have had less impact and resulted in being less effective.

As mentioned above, it is important to note that the following are just recommendations or best practices identified based on the particular experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium; there is no guarantee that they will be successful in other settings or contexts. Furthermore, the measures that have been identified as less effective and impactful by the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium can be, on the contrary, absolutely successful in other settings.

2.1 BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON EFFECTIVE AND IMPACTFUL GENDER EQUALITY MEASURES

Drawing on the feedback provided by the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium partners on their experience with the adoption and implementation of Gender Equality Plans in their institutions, the **gender equality measures that have resulted to be most effective and impactful** are the ones that have been adopted or designed according to the following criteria:

- **Measures with the direct and explicit endorsement of high management.** Measures that benefit from the direct and explicit endorsement of high management are usually most effective and impactful. Although there can be other forms of challenges and resistances, the endorsement of high management guarantees that these measures will be taken seriously within the institution and effectively implemented.
- **Measures that translate into formal institutional policies.** The greater impact and effectiveness of these gender equality measures that translate into a formal institutional policy can be explained by the existence of a tangible outcome that individuals can refer to, also in the long-term. Also, given that the formal policy requires institutional approval, these measures benefit from an institutional endorsement and backing from key stakeholders.
- **Measures aligned with the institution's mission or internal strategy.** When gender equality measures are aligned with the institution's mission or internal strategy, there is greater potential for their effectiveness, since their objective is at the core of the institution's mission and will fall within its action plan.
- **Legally binding measures or eligibility criteria for accessing funding.** Measures that are legally binding or necessary to access funding are very effective in terms of implementation, given that institutions have a strong incentive to adopt and implement such measures so as to comply with current regulations or to be able to apply for funding.
 - For example, the Horizon Europe eligibility criteria has great potential to be followed by research institutions, given their interest in continuing to apply for research funds.

- **Work-life balance measures.** Work-life balance measures are proven to be effective in its implementation. Given the fact that these measures, once approved, are usually directly applicable and workers can directly access them without the need of further develop a policy or a specific process, they are usually effectively implemented. Furthermore, since work-life balance measures are usually linked with employees' well-being, there are few resistances in their implementation.
 - Measures that benefited employees the most have been measures related with paternity or family-related leaves, flexible work arrangements, etc. Nevertheless, measures aimed at introducing flexible work arrangements are generally more difficult to implement, given the multiple forms of flexible work arrangements and the need to combine workers' work-life balance needs with the organisational needs of the institution (for example, classes schedules).
- **Measures and policies related to Human Resources.** In line with the above, specific measures and policies related to Human Resources have shown to be more effective in terms of their adoption and implementation, rather than larger strategic matters.
 - For example, measures to combat the gender pay gap or to introduce better maternity and/or paternity leave are quick and relatively effective measures to introduce, mostly within the range of work that the Human Resources Department is already active in.
- **Promoting a gender equality perspective in research and teaching.** Although increasing gender awareness in teaching and research is a long journey that requires further and continuous efforts, organising workshops, conferences, and trainings promoting gender-sensitive research and teaching resulted, in many institutions, a feasible and generally welcome activity and contribute to create a teaching and esearch environment more sensible to gender equality issues.
 - For example, regarding case studies used in educational programmes have proven to be relatively effective to implement in high education institutions.
- **Gender-based violence, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour measures and procedures.** Measures regarding gender-based violence, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour have also proven to be especially effective and impactful. Given the high awareness nowadays on the need to adopt specific measures to prevent gender-based violence, also in research institutions, institutions generally take this matter seriously and these measures are effectively implemented.

