



EQUAL4EUROPE

GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

Engaging stakeholders and
tackling resistances to
mainstream gender equality
in AHMSSBL research
institutions

WP8.4

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AHMSSBL	Arts, Humanities, Medicine, Social Sciences, Business and Law
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EQUAL-IST	Gender Equality Plans for Information Sciences and Technology Research Institutions
EU	European Union
FESTA	Female Empowerment in Science and Technology Academia
GEAR	Gender Equality in Academia and Research
GENERA	Gender Equality Network in the European Research Area
SAGE	Systemic Action for Gender Equality
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
TARGET	Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation
TCD	Trinity College Dublin



1. INTRODUCTION

In planning and implementing institutional change in higher education institutions, the engagement of key stakeholders is a fundamental step.

Ensuring the active involvement of key stakeholders, that are the most important groups of people having interests in the internal and/or external affairs of an institution, provides indeed some positive effects. It fosters mutual engagement, strengthening the internal community and commitment to change. It promotes a pro-active combination of different expertise and kind of knowledge. And it may ensure a more transparent change process inside and outside of the higher education institution.

The engagement of key stakeholders is, as well, a paramount step in the effort towards gender equality. According to EIGE (2016a), it contributes to increase the potential impact of mainstreaming of the gender perspective into policies, programmes and projects of a complex organization. Besides that, it helps to create a feeling of ownership and commitment for the implementation of gender equality actions.

Therefore, the engagement of key stakeholders is a success factor for the setting-up a Gender Equality Plan. In this context, the potential of gender planning to challenge gender social roles and the unequal distribution of resources and power is greater if key stakeholders –as individuals and as groups potentially affected by the intervention– are involved, and if their participation is taken into account in the different stages of the policy cycle, with particular reference to design, elaboration and monitoring (EIGE, 2018).

The engagement of key stakeholders should be realised through a participative approach. That is, actively involving all relevant stakeholders, from top to bottom of the organisation, and across departments and schools, in the designing and in the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan (EQUAL4EUROPE, 2021). Stakeholders should be engaged, hence, not in a specific moment, but throughout all the process of setting-up a Gender Equality Plan.

At the same time, like most of the efforts to orchestrate significant change, **also the engagement of key stakeholders in the integration of gender equality in higher education institutions may encounter obstacles and resistances.** Barriers may be opposed at individual or institutional level, and they may have different causes. They can be originated, for instance, by a wrong a perception of gender equality as a matter non urgent or not required in a meritocratic environment. Or caused by a long-time commitment towards gender equality, generating a “job done attitude” or a sensation of “gender fatigue”. Or, finally, the lack of effective contribution of key stakeholders in the setting-up of a Gender Equality Plan may be due to their delayed involvement in the process. An effective strategy for an early involvement of key stakeholders and to anticipate and overcome barriers and resistances is, hence, another success factor for a Gender Equality Plan.

Starting from the analysis conducted by former EU gender equality projects, this toolkit aims to provide an original contribution, consisting of **specific guidelines for an effective engagement of key stakeholders in the setting-up a Gender Equality Plan, and to successfully deal with obstacles and resistances that might arise during this process.**



The toolkit will be, thus, structured in three sections: i) describing the most relevant categories of key stakeholders normally present in a higher education institution, and analysing the reasons to engage them in planning and implementing of a Gender Equality Plan; ii) providing details on some effective strategies and approaches for a successful engagement of key stakeholders; iii) addressing the most common obstacles and resistances relating to the process of setting-up a Gender Equality Plan, providing hints and suggestions to anticipate and/or overcome them.



2. KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR GENDER PLANNING

The GEAR tool elaborated by the EIGE, provides an in-depth view about which are the **key stakeholders in gender planning** (EIGE, 2016b).

Considering the GEAR tool as well as other EU gender equality projects, following is a **list of stakeholders in research institutions**, complex organizations with an articulated administrative structure and where different categories of people work and study, that are key in the process of designing a Gender Equality Plan:

- Gender-equality bodies.
- High management and leadership positions.
- Managers.
- Academic staff.
- Administrative staff and human resources.
- Workers' representatives.
- Students.
- External stakeholders.

