

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

Deliverable D.6.2: Guidelines for the Gender Equality Plan Advancement

SUSTainable industrial DESIGN of TEXTile structures for composites (SustDesignTex)

Grant Agreement number: 101079009

Project acronym: SustDesignTex

Project title: Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites

Funding Scheme: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03

Start date of the project: 01.10.2022

Duration: 36 months

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Document History (Revisions – Amendments)		
Version	Date	Changes
V 1.0	01.10.2024	Rebecca Emmerich
V 1.1	30.11.2024	
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Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

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Deliverable Title	Guidelines on Research Management and Administration for TUL
Milestone Lead:	TUL
Related Work Package:	Work package WP6 – Strengthening TUL research management, administrative skills and building the necessary capacity to allow successful participation in R&I projects
Author(s):	Rebecca Emmerich, Christoph Greb
Due Submission Date:	30/11/2024
Actual Submission:	30/11/2024

Table of content

1	GENERAL INTRODUCTION	3
2	ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AT RWTH AND THE INCORPORATION OF ITA	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
3	ESTABLISHED PROCESSES AND POSITIONS AT ITA	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4	RMA AT ITA ON THE EXAMPLE OF A FUNDING CALL	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5	PROJECT MANAGEMENT COURSES AT RWTH	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6	GUIDELINE AND SUGGESTIONS	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

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1 General introduction

According to the European Commission a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) is “a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through a process of structural change” [Eur23]. Such plans are a basic requirement for participation in the research framework programmes of the European Commission. The goal is a sustainable transformation of organisational processes, cultures and structures within research and innovation institutions. Herby, gender imbalances and inequalities should be reduced and combatted. The approach is to target women and men equally and not only focus on one gender. The method to reach this goal is then the implementation of GEPs. The development of such plans has been investigated in different research projects where guidelines and toolkits have been developed. One result of such a project, that can be used for the development of an GEP of an institution is the so-called GEAR (Gender Equality in Academia and Research) toolkit.

The toolkit, provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality, guides universities and research institutions in developing and implementing GEPs. It offers step-by-step resources on structural change, stakeholder engagement, and compliance with Horizon Europe’s eligibility criteria for gender equality. The toolkit includes practical tools, examples, and legal context to help institutions foster gender equality in research environments. The target group of this tool is all staff being employed in research organization such as universities, research-performing organisations, public bodies and research funding bodies. It’s explicitly mentioned that this topic is not only a women’s issue. The tool offers information and guidance on the implementation of a GEP within an instiution. Within four different sections (what, why, how and where) information is provided. [Eur22]

In the context of the SustDesignTex project a guideline for a Gender Equality Plan is to be developed. In the following, firstly a deep understanding for Gender and Equality Plans is developed as well as the implemented facilities and structures at RWTH Aachen University is described. In the second part, the current state at TUL is investigated. Thirdly, a guideline does advance gender and equality at the Technical University of Lodz (TUL).

2 General introduction

Why are Gender Equality Plans required?

It is scientifically proven that divers’ teams create a better result. In consequence here, the full potential of a population is being used. Thus, the return on invest of education and training will be maximized. The development goes back to three objectives, which have been defined within the European Commission’s strategy on gender equality in Research & Innovation (R & I) in the European research area (ERA) framework: [Eur20]

- fostering gender equality in scientific careers;
- ensuring gender balance in decision-making processes and bodies;
- integrating the gender dimension in R & I content, that is, taking the biological characteristics and the social features of women and men into account.

An agenda for the upcoming years has been established by the European Commission for 2022 till 2024. Here, the key points mentioned within the first conclusions of the ERA are emphasised. It endorses the priority areas for gender equality established by the Ljubljana Declaration [Cou21]. Within this declaration the following points are mentioned. To promote gender equality in research and academia, it is essential to ensure fair, open, inclusive, and gender-equal career paths while also considering intersectional perspectives on gender inequalities. This approach allows a comprehensive understanding of the various factors that contribute to disparities in career

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Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

advancement. Facilitating mutual learning opportunities through a robust governance framework that follows the principle of form-follows-function can enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders. It is equally important to address and counteract gender-based violence within academic environments, creating safe spaces for all individuals. Organizations should employ existing tools and develop new ones, such as GEPs, to facilitate systemic institutional change and remove barriers that hinder progress towards equality. Supporting active monitoring and evaluation processes will ensure continuous improvement in these efforts.