2.2 CHALLENGES FOR ADOPTING EFFECTIVE AND IMPACTFUL GENDER EQUALITY MEASURES

Despite the efforts carried out by the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium in the effective implementation of Gender Equality Plans in the six performing research institutions, there are **measures that have proven to be less impactful and resulted in being less effective.**

In this sense, drawing from the EQUAL4EUROPE project experience, the gender equality measures that resulted less impactful and effective are the ones that have been adopted or designed according to the following criteria:

- **Measures that aim at changing people's mindset.** It is especially difficult to observe a specific impact of measures aimed at changing people's mindset, given that they are long-term and aim at challenging people's preexisting knowledge, opinions or prejudices regarding a situation. These measures can be often

misinterpreted and criticised, as they can be perceived as an “enforcement of gender ideology” that goes against the “academic freedom” and what is considered to be a meritocratic and objective research environment.

- For example, although workshops on gender bias are essential and necessary, its results are long-term and harder to measure in the short-term. Similarly, measures aiming at introducing gender-sensitive language are also sometimes more difficult to implement, especially in gendered languages. Finally, measures aiming at introducing quotas also find important resistances. Although there are many people in favour, in general quotas are perceived as unfair and prefer other gender equality measures.
- **Long-term measures.** Although it does not mean that long-term measures are not effective nor necessary, their temporary nature makes that their impact and effects are not visible in the short-term. It is important, however, to not be discouraged for the absence of results in the short-term.
 - For example, the promotion of gender equality in research is a measure with a long-term impact and, as a result, it is perceived as less effective in the short-term. Similarly, measures related to increasing the presence of women in faculty or research positions are also difficult to implement, because they require a long period of time for their impact and results to be visible and measurable. Increasing the presence of women in decision-making bodies and processes are also long-term measures, since vacancies in decision-making bodies are scarce and this goal requires preparing the pipeline of people, within the organization, prepared and willing to take a leadership role.
- **Measures that require the involvement of multiple stakeholders for its implementation.** Measures requiring, for their implementation, the involvement and participation of multiple stakeholders -that is, multiple actors need to participate in the approval and/or implementation of the measure- have the potential of being less impactful or effective, because there is the risk of a delay in the implementation, a diverse implementation in different departments or units, etc.
 - Following with the previous example, the promotion of gender equality in teaching and research requires multiple stakeholders: on the one hand, the institution needs to consider it necessary to offer courses and resources to faculty and researchers to adequately introduce the gender perspective in teaching and research and, finally, faculty and researchers need to incorporate this knowledge and resources in their research or teaching materials.
- **Measures that require setting-up a new programme or process.** Measures that for its implementation require to develop and set-up a programme or process new for the institutions are also difficult to implement. Not only are these measures long-term and require the participation of multiple stakeholders, but they also require that the institution takes multiple steps in defining the programme or process, regulating it, identifying its owners, participants, etc., which can cause delays in its implementation.
 - For example, the implementation of a mentoring programme has also been more complicated in the different institutions, given the need to adopt multiple prior steps before it can start to function, such as defining its scope, adopting a regulation, identifying and requesting the participation of mentees and mentors, appoint a person to be in charge of monitoring the mentoring process, etc.

- **Measures that require data collection.** Measures that require updated data collection are usually less effective in terms of implementation, given the difficulties derived from the process of collecting sex-disaggregated data -especially, when data is collected in various departments and offices and not unified and integrated in a single software or programme.
- **Recommendatory measures.** Measures that are formulated as mere recommendations are usually less effective in terms of implementation, given that they lack binding effect. As mentioned above, the EQUAL4EUROPE project recommended partners to formulate measures following the SMART guidelines; that is, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, and Relevant and Time-Oriented. The more specific and concrete the measure is formulated, the more chances of success in its implementation.
- **Absence of associated consequences.** When the Gender Equality Plan includes measures that do not have specific consequences in case they are not duly implemented show lower effectiveness, specially when they do not have a specific mandate, resources or responsible person.

3. CHALLENGES AND RESISTANCES AND ENGAGEMENT WITH RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

The second section of the report is dedicated to analysing **challenges and resistances that occur when adopting and implementing Gender Equality Plans in research institutions**. The experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE project is that **engaging with relevant stakeholders when developing and implementing gender equality measures is the best strategy to overcome the possible challenges and resistances** that can occur during this process.