The following paragraphs provide further information on key stakeholders and about their possible contribution to gender planning.

2.1. GENDER-EQUALITY BODIES

Gender equality bodies or other structures to support gender equality are specific bodies operating in higher education organizations with the mandate to sustain structural change towards gender equality. They may be single-person offices or collective bodies, and they are generally identified as gender equality officers/units, gender equality network or, more in general, diversity officers or Ombud services.

Why the engagement of gender equality bodies is important in a Gender Equality Plan?

- They have the know-how to set up a Gender Equality Plan and to follow its implementation and monitoring stages.
- They can help to further engage stakeholders at all levels of the institution.
- They may have updated information about the situation of gender equality in the organisation.

2.2. HIGH MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

The significant influence and impact on policies of high management and leadership position, such as rectors, directors, etc., make them one of the key stakeholders for a Gender Equality Plan.

Why the engagement of high management and leadership positions is important in a Gender Equality Plan?



- Their endorsement has a significant impact in driving other stakeholders to support the introduction of a Gender Equality Plan and in raising awareness about gender equality ([GENERA, 2017](#)).
- They can provide financial resources and personnel for the adoption of the Gender Equality Plan.
- Their influence on decision-making bodies may have a strong impact for the approval of the objectives, actions and measures included in the Gender Equality Plan.
- They may get personally involved in the implementation of measures and/or use internal communication channels for promoting legitimacy of the Gender Equality Plan ([GENERA, 2017](#)).

If the commitment of high management and leadership positions is made **public and visible** (through, for example, videos, interviews or statements), it can send a more powerful message.

- ➔ **Example:** [Endorsement videos](#) of high and middle management to gender equality, recommended by the GEAR tool ([EIGE, 2016b](#)) and carried out in the EQUAL4EUROPE project, with videos from high and middle management and researchers endorsing the H2020 project.
- ➔ **Example:** As reported by the SAGE project ([SAGE, 2016](#)), to mark International Women's Day 2015, the Centre for Women in Science & Engineering Research of the Trinity College Dublin (TCD) produced a [video about the institution's commitment to gender equality](#), posted also on YouTube to increase visibility. The Provost and the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer were the protagonists of the video, making statements emphasizing the College's commitment to gender equality as a driver of research excellence, and TCD's role as a national leader in driving gender equality.

2.3. MANAGERS

Managers are those charged to the day-by-day administration, for instance deans, vice-deans or directors of Departments/Schools. Their leadership role is fundamental in higher education institutions and their influence among academic staff and students may be important for adopting a Gender Equality Plan.

Why the engagement of managers is important in a Gender Equality Plan?

- Their endorsement is essential for guaranteeing a sustainable cultural and institutional change in the middle and long term.
- They are usually in charge of the implementation of the measures adopted by decision-making bodies in the field of gender equality.
- They are usually in charge of coordinating the academic activity and assessing performance of faculty and research positions, where introducing a gender perspective might be important for achieving a sustainable cultural and institutional change.
- They can enable and promote the integration of the gender perspective in research and innovation content.
- They can have a role in recruitment and promotions of academic staff, areas that might be affected by specific measures adopted in the Gender Equality Plan.



- They can instruct staff to provide the data necessary to assess the impact of the measures and actions introduced by the Gender Equality Plan in the medium and long-term.
- Their support is important if the Gender Equality Plan should contain pilot measures to be experimented in a specific Faculty/Department/School.

2.4. ACADEMIC STAFF

Academic staff in higher education institutions is in charge of research and teaching. Its engagement in the adoption of the Gender Equality Plan is important to integrate a gender dimension in these two fundamental activities of higher education institutions. Furthermore, professors and researchers can support a Gender Equality Plan either in the course of their studies and while fulfilling their administrative duties.

Why the engagement of academic staff is important in a Gender Equality Plan?

