



CALIPER
Gender Equality in STEM Research

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY DESIGN AND DEVELOP AN INCLUSIVE GEP

The ULB Experience



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“ EU CONTEXT: EXISTING GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Horizon Europe sets gender equality as a crosscutting principle and aims to eliminate gender inequality and intersecting socioeconomic inequalities throughout research and innovation systems. In particular, European Research Area Priority 4 focuses on gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research and innovation[1]. The objective is to foster scientific excellence and breadth of research approaches by fully utilising gender diversity and equality.

Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) have been recognised as an effective gender mainstreaming tool for Research and Innovation (R&I) and Higher Education (HE) institutions to tackle the objectives of the European Research Area (ERA) via a set of actions implemented along with clear timelines and monitored through specific indicators[2]. This is evident as well, since a GEP is an eligibility criterion for acceding Horizon Europe funding for the R&I Institutions. Lastly, the Ljubljana Declaration[3] adopted in 2021 highlights the importance of GEPs as a tool “to achieve long-term and sustainable advancement towards Gender equality in R&I”.

Even though the institutional change strategy implemented through GEPs has had very positive impacts in many research organisations and has been a catalyser at national and EU level, there is still a need for a renewed approach[2] which will enable Institutions to go beyond the minimum requirements for a GEP as defined in Horizon Europe eligibility criteria for effectively addressing the persisting structural barriers in R&I institutions.

For this reason, the recent ERA policies on gender equality in R&I have expanded their scope to cover innovation at large aiming at connecting academic research with society and the economy. This is evident from the European Commission’s (EC) most recent policy directions on Gender Equality in R&I and institutional change that seek for ‘inclusive’ Gender Equality Plans referring to “intersectoriality” as one of the dimensions along with intersectionality and geographic inclusiveness.

The **H2020 CALIPER project** was designed and is now being implemented, (since 2020) addressing these three dimensions and in particular having intersectoriality as its key specific feature embedded in all steps of the institutional change process, from the internal assessment to the GEPs design and implementation phase, as well as in monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, drawing upon the experience of the CALIPER project which aims at addressing gender inequality in STEM in 9 RPOs and RFOs across the EU and which has been built based on the GEAR tool but offering an additional inclusive approach, this policy briefing highlights the main takeaways on the design & development, of an inclusive Gender Equality Plan. This particular policy briefing is the first version of three policy briefings to be developed focusing on the inclusive GEP process.

Elaborating on the different dimensions of inclusiveness addressed by the CALIPER project, this policy brief aims at guiding national stakeholders in Belgium to effectively contribute to tailoring GEPs to specific domestic needs and developing quality assurance for GEPs.

“**THE BELGIAN CONTEXT: EXISTING GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES AND PRACTICES**”

Belgium has several federal laws aimed at preventing sexism, harassment, discrimination and gender inequalities. The Act of May 10, 2007[4] to combat discrimination between women and men prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex (including sex change). In 2014, that Act was modified to extend it to gender identity and gender expression, to also protect transgender people who do not undergo surgery. The same year the Act of May 22, 2014[5] to combat sexism in the public space was also passed. In the employment area, Act of February 28, 2014[6] supplemented the Act of August 4, 1996 on the well-being of workers during the performance of their work to include the prevention of psychosocial risks at work including, in particular, violence and moral or sexual harassment at work.

French-speaking higher education in Belgium is a competence of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB). Therefore, French-speaking RPOs and RFOs, such as ULB, are under the responsibility of the French-speaking Ministries of Higher Education. In 2013, a network of Gender Contact Persons (GCP) was created in the six French speaking universities (one GCP per university) and this function was also introduced to the RFO Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS) the following year. The objective is to develop gender policies within the institutions and to promote gender equality throughout scientific careers. From 2018, a grant of 25,000€ per institution (indexed each year) has been made permanent by decree (Décret du 10 mars 2016 instituant le Comité Femmes et Sciences). That same decree made official the establishment of the ‘Women and Science

Committee’, initially created in 2000 following the creation of the Helsinki Group on Gender in Research and Innovation.

The ‘Women and Science Committee’ is a support committee for the FWB government, constituted by three members (including the Gender Contact Persons) of each FWB university, two members of the FNRS research funding body, and members appointed by the Ministries for Research, Higher Education, Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities and their administration.

The Women and Science Committee is asked to improve gender equality in scientific and academic careers through four key actions.

The first one concerns the formulation of opinion and recommendations about gender equality in the scientific and academic field. The second one focuses on the exchange of information and the dissemination of good practices between the six French universities, the FNRS and the responsible ministers in the French community. The third key action aims to facilitate the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers, and a Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers regarding men and women’s equality. Finally, the Women and Science Committee contributes to the definition of the role and function of the positions of the French Community delegation in the Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (SWG GRI), and thus reinforces the follow-up of these decisions at the European level.