3.1 RESISTANCES AND CHALLENGES WHEN ADOPTING GENDER EQUALITY MEASURES

The EQUAL4EUROPE consortium, in general, did not find express resistances when implementing the different **Gender Equality Plans** in the six research performing institutions. It is important to note that with the submission of the project proposal, the consortium attached endorsement letters from high management ensuring their full cooperation and participation with the project in case it was granted.

Testimony of this involvement from high management is that the EQUAL4EUROPE project has succeeded in adopting and implementing a tailored Gender Equality Plan in the six research participating institutions, including measures specifically designed to address the phenomenon of the leaky pipeline in academia.

Nevertheless, the different local teams had to face different **challenges when implementing and adopting the Gender Equality Plans** that, luckily, were solved in the majority of cases.

Using as a starting point the report [Engaging stakeholders and tackling resistances to mainstream gender equality in AHMSSBL research institutions](#) adopted by the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium in 2021, this section presents the most **common challenges faced by the different institutions when implementing gender equality measures**:

- **Lack of available data.** Having access to sex-disaggregated data for the diagnosis of the situation of gender equality in the institution is a necessary preliminary step to adopt and implement an effective and impactful Gender Equality Plan. Nevertheless, this data is sometimes missing in the institutions or very difficult to collect, which poses an important challenge.
- **Difficulties in coordination of key stakeholders.** As mentioned above, the participation of key stakeholders in the adoption and implementation of a Gender Equality Plan is necessary for its success. However, it is sometimes difficult to guarantee an adequate coordination of these relevant stakeholders, especially in those larger institutions, with different campuses - for instance, located in different countries - and departments or units with competences regarding gender equality.
- **Communication of results.** Communication of results of the diagnosis of the situation on gender equality in the institution is a key element to generate awareness on the importance of adopting specific gender equality measures. Nevertheless, although all institutions have carried out engagement sessions with high and middle management regarding the results of the diagnosis and the measures adopted in the Gender Equality Plan, in some institutions this communication has been more difficult.
- **Ambitiousness.** Although with great ambition comes great results, ambitiousness can sometimes become a challenge. Ambitious measures -for instance, those that require revising different policies within the institution- require a long time to be developed and implemented.

- **Lack of resources or personnel assigned to the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan.** When gender equality measures are not accompanied by specific resources or personnel assigned to its implementation, they will suffer in terms of delays or impact. Indeed, gender equality measures to be effectively implemented and impactful require for specific resources and/or personnel in charge of its implementation or supervision.
- **Lack of organizational authority of the Gender Equality Officer, body or unit.** Assigning a specific person as a Gender Equality Officer or creating a Gender Equality body or unit as responsible of the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan, although an important indicator of its effectiveness, is not guarantee for success in itself if that person, body or unit does not have organizational authority. The Gender Equality Officer, body or unit must have institutional influence and competences to promote the effective implementation of the Gender Equality Plan. The Gender Equality Officer, body or unit must be well integrated within the institution to assess and promote the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan.
- **Lack of faculty participation.** Some measures require the involvement and participation of faculty, such as the mentoring programme or integrating the gender perspective in teaching or research. Nevertheless, sometimes, given the high workload of faculty, it is difficult to obtain their participation and involvement in the implementation of such measures, which causes some delay or reduces their impact and effectiveness.
- **Lack of understanding of gender equality and/or perception that specific gender equality measures are not necessary in a meritocratic environment.** The lack of understanding of gender equality or the perception that specific measures are not necessary, especially in a meritocratic environment, is an important resistance or challenge when implementing Gender Equality Plans. In some cases, internal policies or structures are considered to be sufficiently clear and complete to not require changes. Although institutions are open to gender equality and the need to guarantee equal opportunities between women and men, it is sometimes not perceived that the institution itself creates the scenario for a lack of equal opportunities or inequalities and, as such there is a lack of perception or understanding of the need to adopt specific gender equality measures.
- **Perception that gender equality is neither a priority nor urgent.** Another important challenge is that sometimes gender equality is perceived as neither a priority nor urgent, especially given that there are usually more urgent matters within the institution (Covid-19 pandemic, accreditations, implementation of technologies in teaching, etc.).
- **Perception of gender equality measures as just part of a research project.** The EQUAL4EUROPE project aimed at developing tailored Gender Equality Plans in the six research performing institutions and the participation of institutions in gender equality projects can be an effective measure to increase awareness on gender equality. Nevertheless, it also poses the risk that the institution perceives gender equality measures only as part of a project and therefore does not integrate them in the core of the institutions' bodies and processes.
- **Opposition to specific gender equality measures.** Sometimes there can be opposition from key stakeholders to the adoption and implementation of specific gender equality measures, which can of course act as an important resistance. For example, gender-sensitive language can sometimes suffer resistance from some stakeholders that are not willing to adapt and/or do not agree with the need to introduce gender-sensitive language. Similarly, hiring quotas can also suffer resistances, especially from men, who might consider that quotas pose an unfair treatment between women and men.