- They have a primary role in implementing measures and actions regarding the integration of a gender perspective in research, teaching and innovation content.
- Their awareness of gender equality issues and engagement can ease the adoption of specific gender equality measures, such as, for example, participation in academic recruitment and promotion committees.
- Their knowledge and expertise in specific studies or areas may allow them to propose effective measures to reach the objectives set by the Gender Equality Plan.
- Participation of academic staff in surveys, focus groups or interviews in the initial phases of adopting a Gender Equality Plan, as well as during the monitoring and assessment of its impact, may provide important data and insights regarding the situation of gender equality in the institution and, specifically, measures to address specific gender imbalances in academia.

2.5. ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Administrative staff is composed by employees with the administrative duties linked with the professional activity of a higher education institution. Among them, people working in the Department of Human Resources assume important roles in tasks related to people management and, hence, the implementation of specific measures of the Gender Equality Plan.

Why the engagement of administrative staff is important in a Gender Equality Plan?

- The active support of administrative staff and human resources can be helpful in the implementation of gender equality in specific fields, such as recruitment, working time, work-life balance or anti-harassment policies.
- Administrative staff may play a crucial role in obtaining sex-disaggregated data and information about internal policies which are important for the diagnosis and for monitoring the implementation and outcomes of the Gender Equality Plan.



- Human Resources may have the necessary knowledge to help in developing the indicators which should be integrated in the designing of a GEP, to monitor its results in the medium and long-term.
- Participation of administrative staff in surveys, focus groups or interviews in the initial phases of adopting a Gender Equality Plan, as well as during the monitoring and assessment of its impact, may provide important data and insight regarding the situation of gender equality in the institution.

2.6. WORKERS' REPRESENTATIVES

In most higher education institutions there are formal representations of workers. They can assume different forms, depending on the legal framework: individual workers' representatives, works councils, or external trade unions involved in the collective bargaining process. Workers' representatives can positively contribute to the process to set-up a Gender Equality Plan, on the basis of their expertise, their role as representatives of workers' interests or their position in strategic bodies or decision-making processes.

Why the engagement of workers' representatives is important in a Gender Equality Plan?

- Workers' representatives may have useful information about the status of gender equality in the organization, which can turn into a resource during the initial sex-disaggregated diagnosis, or the periodical assessment during the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan.
- In some countries they have knowledge and competences regarding the negotiation of Gender Equality Plans.
- They may have a representation and vote rights in decision making bodies, playing a role in the adoption and/or implementation of the Gender Equality Plan.
- The endorsement of workers' representatives can be crucial to legitimize the mainstreaming of gender equality among employees, to implement the Gender Equality Plan and to guarantee a sustainable institutional and cultural change.
- Their involvement can lead them to adopt a gender perspective when assessing other labor issues in the institution, contributing to gender mainstreaming.
- They can be involved in the internal dissemination process of the Gender Equality Plan, in particular among employees.

2.7. STUDENTS

Students are key stakeholders in higher education institutions. Their engagement can have an important influence on their commitment to gender equality during their studies, but also in their future careers.

Why the engagement of students is important in a Gender Equality Plan?

- Their active participation may be important for the success of specific measures adopted in the Gender Equality Plan, such as the integration of gender perspective in teaching and research or anti-harassment policies.



- The support of students' organisations may contribute to mainstream gender equality in higher education institutions, as well as identify areas of improvement.
- Participation of students in surveys, focus groups or interviews in the initial phases of adopting a Gender Equality Plan, as well as during the monitoring and assessment of its impact, may provide important data and insight regarding the situation of gender equality in the institution.
 - ➔ **Example:** a competition of ideas –which can, even, include a final prize– may be a good strategy to raise interest about gender equality among students. It might work even better if based on an innovative approach, such as serious games. An example, in the field of STEM, is the hackathon [“Hack4Good: increasing the number of girls in STEM through IT technologies”](#) to which contributed the EQUAL-IST project.

2.8. EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The engagement of external stakeholders may also contribute to legitimate the effort for the adoption of a Gender Equality Plan and to mainstream gender equality.

Why the engagement of external stakeholders is important in a Gender Equality Plan?

