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**EQUAL4EUROPE**  
GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

## European Policy Brief

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# Impartial Assessment Methodology for Evaluating GEPs



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## Methodology for a Gender Audit Tool

Impartial assessment methodology for monitoring and evaluating progress of Gender Equality Plans at AHMSSBL institutions

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### Introduction

Equality between women and men is a fundamental right and a precondition for effective democracy and lasting economic growth. It is one of the European Union's founding principles and a building block of its future. Gender equality contributes to jobs, growth, fairness and democratic change. Achieving Gender Equality in research has been a priority of the Council of Europe since 2005 (EC, 2005). In 2012, gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research formed one of the five ERA priorities, to end the waste of talent which we cannot afford and diversify views and approaches in research and foster excellence (EC, 2012). Through their 2012 Communication, the European Commission committed to promoting and funding projects that design and implement so-called Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) for Research Performing Institutions (RPIs) in the European Research Areas (EC, 2012). These projects were initially funded under Framework Programme 7 (FP7) and thereafter by the Horizon 2020 programme (as part of the "SwafS" – Science with and for Society). EQUAL4EUROPE is part of this large group of projects.

The EQUAL4EUROPE project includes the development and implementation of GEPs at six European RPIs participating in the project. The six partners pertain to the disciplines Art, Humanities, Medicine, Social Sciences, Business & management and Law (AHMSSBL). Independent project partner Nehem, a consultancy company, was appointed Task 7.1 within Work Package 7 which involves developing an *impartial assessment methodology*, to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the GEPs. The impartial assessment methodology developed by Nehem consists of a comprehensive Gender Audit Tool (GAT) and shall be applied to each GEP and its implementation.

The results of the GAT will not only provide insight into the GE situation at each institution at the time of assessment but will also lead to recommendations to further improve their efforts and impact in the field of Gender Equality for beyond the scope of the project.



## Evidence and analysis

For the development of the GAT, a desk review was done to establish what types of assessments and audit tools were already available. Several sister projects (EU-funded projects under FP7 or H2020) and other relevant organisations were consulted. These were the most important findings:

- According to EIGE (2016), when an assessment is performed by an independent third party, it is called an 'audit'. An audit is an unbiased examination and evaluation, and a gender audit is a tool to assess and check the institutionalisation of gender equality into organisations, including in their policies, programmes, projects and/or provision of services, structures, proceedings and budgets.
- The Manual for Gender Audit Facilitators, written by the International Labour Office (ILO, 2012), has developed a participatory audit methodology, which includes the involvement of independent 'facilitators', an extensive desk review and the need for stakeholder engagement (through interviews, workshops, focus groups, etc.).
- The PLOTINA project (Promoting gender balance and inclusion in research, innovation and training, 2016) provided valuable information on how to translate the theory of change to a practical application for measuring impact in a gender equality context.
- The TARGET (2018) project emphasised the need for self-assessment and reflection by the different stakeholders to enable structural organisational learning. They demonstrated the need for an iterative and reflexive process towards equality at the institutional level as well as the establishment of a Community of Practice for gender equality within the institution.
- The GENOVATE (2012) project has established guidelines for evaluating GEPs using Tichy's framework and has demonstrated that different priority levels should be distinguished, that is, the strategic level, the mid-management level and the operational level.
- The quality of an audit tool is, according to the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL, 2016), determined by the following four criteria: (i) Utility (to be informative, effective and appropriate); (ii) Feasibility (to ensure the greatest possible acceptance by those involved); (iii) Propriety (to be respectful, unbiased and impartial attitude); and (iv) Accuracy (to make logical connections).

Although the desk review was extensive and many helpful insights were gathered, it also revealed several shortcomings of currently existing gender audit assessments and tools for the EQUAL4EUROPE project.

- Most projects either covered one type of data collection (either survey, interviews or quantitative data collection);
- Most projects had a strong focus on disciplines such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), which does not translate well to AHMSSBL institutions; and
- Most projects had a strong focus on internal assessments and/or self-assessment.

As the EQUAL4EUROPE project is specifically focused on AHMSSBL institutions and has the objective to perform an impartial (third party) assessment, the desk review also underlined the necessity of the development of a new impartial assessment methodology.

## Project Objectives and Methodology

Gender equality is not just about levelling the playing field through a fair distribution of rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men. It is a complex justice and cultural issue and simultaneously it is about ensuring excellence, by offering opportunities to the best professionals, sharing and teaching knowledge to the most talented students, and producing better scientific outputs.



The Logical Framework of the impartial assessment methodology focuses on five Key Areas of Intervention (KAIs):

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

For each KAI, a Theory of Change (see Figure 1) has been applied by first determining the desired impacts, then the outcomes, outputs and activities (so-called Impact Pathways).