- **Existence of external pressures.** External pressures - such as publicity and media coverage - can act as a form of resistance and have negative effects on the effective implementation of gender equality measures, especially when they are sensitive matters or issues that centre the public debate (for example, gender-sensitive language).
- **Change of leadership.** During the EQUAL4EUROPE project, different institutions suffered a change in leadership. Although not necessarily a resistance *per se*, a change in leadership can be a challenge in terms of implementing gender equality measures, as the process can be delayed or there can be a change in the institution's strategy or focus.
- **Integration of gender equality in a broader diversity strategy.** The integration of gender equality within a broader strategy of diversity, equity and inclusion can be positive in some sense -because it includes all forms of discrimination. Nevertheless, it can also be perceived as a challenge, for instance because it can blur the importance of gender equality as a specific form of discrimination or it can unnecessarily delay the adoption of specific measures.
- **Changes in legislation.** During the process of implementing a Gender Equality Plans there can be changes in the applicable legislation (gender equality measures, work-life balance measures, gender pay gap, etc.) that delay the adoption and/or implementation of the Plan.
- **Overburdened employees.** When employees feel overburdened with their existing professional obligations, they might perceive the Gender Equality Plan as an additional task that they do not have the time nor resources to carry out, leading to passive resistances in its implementation and effectiveness.

3.2 BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENGAGE WITH RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

The experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE project is that **engaging with relevant stakeholders when developing and implementing gender equality measures is the best strategy to overcome the possible challenges and resistances** that can occur during this process. In this sense, the EQUAL4EUROPE project practiced the **participatory approach and engaged with all relevant stakeholders when implementing the Gender Equality Plan.**

Specific strategies and best practices to engage with relevant stakeholders as a way to overcome the different challenges and resistances that occur when implementing gender equality measures are the following:

- **Initial explicit institutional commitment.** It is important to have an initial and explicit institutional commitment when implementing a Gender Equality Plan, as it can eliminate and reduce some of the possible obstacles or challenges that can occur during the process. Furthermore, this commitment must translate in sufficient personnel and resources and access to data and information necessary for the adoption of the Gender Equality Plan.
- **Engage with multiple stakeholders.** It is important to have the participation and involvement of all relevant stakeholders to guarantee the successful implementation of gender equality measures. This implies the participation of high and middle management, faculty, academic staff, non-academic staff, students, workers representatives, etc. All stakeholders of gender equality measures must be involved in its adoption and implementation, because it will increase the sense of ownership and commitment regarding the Gender Equality Plan.