- The engagement of other (national or foreign) higher education institutions with expertise in the field of gender equality may provide important knowledge for the development and adoption of a Gender Equality Plan.
- The engagement of other (national or foreign) higher education institutions may provide an opportunity for coordinated actions or measures or other forms of collaboration.
- The engagement of external stakeholders, including renowned experts, professionals or companies, and their participation in initiatives organised in the higher education institution can contribute to mainstream gender equality in the organization.
- The engagement of external stakeholders may provide opportunities to share best practices, tools and recommendations of gender equality measures.



3. STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Given the role of key stakeholders for a successful Gender Equality Plan, an effective strategy for their engagement is of the outmost importance. Also, the cooperation between different stakeholders may provide an important added value to the effort of gender mainstreaming in the organization.

The effort to engage key stakeholders in the Gender Equality Plan should be conceived as distributed along the **entire process of diagnosis, design and implementation of the Plan**. This strategy has more potential to be effective in obtaining commitment, support and involvement of key stakeholders with gender equality.

This section includes **specific strategies for the engagement of high and middle management**, as their collaboration with the Gender Equality Plan is essential in achieving a sustainable cultural and institutional change. Their endorsement of the Gender Equality Plan can have a positive impact on its effective implementation and on the commitment of other stakeholders with gender equality.

- **Gather knowledge**

In the diagnosis phase, it is important to identify all relevant high and middle management and relevant decision-making bodies in the context of gender equality, identifying their competences and composition. This will allow to develop a more specific engagement strategy.

- **Solid evidence-based diagnosis of the situation of gender equality in the institution**

One of the first steps when attempting to engage high management in supporting the Gender Equality Plan is presenting a solid evidence-based analysis of the institution. This element shows that gender imbalance is a real issue for the organization, and that measures should be taken.

This diagnosis should include: (i) quantitative and qualitative data about gender equality in the organization; (ii) a detailed mapping of internal policies, measures and practices about gender equality; (iii) the assessment and the conclusions reached by each partner institution while drafting an institutional report (see the [Resources](#) available on the EQUAL4EUROPE website, including a the [Gender Equality Index](#) –that is, a series of key indicators for the quantitative analysis–; [Guidelines to structuring a report on the internal diagnosis about gender equality](#); and a [Tool for comparing the results](#) of the diagnosis conducted in different institutions).

- **Effective communication of the results of the diagnosis of gender equality to high and middle management**

It is essential to organize workshops, dissemination and communication activities to present the results of the diagnosis of the situation of gender equality in the institution to high and middle management and to all other stakeholders in the institution that are relevant to achieve a sustainable cultural and institutional change. Giving visibility to the situation of gender equality in the institution will increase the perception of a need for change and the legitimacy of the adoption of a Gender Equality Plan.

It is important to also communicate the process of adoption of the Gender Equality Plan, as well as its development and implementation.



In this view, a success factor is the early engagement in the process of the Communication officer/department of the higher education institution. This will allow to set out a detailed communication strategy, capable to embrace all the steps about designing and implementation of the Gender Equality Plan.

Following the TARGET project ([TARGET, 2017](#)), Table 1 provides indications on how to design an effective communication strategy regarding the Gender Equality Plan to engage high and middle management:

Table 1. Communication strategies to engage high and middle management in the Gender Equality Plan

When?	Action	Stakeholders' engagement	Expected advantage
After the diagnosis on gender equality	Organize workshops, dissemination and communication activities to present the results of the diagnosis of gender equality in the institution.	Ask top level management to: (i) open these initiatives; (ii) announce the results of the gender analysis; and/or (iii) if possible, actively attend the workshops.	Visibility of high and middle management in these activities will increase their commitment and the legitimacy of the Gender Equality Plan.
From the end of the diagnosis until the final adoption of the Gender Equality Plan	Communicate all milestones towards the adoption of the Gender Equality Plan (e.g., announcement of the results of the diagnosis, beginning of the design process of the Gender Equality Plan, its implementation, etc.).	Encourage an active involvement of the high and middle management in the milestones to adopt and design the Gender Equality Plan.	Potential increase of the commitment of high and middle management to the Gender Equality Plan, fostering their effort for a positive impact of its implementation.
While designing the Gender Equality Plan	Organize meetings and activities, involving the Equality Commission or Team in charge of adopting the Gender Equality Plan with high and middle management, to discuss the design of the Gender Equality Plan, especially the main objectives.	Encourage the presence of high and middle management to attend all key activities related with the Gender Equality Plan, especially when fixing the main objectives.	This will help to get support to gender proof those procedures and practices identified as biased during the initial diagnosis about gender equality.
Design and implementation of the Gender Equality Plan	Organize trainings and other activities showing the positive effect of gender equality actions for the institution; specifically in a research institution, provide evidence of the positive impact of gender equality on the level	Tailorize these trainings and other activities to high and middle management and the characteristics of your institution.	Potential to ensure a long-term engagement of high and middle management to the Gender Equality Plan, essential for a sustainable cultural and institutional change.