Moreover, leveraging synergies across different initiatives can significantly enhance achievements in gender equality within the ERA as well as complementary fields like the European Higher Education Area, cohesion policy funds, innovation ecosystems, and international cooperation.

Lastly, it is crucial to underpin these priorities and activities by fully acknowledging gender mainstreaming as a horizontal principle that permeates all levels of decision-making and implementation. By integrating these strategies into organizational practices, we can foster an environment where gender equality thrives.

In line with these policy priorities, gender equality is also a main cornerstone and cross-cutting principle of Horizon Europe – the EU framework programme for R & I funding – and is considered at three levels:

1. GEPs for public bodies, research organisations and higher education establishments as an eligibility criterion to get access to [Horizon Europe funding](#),
2. integration of the gender dimension into R & I content as a requirement by default,
3. increasing gender balance, with a target of 50 % women throughout the Horizon Europe programme.

Since then, national action plans have been established. By these plans roadmaps including concrete measures and actions have been defined. The degree of implementation differs between the different countries. It is proven that the higher the gender equality index the higher is its innovation potential. The gender equality index is found to be also highly correlated to the number of research institutions that have established GEPs and the number of women in the research and innovation boards in the country. [Eur22]

Within the Horizon Europe funding programme, the gender equality plan criterion has been launched in 2021. Since then, all parties applying for funding within this programme need to comply to this criterion. Four minimum mandatory process-related requirements are defined within the criterion. Firstly, it should be a public document that is **formally published** on the organization’s website, signed by top management, and actively communicated within the organization to promote transparency and accountability. Secondly, the GEP must **allocate dedicated resources**, committing to provide sufficient financial support and expertise in gender equality for its implementation. This ensures that adequate attention is given to achieving the outlined goals.

Additionally, **data collection and monitoring** are crucial components of a GEP. Organizations should collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data related to personnel (and students, where applicable), using this information to inform their strategies. Furthermore, they are expected to report progress annually based on specific indicators that reflect advancements made towards gender equality objectives.

Training also plays a vital role in the success of a GEP. The plan must include awareness-raising initiatives and training activities focused on gender equality for all members of the organization. This includes specific training on unconscious gender biases aimed at staff and decision-makers to foster a more inclusive environment.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites“ funded by the European Union

In addition to these mandatory requirements, there are five recommended content-related aspects that should be addressed within a GEP. These include promoting work-life balance and fostering an organizational culture that supports gender equality; ensuring gender balance in leadership positions and decision-making processes; facilitating gender equality in recruitment practices and career progression opportunities; integrating the gender dimension into research and teaching content; and implementing measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

By adhering to these process-related requirements and addressing key content areas, organizations can create comprehensive Gender Equality Plans that effectively promote equity and inclusivity throughout their structures. [Eur21]

What is important for GEPs?

There are several basic elements to be taken into account when setting up the GEP:

- objectives
- measures
- indicators
- targets
- timeline
- responsibilities

During the development process, it should be considered, that to connect the GEP to other important strategy documents and processes of the organisation to foster the sustainable institutionalisation of gender equality. The definition of these elements should follow the SMART principle (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-related). The development of GEPs has been evaluated in several research projects. The process will be explained in section 4.