- A way to engage with multiple stakeholders, and to ensure their long-standing commitment to mainstream gender equality in the institution, can be creating a taskforce – or a consulting working group – involved in the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan, where all main stakeholders of the institution have at least one representative. This is likely to allow them to see some of their instances integrated in the institutional effort to improve gender equality, consequently increasing their commitment to that.
- **Engagement with high management.** It is important for high management to be aware of the situation of gender equality within the institution. Although it is essential to engage with all key stakeholders, high management is essential, because their endorsement to gender equality measures increases their effectiveness and impact. For example, when high management is aware of indicators such as data on gender-based violence and inappropriate sexual behaviour or the gender pay gap, they will more likely adopt specific measures to address these issues.
 - Periodical sessions can be organized to update high management regarding the situation of gender equality in the institution. This can also be the occasion to show how improving gender equality can benefit the institution, for instance making it possible or easier to obtain funds for research, or attracting and retaining talented academics.
- **Engagement with workers’ representatives.** Workers’ representatives can act as allies when implementing Gender Equality Plans. Given their access to information regarding the institution, their relationship with employees, and their knowledge of the institution and working conditions, workers representatives can suggest interesting measures to include in the Gender Equality Plan, insist on its importance in front of high management and promote it in front of the workforce.
 - A good practice is for the Gender Equality Plan or the most relevant measures to be negotiated and agreed with workers’ representative. Negotiating gender equality measures with workers’ representative is compulsory according to Spanish law, but it can also be done on a voluntary basis.
- **Participation of the Gender Equality or Diversity Officer.** The Gender Equality or Diversity Officer can play a crucial role in guaranteeing the effective implementation of gender equality measures given his or her expertise on gender and diversity and role within the institution.
 - To ensure that the Gender Equality or Diversity Officer can meaningfully and positively impact on the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan, it is advisable that this person is entirely – or at least mostly – dedicated to this task.
- **Engagement with already existing gender equality bodies or initiatives.** Gender equality and diversity bodies, workgroups, or associations already existing in an institution can be a precious resource when setting-up and implementing a Gender Equality Plan. On the one hand, given their specific knowledge, they can be aware of specific data or good practices useful for the plan; and, on the other hand, from an operational perspective, they can support the implementation of some measures or act as allies to overcome possible resistances or challenges.
 - In this sense, before starting to set-up or review a Gender Equality Plan, it is always advisable to identify and engage with all existing gender equality bodies and initiatives, those stakeholders involved with gender equality activities and initiatives.

- **Participation of Human Resources representatives.** Involving people working from the Human Resources Department in the process of adoption and implementation of Gender Equality Plans is also important, given their role within the institution in guaranteeing the application of specific measures -for example, measures regarding work-life balance.
 - Given that many measures included in the Gender Equality Plan will affect the Human Resources Department - measures regarding work-life balance, hiring and promotions, etc. - a good practice is to involve people working at the Human Resources Department in the negotiation committee of the Gender Equality Plan.
- **Endorsement of faculty.** In research institutions, it is essential to have the endorsement of faculty for gender equality measures related with teaching and research to succeed. Given that these measures will fall within the scope of their activity, it is important that faculty understands and acknowledges the importance of adopting specific measures to guarantee equal opportunities between women and men in their career.
 - The endorsement of faculty can be ensured by organising specific workshops aimed at presenting the relevance of gender equality measures from an academic perspective, for instance as a key-element to obtain funds for research, as a basis for international collaboration or, more in general, presenting gender equality as a cross-cutting topic that can improve the quality of research.
- **Engagement with students.** There are some measures that benefit from engagement with students. For example, measures related to the integration of the gender perspective on teaching or the adoption of measures to prevent gender-based violence or inappropriate sexual behaviour applicable to students are of great importance to them. When the institution is aware that students value gender equality issues as important, there are less resistances to the different initiatives and they are implemented more effectively.
 - Periodical surveys, periodical communication campaigns, workshops and regular meetings with students' representatives are useful tools that can help to ensure the engagement of students in mainstreaming gender equality in the institution, and also to ensure that they are aware of the implemented gender-equality measures.
- **Identify allies within the institution.** For gender equality measures to succeed, it is important to identify and create a network of allies in the different schools, departments and units, to guarantee that gender equality measures will be, not only adopted, but effectively and adequately implemented.
 - For example, to increase the number of allies within the institution, a good practice is to adjust communication to small groups of faculty, staff, and students emphasizing the different and more relevant gender equality initiatives.
- **Share the results and impacts of gender equality measures.** When engaging with relevant stakeholders, it is not only important to share the results of the diagnosis of the situation of gender equality in the institution or the measures adopted in the Gender Equality Plan, but also the results and impacts of these measures. Indeed, by identifying and sharing the results of such measures with key stakeholders will, not only prove the importance of such measures, but also increase their engagement and understanding of the importance of continuing with gender equality measures. For example, share the results of measures regarding the gender pay gap, or the impact of specific work-life balance policies or gender-based violence policies on workers' and students' well-being.