	<p>of scientific excellence of research in the institution.</p> <p>The GEAR tool may help to identify the main benefits linked to the setting-up of a Gender Equality Plan, through its section Rationale for gender equality change in research and higher education institutions (EIGE, 2016c).</p>		
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▪ **Additional actions to engage other relevant stakeholders**

Following the GENERA project ([GENERA, 2017](#)), additional actions should be taken to engage other relevant stakeholders in the Gender Equality Plan:

- Get to know the Gender Equality bodies or officer that are already active in your organization and explain the project of the Gender Equality Plan, involve them in the process and seek for their advice.

If a Gender Equality Body or Officer is absent, get to know the officer or body dealing (also) with the topics related to gender equality issues. In this case, it is important to be very clear and specific in explaining the added value associated with the introduction of a Gender Equality Plan.

- Involve all relevant groups of stakeholders in the composition of the working group in charge of the elaboration of the Gender Equality Plan (Equality Committee or Team) as active members or advisors (see EQUAL4EUROPE, 2021, section 2.1).
- Share knowledge about gender equality and present the project for the introduction of a Gender Equality Plan to all levels of the institution. Present the Gender Equality Plan as a strategic document for pursuing greater gender equality within the organisation, highlighting the positive effects of gender equality for the institution.
- When presenting the project for the Gender Equality Plan to a group of stakeholders, rely on benchmarks of implementation in other (national or foreign) institutions, containing actions and measures in line with the perceived interests of that group.

➔ **Useful tool:** the GENERA project provides a [Resources section](#), containing a wide series of benchmarks about integration of gender equality in higher education and research institutions in the field of STEM. An example is the [German study](#) about the positive impact of training on career planning for women mathematicians and physicists. It led more women than men to adopt this instrument, with important advantages in their career path and more possibilities to find solution to (often gender-related) problems characterising the beginning of the career.



- Organize frequent meetings of Equality Committee or Team with high and middle management and other relevant key stakeholders to encourage the exchange of experiences and suggestions, as well as to inform about the progress of the adopting of the Gender Equality Plan.

→ **Interesting example:** the EQUAL-IST project developed an [online platform](#) allowing the key stakeholders to exchange experiences and provide suggestions about gender equality in a higher education institution (on in a consortium). The internal stakeholders registered to the platform, in particular, may upload posts emphasizing gender equality issues ('challenges') relating their institution, and/or proposing measures ('ideas') to address them. The proposals collected may be, then, rated by the external stakeholders registered to the online platform. The outcomes of this process can provide useful insights to design and implement a Gender Equality Plan ([EQUAL-IST, 2017](#)).

- **Fostering the cooperation between stakeholders**

The cooperation between stakeholders is a fundamental element for the successful design and implementation of a Gender Equality Plan. Bringing together different stakeholders, with different expertise and background, is effective, because it helps building more targeted policies, anticipating potential resistances and pursuing greater acceptance and support.

In this sense, it might be helpful for the Equality Committee or Team to have clear information regarding the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among stakeholders within the institution. Organizing initiatives to encourage different stakeholders to cooperate in the field of gender equality (like common training sessions or workshops) may further help to broader networks between the different units or departments within the higher education institution.



4. OBSTACLES AND RESISTANCES FOR THE ENGAGEMENT OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The integration of gender equality in a higher education institution can be a sensitive process and encountering **obstacles and resistances when engaging with key stakeholders is a possibility**. These obstacles and resistances can increase when engagement of high and middle management and other key stakeholders has been delayed.