3 Gender and Equality at RWTH

The Gender Governance and Diversity of RWTH Aachen University is composed of the Framework Plan and the Gender Equality Plans of the faculties, the Central University Administration, the Central Academic Facilities, and the Central Operating Units. (see Figure 1) The Framework Plan is published online [RWT22]. The individual Gender Equality Plans are provided in the appendices to this official announcement on the Senate's intranet pages. The Gender Equality Plans of the faculties are also published on the RWTH website. Together with the Framework Plan, they form the Gender Equality Plan of RWTH Aachen University, which thus meets the requirements of the EU's Horizon Europe research funding program.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

Gender and Diversity Governance at RTWH Aachen University

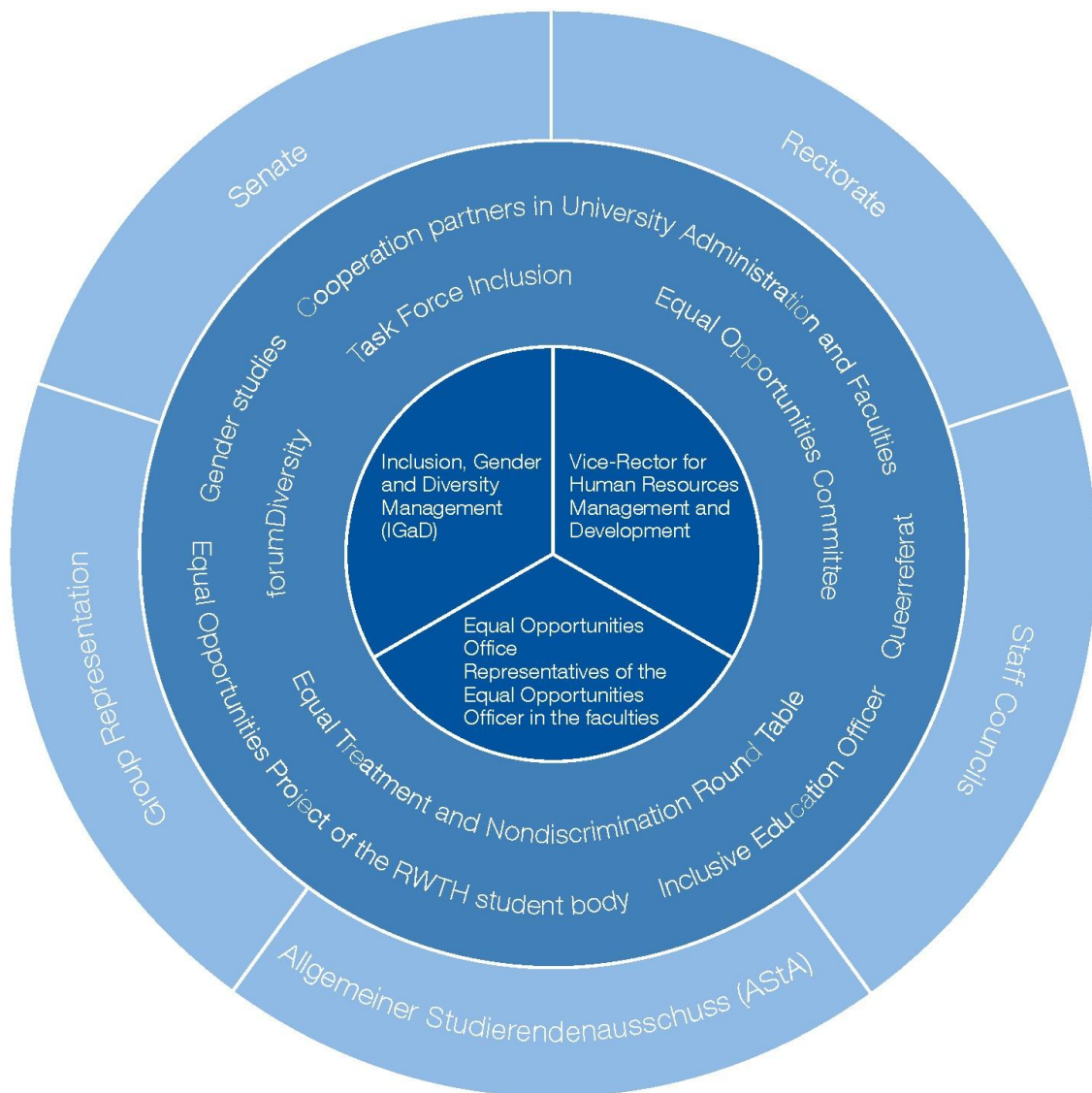


Figure 1: Gender Governance and Diversity at RWTH Aachen University

RWTH Aachen University GEP:

The RWTH Aachen University GEP consists of six main parts. For each category, objectives, planned activities, and quality assurance measures are defined.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

Cultural Change

The objective of this initiative is to cultivate a respectful and inclusive culture that values diverse perspectives within the university. Activities will include the incorporation of gender considerations into institutional strategies, enhancement of communication channels, implementation of robust feedback mechanisms, and the provision of comprehensive training on diversity and anti-bias principles. Quality assurance will be ensured through the conduction of interim and final reports to evaluate cultural progress.