- Results and impacts of measures adopted in the Gender Equality Plan may be shared through a dedicated page on the internet or intranet website of the institution, by means of an internal newsletter, as well as a dedicated space in the annual report concerning most relevant activities and achievement of the institution. Periodical series of workshops can be another option to share with relevant stakeholders the results and impacts of gender equality measures in the institution.
- **Show the impact of gender equality measures on the institution's performance.** A strategy to avoid resistances or challenges when implementing gender equality measures is to show that the implementation of gender equality measures can improve the whole performance of the organization.
 - In this sense, emphasizing that having implemented a Gender Equality Plan is a key-requirement to access important research funds – for example, Horizon Europe funds – can be an important leverage to convince most institutions to set-up and adopt gender-sensitive measures and plans.
- **Discussions with gatekeepers.** A possible measure is to have workshops or discussions with employees directly involved in the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan to address their needs and experiences. This facilitates understanding the challenges faced by these individuals when implementing gender equality measures and, as a result, specific tailored solutions can be adopted to avoid passive resistances.
- **Understand that not all resistances can be overcome.** When implementing gender equality measures, it is important to understand that it is not necessary to overcome all resistances, as it can be an unattainable goal. It is important to identify which resistances must be addressed to guarantee the successful adoption and implementation of the gender equality measures.

4. SUSTAINABLE GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

This section of the report is dedicated to analysing the **sustainability of Gender Equality Plans**.

Using the **experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium**, this section includes best practices and recommendations of strategies to (i) guarantee the sustainability of gender equality measures and (ii) to raise awareness on gender equality. The experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE is that **raising awareness on gender equality is the best strategy to guarantee the effectiveness and sustainability of gender equality measures**.

4.1 SUSTAINABILITY OF GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

An important objective of the EQUAL4EUROPE project is to guarantee the **sustainability of the Gender Equality Plans and gender equality measures implemented** during the project after its finalization.

Following are some **good practices and recommendations to guarantee the sustainability of Gender Equality Plans** and gender equality measures adopted in higher education institutions resulting from the experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium:

- **Assignment of economic and human resources.** The first good practice to guarantee the effective implementation and sustainability of gender equality measures is the assignment of specific resources - both economic and human - to the adoption and implementation of such measures.
- **Appointment or hiring of a Gender Equality Officer or a task force** at organizational level in charge of the implementation and follow-up of gender equality measures in the institutions.
- **Integrate the Gender Equality Plan alongside other institutional commitments regarding gender equality or diversity.**
- Include in the Gender Equality Plan the **obligation to review and renew the Plan** after its finalization.
- **Regular monitoring of gender equality issues, including gathering sex-disaggregated data.** A specific agent or unit has been identified to coordinate the data-collection process.
- **Continued training sessions and/or workshops on gender equality** for faculty, staff, and students, to guarantee increased gender awareness.
- **Implementation of mid or long-term programmes.** Some institutions have included in the Gender Equality Plan the implementation in the institution of programmes with a mid or long-term nature, which guarantees their operation even after the end of the Gender Equality Plan.

4.2 RISING AWARENESS AND MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY

Raising awareness and mainstreaming gender equality is another essential goal of the EQUAL4EUROPE project and it is essential for the effectiveness and impact of Gender Equality Plans. Continuous gender awareness raising activities aimed at all levels of stakeholders, including students, administrative staff, research and academic staff, high and middle management, and external stakeholders, is a key part of adopting and implementing Gender Equality Plans.