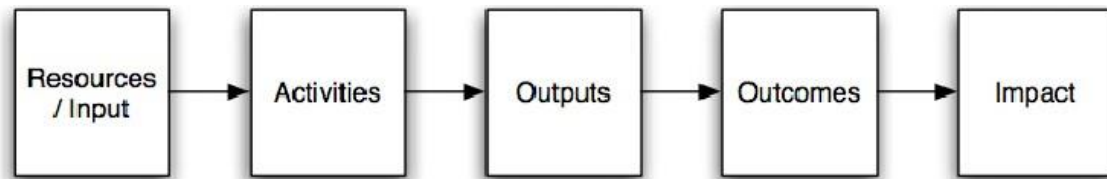


Figure 1 Model of Theory for Change

To ensure proper application of the Gender Audit Tool, guidelines have been developed as well. Applying the tool will provide the independent audit team insights into the current GEP implementation status and results in recommendations for further improvement towards institutional gender equality.

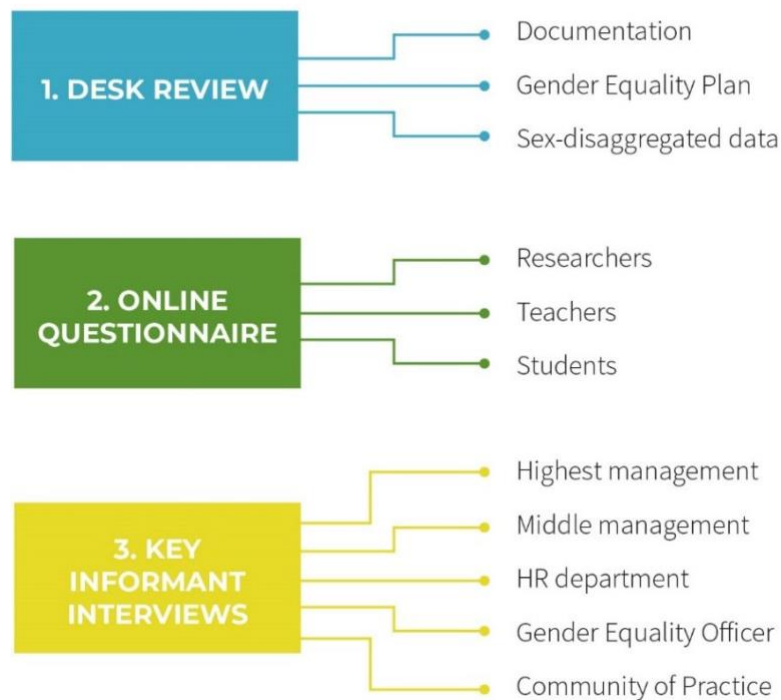
### Sustainability and Legacy

The Gender Audit methodology consists of four phases: 1) Initiation, 2) Preparation, 3) Visitation, and 4) Evaluation. The first phase is meant to establish the necessary arrangements to perform the Gender Audit. The second phase encompasses a desk review and online questionnaires. The desk review is split into three components. The first component involves an overview of the targets that were set in the GEP, including, reviewing whether the targets were met, what went different than expected, and what could (still) be improved. The second component consists of a desk review of documentation that is associated with new policies and measures introduced as a result of the GEP. The third component encompasses quantitative administrative data that should be collected. The online questionnaires are divided among the five KAIs and directed toward three stakeholders, i.e. researchers, teachers and students. The desk review operates on an institutional level, whereas the online questionnaires operate on an individual level. The third phase involves the Gender Audit visit and conducting the interviews aimed at five types of stakeholders. These four types of Key Informants are spread among high-level management, middle-level management, the HR Department, the Gender Equality Officer, and the Community of Practice.

If the institution does not allow for the online questionnaires to be distributed, alternatively focus groups could take place during the audit visit. These focus groups would then be directed at the three stakeholders (researchers, teachers and students) and allow for the audit team to broach the main themes of the online questionnaires. Where the interviews operate at an institutional level, the focus groups would operate at the individual level. After finalising all three modules for data collection, the final phase four consists of analysing and evaluating the collected data and writing the GEP audit report.



## EQUAL4EUROPE GENDER AUDIT TOOL



### Policy Implications and Recommendations

In general, gender equality is a complex issue that requires careful consideration of perceptions, experiences, quantitative data and bias of the participants involved in the audit. Similarly, understanding the impact of Gender Equality Plans on institutions and their communities would benefit from longitudinal data. Therefore, implementing consistent and continuous monitoring systems will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the measures and policies defined in a GEP over time.

Based on the excellent and evidence-based knowledge and information regarding assessments that is available, we were able to compile a list of actions and requirements for gender assessment tool for AHMSSBL institutions. It should:

- Reveal the **actual changes** at the institutional level by the GEP implementation;
- Collect and integrate **quantitative** and **qualitative data**, to allow for a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of measures and regulations set forth in the GEP;
- **Monitor** activities and outputs as described in the GEP and/or other relevant policies;
- **Evaluate** outcomes and impacts that have been achieved by the implementation of the GEP both at the individual as well as the institutional level; and
- Be **impartial** and **not judgmental**, but rather a learning tool using participatory methods.

Another relevant consideration is the existence or inclusion of change makers in the Gender Equality strategy, i.e. Gender Equality Officers (or Committees, etc.). Whether an institution accounts for a permanent role for a gender equality officer who can monitor progress, advise on policies and measures, and who can initiate programmes and projects, makes a big difference in terms of impact evaluation. In the absence of such a role, the GEP should clarify who will be doing what to ensure a progressive trend.

For further information, please refer to: [www.equal4europe.eu](http://www.equal4europe.eu)