Gender Governance

The aim is to fortify decision-making structures and responsibilities that are focused on gender issues across the university. Proposed activities include the development of an Equal Opportunities Codex, clarification of organizational roles illustrated in a visual chart, and the establishment of a gender-sensitive financing model. Quality assurance measures will involve regular updates presented to university committees, including an annual report from the Equal Opportunities Office.

Gender Monitoring

This section seeks to visualize advancements in gender equality while tracking adherence to equal opportunity standards. Activities will encompass the establishment of measurable quotas, documentation of changes in representation, and regular updates and dissemination of statistics across departments. Quality assurance will be achieved by evaluating target fulfilment through performance agreements alongside continuous monitoring processes.

University as a Place of Work

The objective is to ensure equitable and family-friendly employment practices that facilitate career advancement for all employees. Activities will consist of implementing guidelines for gender-sensitive employment practices, expanding family support services, and promoting part-time as well as flexible work options. Quality assurance will involve assessing employment conditions for potential gender bias, monitoring gender representation within staffing structures, and reviewing the sustainability of family-friendly programs.

Equal Treatment & Anti-Discrimination

This initiative aims to guarantee a work and study environment devoid of discrimination while providing accessible complaint mechanisms. Activities will focus on enhancing the visibility of complaint offices, developing informal complaint processes for ease of access, and conducting regular anti-discrimination training for personnel. Quality assurance will be maintained through annual compliance reports as well as ongoing discussions within diversity forums.

Research & Teaching

The objective here is to integrate awareness regarding gender and diversity into teaching and research methodologies. Proposed activities include enhancing education related to gender issues within curricula, offering credits for participation in diversity training programs, and incentivizing research initiatives with a focus on gender-related topics. To ensure quality assurance in this domain, existing evaluations pertaining to research and teaching effectiveness will be utilized while monitoring the integration of gender considerations into academic projects.

By systematically addressing these objectives across various dimensions—cultural change, governance structures, monitoring systems, employment practices, anti-discrimination efforts, as well as research and teaching—the university can establish an inclusive environment that promotes equity for all individuals within its academic community.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites“ funded by the European Union

RWTH's Equal Opportunities Concept has been initiated and developed by the staff office for Inclusion, Gender and Diversity Management (IGaD) and the Equal Opportunities Office, consistently responds to these clear signals: The aim is to strategically institute the equal opportunities work at the University even more effectively, set necessary priorities, and evaluate the measures to be implemented and their effects.

Besides these institutions with clear agendas and a dedicated budget for measures to improve and promote gender equality, all faculties and in consequence all institutes are asked to implement measures to enable gender equality. For such measures dedicated funding can be requested from the institutes at the university.

4 How to develop and implement a GEP?

The SPEAR's Compass is a guide that has been developed to guide institution through the development of gender equality plans and their implementation. The SPEAR's COMPASS is a holistic and practical approach that helps you draft an effective and sustainable Gender Equality Plan (GEP) and implement gender equality measures in your Research Performing Organisation (RPO). Together with the previously mentioned GEAR-toolkit by the European Institute for Gender Equality, an important guidance is provided to set up a GEP. The GEAR-tool offers a comprehensive Step-by-Step guide for establishing a Gender Equality Plan and provides essential scaffolding for GEP design, implementation, and monitoring, while SPEAR's COMPASS is supporting in ensuring the quality and sustainability of defined objectives and measures within a GEP. [Uni24]

SPEAR's COMPASS methodology draws on seven carefully selected principles (**C**reative, **O**pen, **M**itigating, **P**rocessual, **A**ccountable, **S**MART, **S**ustainable). The COMPASS approach incorporates and extends beyond the classic SMART-paradigm for defining objectives. While specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound objectives are deeply relevant to gender equality work, it is our understanding that effective gender equality practice and cultural change draw crucially on participation, processual skills, and a wider sustainability perspective than SMART objectives alone are able to capture. [Uni24] The COMPASS is guiding the responsible person by using different questions and inspirational material that will help to stay open, alerted, and reflective in the complex undertaking of gender equality change work.