As mentioned above, the experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE is that **raising awareness on gender equality is the best strategy to guarantee the effectiveness and sustainability of gender equality measures.**

Good practices and recommendations identified by the EQUAL4EUROPE partners **to increase awareness and mainstream gender equality** in higher education institutions are the following:

- **Initial engagement sessions with high and middle management regarding the results of the diagnosis** of the situation of gender equality in the institution and **follow-up engagement sessions regarding the measures adopted in the Gender Equality Plan.** The engagement sessions organized in the different institutions were the following:
- **Internal communication campaign** aimed at promoting the Gender Equality Plan.
- **Broad communication strategy related with equality and diversity.** A broader communication strategy signals that the institution is committed to gender equality, not just in a moment in time, but as an institutional strategy and ongoing effort. For example, INSEAD developed a communication strategy which is aligned with the school's general strategy of promoting gender equality.
- **Taking part in gender equality projects.** Indeed, the participation of the different research institutions in the EQUAL4EUROPE project has been in itself a very impactful measures of increasing awareness and mainstreaming gender equality within the institution. Furthermore, this allows the institution to share progress and exchange knowledge with other organizations.
- **Reporting gender issues in the intranet and public website.** Including information regarding gender equality in the intranet and/or on the institution's website is a good practice to increase visibility of gender equality measures and raise awareness on gender equality, as it encourages to maintain gender parity where it has been achieved, and to continue improving in areas where there is still inequality.
- **Opening virtual and physical channels for collecting suggestions for improving gender equality in the institution.** This practice may help to further "democratize" the effort for gender mainstreaming, allowing not only key-stakeholders, but everybody in the institution – including associations, informal groups, or people with a specific interest in this issue – to provide their input and feel involved in the process. To make this measure even more effective, a good practice could be to periodically issue a report concerning the inputs received, the discussion developed around them in the competent institutional bodies, and eventually the measures they originated.
- **Creating a broad network related with gender equality within the institution.** Creating a broad network of faculty, staff and/or students within the institution regarding gender equality issues is also a good practice to guarantee the sustainability of measures included in the Gender Equality Plan.
- **Institution's participation in gender equality events, conferences, or campaigns.** The regular participation of the institution in events, conferences, or campaigns on gender equality -such as, for example, International Women's Day or Girls' Day- is a good practice to raise awareness on gender equality.
- **Involving key stakeholders in the implementation of gender equality measures.** When involving different stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, students, etc. in the implementation of gender equality measures, it increases their awareness on the situation of gender equality in the institution and the need and importance to adopt specific measures. Furthermore, integrating key stakeholders in the committee or task force appointed to set-up and implement the Gender Equality Plan can transform them in allies for this effort.

- **Regular communication of the advancements on gender equality on internal communications.** To increase awareness on gender equality it is important for the institution to continuously communicate the advancements on gender equality among its workforce, through internal communications or meetings.
 - o In this sense, institutional meetings - such as townhalls - have a large reach within the organisation and the information provided on these meetings is viewed as important for the workforce and, hence, can be an important tool for increasing gender awareness.

Despite the efforts of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium to increase awareness and mainstream gender equality, there are areas where **further gender awareness is needed**, as this is a continued and long-term process.