Some soft law measures that have been implemented in FWB include recommendations on ad hoc leave, and propositions to modify the composition of juries and scientific committees to have a

more balanced gender representation. In relation to the integration of the gender dimension in teaching programs, the six French-speaking universities have an inter-university Master's program in Gender studies since 2014/2015.

EVIDENCE ON ULB GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

ULB's gender equality and diversity policy is included in the areas of competence of a Vice-Rector and three university authorities' advisors (1 for the gender policy and 2 for the diversity policy). To sustain and promote this policy, an internal network of gender contact persons has been established in all the faculties and departments of the university administration. The gender policy aims at promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in different domains and is articulated in different action plans (the Diversity Plan for the university staff in collaboration with Actiris – the regional employment agency –, the EURAXESS HR Excellence in Research strategy, and the recently approved Gender Equality Plan in STEM designed within the CALIPER project) and several measures, among which the following are particularly worth mentioning and is summarised in the institutional Gender Equality Plan of ULB that is available on the University's website: <https://www.ulb.be/fr/egalite-des-genres/gender-equality-plan>.

In the governance area, ULB has established gender parity in the candidacies for the representation of the personnel in the Plenary Assembly. Gender-disaggregated data is collected and monitored every year and a report on the state of gender equality at ULB is published annually. In the area of

education, ULB participates in the Inter-university master's degree in gender studies and offers also a University certificate in gender and sexuality as part of its catalog of life-learning courses. The University also provides training on gender-sensitive teaching to its teaching staff once a year. In the area of research, the interdisciplinary research structure on gender, equality and sexuality (STRIGES) gives strong visibility to gender studies conducted at ULB. The University also organised with the University of Lausanne the first international francophone summer PhD school in gender studies (BRULAU). In the area of human resources, the 'Cascade measure' aims at fighting against the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon in academic careers by establishing a gender proportion in career promotions. Moreover, there must be at least one third of members of each gender in the commissions involved in academic recruitment and promotion and a gender-balanced proposal concerning the reference persons likely to be contacted by these commissions. An awareness-raising video to prevent biases in recruitment and promotion processes is also disseminated by the University. To improve work-life balance, ULB offers to its staff and students the use of University's nurseries and activities for children during school holidays. In relation to the student community, ULB recognises a special status to students who are pregnant and students who are parents to adapt their study curriculum. Transgender students also have the possibility to use a common or preferential first name upon registration. A center to accompany and support students in case of harassment has also been created. In the area of communication, the University has published recommendations for the use of inclusive communication in institutional materials and has named lecture halls with the name of remarkable women in line with

the history and values of ULB.

Not being a technical university, ULB has designed and developed its GEP for its two STEM faculties (Faculty of Sciences and Polytechnic School of Brussels). Although some measures target the overall institutional context, many of the recommendations presented below concern the STEM fields.

CALIPER **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN INCLUSIVE GEP**

Setting up the scene for the GEP design and development: Perform an analysis of external and internal conditions for the GEP development and acceptance. Identify potential gender biases and inequalities along with scenarios towards change using the proposed actions below:

Set up a GEP Working Group:

Suggested members of the GEP working group include staff members at different managerial levels including stakeholders from middle and high management.

Perform a qualitative and quantitative gender analysis:

Suggested areas for data collection include human resources, institutional governance, research, teaching, student services, transfer to the market, institutional communication, intersectionality, and sexual harassment.

Tools: set up intersectional indicators and targets to be achieved and collect sex-disaggregated data via desk research and interviews.

Set up Research & Innovation (R&I) Hub:

Following a quadruple helix approach, identify the key stakeholders of your regional/national innovation ecosystem (including 1) academia and universities, 2) industry, 3) ministries/government, public sector and 4) civil society organisations) and engage them in the GEP design and development process. For this purpose, gather information through desk research, social network analysis and interviews with these key stakeholders and identify the regional/national innovation ecosystems in which they operate adopting and engaging them in the GEP design and development process.

Develop strategic change scenarios to better understand and reflect key factors, the potential measures and the strategic collaborations with internal and external stakeholders that need to be leveraged with regards to the implementation of the GEP.

Suggested methodology: develop three scenarios focusing on the identification of the maximum resistances, the maximum opportunities, and a mix of both in the areas mentioned in the gender analysis.

Suggested main components of the scenarios: Situation; Main problems; Objective(s); **Scenario 1: Maximal resistance** (including the possible solutions that would trigger high resistance and potential opportunities); **Scenario 2: Low resistance** (including the possible solutions that would trigger low resistance and potential opportunities); **Scenario 3: Intermediate resistance** (including the possible solutions that would trigger intermediate resistance and potential opportunities).

Organise Multi Stakeholder dialogues involving the R&I Hubs assess the above-

mentioned scenarios and investigate opportunities and barriers for collaboration with the regional and national stakeholders.

ULB results: At ULB, the stakeholder dialogues were useful in terms of networking and dissemination, but they were also time consuming, and the discussions were sometimes too abstract, which is normal when first contacts are being established. It is however important to identify specific forms of collaboration in order to further engage the R&I Hub members in the university activities.