The ultimate goal of GEPs is to sustainably transform organizational processes, cultures, and structures, addressing and reducing gender imbalances and inequalities. These plans adopt a holistic and comprehensive approach, ensuring the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. They are designed to benefit and target people of all genders in their diversity, fostering an inclusive environment. The SPEAR team has outlined six key steps to achieve these objectives. These steps are detailed in the sections that follow.

Step 1: getting started. In this step, it is needed to familiarise with the GEP concept and how it fits with the respected organisation and the specific context of the organisation. Here, potential allies and supporters of a GEP in the organisation have to be investigated and approached.

Step 2: analysing and assessing the status quo in the organisation. In this step, sex-disaggregated data is collected and organisational procedures, processes and practices are critically reviewed to detect any gender inequalities and their causes.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

Step 3: setting up a GEP. In this step, it is needed to identify objectives, set targets and measures to remedy the identified problems, allocate resources and responsibilities, and agree on timelines.

Step 4: implementing a GEP. In this step, the planned activities are implemented and outreach efforts to gradually expand the network of stakeholders supporting the GEP implementation are undertaken.

Step 5: monitoring progress and evaluating a GEP. Through monitoring and evaluation activities the implementation process is assessed and the progress achieved against the aims and objectives identified in the GEP. Findings from the monitoring and evaluation exercise(s) allow to adjust and improve interventions.

Step 6: what comes after a GEP? Based on the results of steps 4 and 5, it is needed to develop a new GEP that builds on experiences, learnings and achievements and that also ensures the sustainability of the efforts started in previous GEP implementation rounds.

If these six steps are fulfilled a structured progress of the GEP development is enabled. As a background information the Horizon Europe program has defined five aspects that need to be considered in research and innovation management processes.

- Work-life balance and organisational culture
- Gender balance in leadership and decision-making
- Gender equality in recruitment and career progression
- Integrating the gender dimension into research and teaching content
- Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

It is recommended to develop and implement GEP by forcing participation of different organisational members. A certain framework should be kept in the different levels of the GEP. Here, structure, personnel, power, culture and the Research and innovation context in which the GEP will be implemented. Another structure that can support the transformation or in which the change model can be even implemented is a holistic change model. This holistic structure will give a framework to the organizational development. In such a change model also other combinations of gender with other personal characteristics or identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination – as a cross-cutting principle – can be added.

5 Evaluation of the status quo at TUL

In this section the status quo of gender equality at TUL is evaluated. Here, researchers from TUL are requested to fill out the current status in the five different level for an effective GEP. Here, people from different positions within the organisation need to be involved. Some examples of possible stakeholders that can be involved, Senior management, middle management and leadership, research and teaching staff, administrative and non-academic units or staff members, students as well as external stakeholders.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

Since 2022 the Lodz University of Technology has established a Gender Equality Plan. [Lod22] The plan for 2022–2024 is a strategic initiative aimed at fostering gender equality across the university community. The plan aligns with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research guidelines, ensuring compliance with Horizon Europe eligibility criteria. Its primary focus is on five critical areas: promoting work-life balance and an inclusive organizational culture, achieving gender balance in leadership and decision-making, ensuring equality in recruitment and career progression, integrating gender perspectives into research and teaching, and implementing measures to counter gender-based violence and harassment.