- **Increase gender awareness in teaching and research content.** Increasing awareness in the need to introduce a gender perspective in teaching and research is essential, because it would increase the social impact of gender equality measures adopted in higher education institutions. In addition to promoting gender sensitivity among faculty and researchers, it would increase gender awareness among students and, eventually, the professional and social spheres where these students participate. Furthermore, regarding the integration of a gender perspective in research, it would expand the knowledge available regarding the gender impact in the different fields of research and eventually influence policy implications.
- **Importance of mentoring.** Mentoring programmes are measures that have been proven to be especially difficult to implement in research institutions. On the one hand, they are long-term measures that require the introduction of a specific programme or regulation within the institution. And, on the other hand, they require the involvement of multiple stakeholders, as it requires, not only the participation of those departments or units in charge of implementing and sustaining the programme, but of mentees and mentors, which is sometimes difficult to achieve. Furthermore, the impact of a mentoring programme on improving the situation of women in academia is long-term and, as a result, can sometimes blur the importance and need of such a measure.
- **Gender equality and unconscious bias.** The importance of gender equality and unconscious bias is an area where further gender awareness is needed. Although the EQUAL4EUROPE partners have carried out trainings on these topics in the different institutions, these are measures with a long-term impact on gender equality and, as a result, require further actions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present report has presented **best practices and recommendations for adopting and implementing effective, impactful and sustainable Gender Equality Plans in AHMSSBL research institutions.**

Drawing on the experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium in adopting and implementing Gender Equality Plans in the six research institutions, the aim of the report is to share the experience and knowledge derived from the EQUAL4EUROPE project and present the strategies that have been most effective, impactful and sustainable.

Gender Equality Plans serve as a valuable commitment document and reference point for gender equality in the organisation. It encourages discussions, reflection, and the setting of specific goals, contributing to heightened awareness and progress. Although the implementation and impact of Gender Equality Plans vary across the different research institutions of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium - given the importance of context, resources, and commitment in implementing gender equality measures -, the overall assessment of the results of the EQUAL4EUROPE project is that **adopting a Gender Equality Plans has increased gender awareness and made progress in the field of gender equality.**

It is important to note, however, that the following are just recommendations or best practices identified based on the particular experience of the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium. Although the aim of this report is to share the knowledge derived from this experience, there is no guarantee that these recommendations or best practices will be successful in other settings or contexts. **Sadly, when it comes to gender equality - and other world-wide social challenges - there are no magic formulas nor effective-guaranteed measures.**

ANNEX. TEMPLATE DATA COLLECTION

Following is the template used for collecting information among the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium regarding the effectiveness, impact, challenges and resistances and sustainability of the implementation of Gender Equality Plans. The input provided has been used to prepare Deliverable 8.4.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTNERS

DELIVERABLE 8.4. DETAILED EVALUATION REPORT

EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT, CHALLENGES AND RESISTANCES AND SUSTAINABILITY OF GEP

Deliverable 8.4 is dedicated to providing a detailed evaluation report of the effectiveness and impact, challenges and resistances and sustainability of the Gender Equality Plans developed and implemented during the EQUAL4EUROPE project.

Please respond to the following questionnaire to provide information regarding your experience in the implementation of the GEP in your institution, focusing on (A) the effectiveness and impact, (B) challenges and resistances and (C) sustainability.

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
A. Effectiveness and impact	
1. What measures or types of measures included in the GEP had more effectiveness and impact in your institution?	
2. What measures or types of measures included in the GEP had less effectiveness and impact in your institution?	
3. What elements do you think contribute to a higher or lower effectiveness and impact of gender equality measures	
B. Challenges and resistances	
4. What measures or types of measures included in the GEP had more resistances in its implementation?	
5. What are the three most relevant resistances/challenges you encountered while implementing the GEP? (See the Toolkit for Engaging stakeholders and tackling resistances p. 17-20 for examples).	

6. What measures or types of measures included in the GEP had less resistances in its implementation?	
7. What elements do you think contribute to having more or less resistances when implementing gender equality measures?	
8. Identify specific strategies used to overcome these resistances or challenges.	
9. Which stakeholder has been considered an ally when implementing gender equality measures in your institution?	
C. Sustainability of GEP	
10. What measures has your institution adopted to guarantee the sustainability of the GEP after the end of the EQUAL4EUROPE project?	
11. What measures has your institution adopted to guarantee the continuation of gender equality measures or actions after the end of the current GEP?	
12. What measures has your institution adopted to increase awareness and mainstream on gender equality?	
13. What measures have been most effective in increasing awareness and mainstreaming gender equality?	
14. What measures could be adopted to further increase gender awareness in your institution?	