GEP design and development: Develop an inclusive GEP based on the knowledge and experience gained and the targets set.

Recommended areas to focus on when designing and developing a GEP in Belgium, on the basis of ULB's GEP design and development process.

Human Resources: To ensure a more gender equal and bias free environment, the proposed measures include: **Drafting a toolkit to avoid unconscious bias** in academic recruitment processes. This can be done by examining the current policies, identifying both the biases and the existing good practices in the literature. The final step includes disseminating the toolkit within the Institution. **Assessing the feasibility of creating a standardised policy for career breaks** due to childcare leaves, in selection procedures for academic vacancies. This can be achieved by first conducting a study on the current status, gathering the conclusions and then publishing the results to inform the staff and the students. **Assessing the feasibility of postdoctoral contract extension due to childcare leaves.** This can be achieved by identifying the different leave situations and then mapping the existing good practices and

conditions for a contract extension. Next, the organisation should identify and consult with internal and external sources of funding for a contract extension.

Institutional Governance: To guarantee the sustainability of the gender equality policy initiated and to address the low representation of women in decision making bodies, the proposed measures include: **Establishing a Gender+ commission in the STEM faculties** giving them a specific mission, clear tasks and activities in the promotion, monitoring and evaluation of the gender equality policy at faculty level. **Setting up new and improving existent gender indicators in STEM** at different levels of the organisation (e.g. faculties, departments, services). First, the institution should assess the existing data and define relevant indicators. Then, the process of collecting data for these indicators should be define. It is also important to draft annual internal reports and disseminate them. **Proposing a gendered-balanced participation in advisory boards.**

Research: To adopt gender sensitive policies in the focus area of research, the proposed measures include: **Disseminating guidelines on the inclusion of sex and gender dimension in STEM research.** To achieve this, a working group can be established to identify the possible guidelines, the target audience and appropriate communication channels. **Organising an exhibition to raise awareness on the sex and gender dimension in STEM research.** To achieve this, a working group can be established composed of both internal and external stakeholders, to define the content and organise the exhibition's inauguration, including a top management's speeches and the presentation of the aforementioned guideline. **Setting up gender targets in STEM PhD juries.** To achieve this, a working group

can be established in the faculties to set the targets and collect relevant data and indicators. They should discuss the targets and communicate them internally, and finally monitor and evaluate their efficiency and sustainability.

Teaching: The lack of gender sensitive teaching practices can be addressed through: **Publishing a guide on gender sensitive teaching** focusing on academic staff, Then, the guide should be integrated into STEM education practices. **Integrating the sex/gender and diversity perspective into STEM curriculum** competency frameworks. To achieve this, a consultation process with key stakeholders needs to be carried out to define the specific formulation. Therefore, the key stakeholders should be identified and meetings conducted to define and establish the institutional framework.

Students and student Services: The number of female students enrolled in STEM studies can be improved with the following measures: **Organisation of a new science and technology training for future secondary school teachers.** The goal is, first, to examine the possibility of designing a new interdisciplinary science and technology qualification program to teach at the upper secondary level for science teachers and, second, design and implement it. Identification of key stakeholders and the establishment of a working group is needed for the consultation process. **Gender technical assistance** can be foreseen within the institution for the discussion of survey results, the identification of gender-related gaps in science outreach activities, and the integration of the gender+ perspective in science outreach activities.

The organisation of events dedicated to women role models in STEM. Inviting both internal and external stakeholders from the local and national ecosystem can increase the event's impact.

Institutional Communication: The popular perception of male dominance in the STEM community creates the need for gender neutral language in the internal and external communication content. The proposed activities include: **Hands-on training on inclusive communication for STEM webpages' administrators** based on the institutional guidelines on inclusive communication to solve doubts on how to implement it. **Review and update of the communication material** (website and social networks). **A dedicated web page for the gender+ measures of STEM faculties,** and regular feeding of it with faculty gender+ policy and initiatives.

Sexism and Sexual Harassment: Measurements to improve the methods of combating sexual harassment include: **Development of training on discrimination and harassment** targeting STEM faculty departments/services leaders, to encourage them to improve their skills in order to contribute to the prevention and better management of discrimination and harassment cases. **Create a permanent poster campaign** to inform about the existing services and protocols to prevent and/or report cases. This action may include the establishment of a working group to design the posters including key messages, the description of protocols and services, and the visual style.

“CONCLUSION

The present policy briefing describes the European and Belgian national context as well as the institutional context regarding gender equality policies and practices as they have been depicted in the extensive external and internal analysis conducted within the context of the CALIPER project. Based on the abovementioned context, ULB's GEP has been designed and described here for giving the example to other Research Performing Organisations operating in Belgium for setting up their inclusive GEP.

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Learn more about CALIPER project and the Gender Equality Plans:



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