The plan is based on a thorough diagnosis of the current state of gender equality at TUL, which involved quantitative analysis of disparities in leadership roles, career progression, and representation among staff and students, as well as qualitative feedback from focus groups. Quantitative analysis revealed gender imbalances across different levels of the university. In leadership and decision-making roles, a relatively balanced gender representation was observed at the central management level, with women holding 43,4 % of leadership positions. However, disparities were more pronounced in faculty-level roles, especially in institutes and departments, where women occupied significantly fewer leadership positions compared to men. For instance, only 15,4 % of department heads were women, reflecting a traditional gender skew in academic leadership. Conversely, women were overrepresented in administrative and support roles, such as in the rector's office and faculty administration. [Lod22]

The academic staff's gender distribution also showed a notable disparity, with 61 % of staff being male and only 39 % female. This imbalance was particularly evident in technical fields, such as the Faculties of Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering, where men comprised over 80 % of the staff. Meanwhile, fields like Biotechnology and Food Sciences demonstrated a predominance of female academic staff, highlighting the gendered clustering of disciplines. Furthermore, the progression of academic careers displayed disparities, with women being underrepresented at senior levels. For example, among the university's 133 full professors, only 26 % were women, reflecting systemic barriers that hinder women's advancement to the highest academic ranks.

The diagnosis also examined the gender balance among students and doctoral candidates. While the gender ratio among doctoral candidates was nearly equal, data indicated that women were more likely to leave academia before progressing to senior academic positions. This trend was linked to structural and societal factors, including family responsibilities and career interruptions.

Qualitative analysis complemented these findings by exploring underlying causes and perceptions of gender disparities. Focus groups and interviews with staff, doctoral candidates, and leadership provided valuable insights. Participants noted that gender inequalities were not overtly institutionalized but often stemmed from cultural stereotypes and societal expectations. For example, women in traditionally male-dominated fields faced implicit biases and assumptions about their capabilities. Respondents also pointed to family responsibilities as a critical factor impacting women's career trajectories, with many citing the challenge of balancing motherhood with professional growth. Additionally, cultural norms often led women to decline leadership opportunities due to perceived time constraints or family commitments, perpetuating gender imbalances in decision-making roles.

Specific challenges identified included a lack of mechanisms to support women returning from parental leave, insufficient representation of women in large-scale research grants, and limited visibility of women in leadership and mentorship roles. Instances of gender-based stereotyping, though not widespread, were reported, particularly in informal interactions.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

This detailed diagnosis provided a comprehensive understanding of the gender equality landscape at TUL, forming the basis for the targeted actions outlined in the GEP. It emphasized the need for systemic changes to address structural barriers, promote balanced representation, and create a supportive environment for all genders. By grounding the plan in robust data and stakeholder input, TUL aims to foster meaningful and sustainable progress toward gender equality.

Several actions have been outlined in the plan. To strengthen institutional infrastructure, the university has designated specific roles and responsibilities related to gender equality and introduced policies against discrimination, harassment, and mobbing. Leadership and decision-making processes are being reformed to promote balanced representation, with ongoing monitoring of gender diversity in decision-making bodies and the publication of relevant data. Recruitment and career progression efforts focus on standardizing hiring practices, ensuring fairness, and tracking career advancement, particularly among doctoral candidates. Work-life balance initiatives include the establishment of childcare facilities, support for parental leave, and flexible work arrangements. Furthermore, the plan emphasizes the integration of gender perspectives into research and education through the dissemination of best practices and resources.

The GEP includes 28 specific measures, with progress regularly evaluated through performance indicators, surveys, and reviews. Such measures are the Implementation of a childcare allowance, the publication of gender integration examples and the standardisation of interview processes. The implementation of the GEP involves all levels of the academic community, with particular attention to doctoral candidates as future researchers and educators. By maintaining a safe and inclusive environment, the university aims to eliminate discrimination and support equitable academic and professional development.

In conclusion, the Gender Equality Plan 2022–2024 is a comprehensive framework designed to embed gender equality into the core of Lodz University of Technology's operations. It represents a long-term commitment to creating an equitable and inclusive academic environment for all members of its community. [Lod22]

In addition to the GEP, an internal policy towards anti-discrimination and anti-mobbing is established at TUL. Within this document principles for preventing and addressing discrimination, mobbing, and similar behaviours within the university community are es. Key provisions include:

1. General provisions that define unacceptable behaviours, including discrimination and mobbing, emphasizing that all members must familiarize themselves with these policies.
2. Definitions that provide clear meanings for terms such as discrimination, harassment, mobbing, and roles like the Rector, university community members, and the Commission for Combating Discrimination and Mobbing.
3. Implementation details on how the university will promote equal treatment, ensure a safe working environment, conduct training on anti-discrimination measures, and support those affected by discrimination or mobbing.
4. Reporting mechanisms that outline procedures for reporting incidents of discrimination or mobbing to designated representatives or committees.
5. An early warning system described to identify and address undesirable phenomena related to discrimination or mobbing.
6. A Commission for Combating Discrimination and Mobbing is established to investigate reports of discrimination or mobbing while ensuring confidentiality and impartiality in its proceedings.
7. Explanatory proceedings detail the steps taken once a report is received, including gathering evidence and making decisions based on findings.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

8. Provisions specific to employees and students specify rights regarding equal treatment for employees as well as doctoral students and students at the university concerning recruitment processes, promotions, assessments, etc.

Overall, this guideline aims to create an inclusive environment at Lodz University of Technology by outlining clear policies against discrimination and mobbing while providing mechanisms for reporting and resolution.

The GEP of RWTH Aachen University and of Lodz University of Technology share a common goal of fostering gender equality within their institutions but differ in their approaches and specific measures. While TUL focuses on the five key areas suggested by the Horizon Europe programme - work-life balance and organizational culture, gender balance in leadership, gender equality in recruitment and career progression, integration of gender perspectives into research and education, and combating gender-based violence - RWTH emphasizes diversity alongside gender equality as part of its broader inclusion strategy.

The TUL plan includes explicit measures like establishing on-campus childcare facilities, implementing anti-discrimination regulations, and creating a structured framework for monitoring gender representation in leadership and recruitment. TUL emphasizes performance indicators and regular evaluations, such as surveys, to track progress. It also targets systemic change in traditionally male-dominated technical fields by promoting gender balance in admissions and research grants.

The GEP of RWTH integrates measures into a wider framework that includes the "Diversity Charter" and the "Family-Friendly University Audit." Key actions include developing mentorship programs for underrepresented genders in academia, providing gender and diversity consulting for research projects, and ensuring family-friendly policies like flexible working hours and childcare support. RWTH Aachen also actively participates in national and international rankings and certifications to benchmark and improve its equality practices. Awareness programs, such as the RWTH Diversity Days, highlight the university's community-driven approach to fostering equality.

While both universities aim for structural and cultural changes, Lodz University emphasizes clear performance tracking and internal evaluations, while RWTH Aachen integrates gender equality within a broader diversity and inclusion strategy and utilizes external certifications and benchmarking to shape its policies. Both institutions actively promote a safe and inclusive environment for academic and professional growth.

6 Guidelines for TUL GEP

After a detailed analysis of the current state at RWTH Aachen University as well as the Lodz University of Technology it was found that the most important measures as basis for gender quality have been taken. A few points have been identified that could help to pave the way more easily:

- Development of faculty based GEPs to address topics that are special to each faculty
- Creation of a staff position comparable to the Inclusion, Gender and Diversity Management (I Gad) department at RWTH Aachen University. The department should fulfil the following tasks:

Focus on promoting equality and diversity in technical disciplines. The main tasks include:

1. Research: Conducting research projects that address gender and diversity issues in technology and science.
2. Advisory Services: Provide support and advice for students and staff to create an inclusive environment.

Call: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03/Twinning

Project SustDesignTex (GA No. 101079009), title: „Sustainable Industrial Design of Textile Structures for Composites” funded by the European Union

3. Education: The department should develop educational offerings, workshops, and training sessions to raise awareness of gender and diversity topics.
4. Networking: Collaboration with other institutions, organizations, and initiatives to promote the exchange of knowledge and best practices.
5. Strategy Development: Assisting in developing strategies for implementing equality measures within the university.

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