The adoption of a Gender Equality Plan should be carefully planned and tailored according to the specific characteristics of each organization. This will ensure that obstacles and resistances are duly addressed from the beginning, smoothening the implementation process.

Following the EIGE's GEAR tool ([EIGE, 2016d](#)), some of the most common obstacles and resistances concerning the engagement of key stakeholders in a Gender Equality Plan consist of:

- **Not engaging potential key allies and/or stakeholders in the early stages of the Gender Equality Plan**

The crucial importance of engaging key stakeholders in the process of designing and implementing a Gender Equality Plan requires to act timely. In particular, despite most of the attention is usually focused on high management, it is important to also engage middle management or other stakeholders (like, for example, human resources officers or workers' representatives), who will be in charge of implementing some of the measures included in the Gender Equality Plan.

In **higher education institutions**, since some aspects of people management are sometimes distributed among professional and academic management (for example, deans or department directors), it is important to engage all stakeholders that will be in charge of implementing some of the measures adopted in the Gender Equality Plan. Furthermore, it is also important to engage academic staff and students. The former will have a key-role in implementing important measures such as the introduction of a gender perspective in teaching. The latter are the addressee of these measures, and their active participation may become crucial for a successful implementation.

A suggestion is to schedule and deliver, also during the process of designing the Gender Equality Plan, training, workshops, seminars, meetings etc. to staff whose support is required, even when they are not part of the Equality Committee or Team.

- **Lack of understanding of gender equality and/or a Gender Equality Plan**

It is important for all key stakeholders to have a full understanding of gender equality and the importance of adopting a Gender Equality Plan. If this is not the case, this lack of understanding can create obstacles and resistances throughout the process.

Training sessions involving stakeholders and the entire workforce explaining the importance of gender equality, specifically for the success of a higher education institution, can contribute to raise awareness and foster engagement.

- ➔ **Useful tool:** organizing initiatives to contrast the lack of understanding of gender equality may not require huge efforts. Especially at the beginning of the engagement of stakeholders, it is possible to use resources already developed by former European



projects. An example is the [joint webinar on gender bias in leadership and decision-making](#) realized in 2020 by the EU-funded GEARING-ROLES and Gender Equality Academy projects. It is aimed (also) at deepening the effects of gender bias, helping to explain to stakeholders the importance of initiatives for gender equality.

- **Perception that gender equality is not a priority nor urgent matter**

In some cases, gender equality is not perceived as a priority in organizations, including higher education institutions. Although there may be a commitment to gender equality, indeed, other urgent matters characterising the academic sector –like the need for continuous innovation, internationalisation, recently the urgency to cope with the Covid-19 crisis– may contribute to put gender equality on the background.

If this is the case, is important to highlight that the implementation of a Gender Equality Plan and gender mainstreaming can improve the whole performance of the organization ([EIGE, 2016c](#)). For instance, allowing to comply with EU and national regulations, also to obtain Horizon Europe funds for research, or contributing to a general improvement of the quality of research and teaching.

- **Gender equality is treated like a niche issue**

Some key stakeholders in the organization may minimise gender issues and consider they are a niche or secondary matter for the institution or an interesting matter for a group of people, but not applicable to the entire organization. This perception may lead to a lack of engagement of key stakeholders, which can impede the success of the Gender Equality Plan.

In this context, a public and clear endorsement of high management to the Gender Equality Plan has the potential to enhance the commitment of the entire institution, overcoming obstacles and resistances.

- **Perception that gender equality is not required in a meritocratic environment**

The perception that gender equality is not required in a meritocratic environment such as higher education and research institutions can act as a true obstacle and resistance. The belief that commitment to merit and/or excellence negates the need for gender equality actions can act as a resistance to adopt gender equality measures. Indeed, the perception that there are no gender biases in a meritocratic environment where performance is measured on the basis of objective outputs, such as the academic career, might affect the perception of the need of a Gender Equality Plan and/or specific measures for researchers.

In this scenario, it is important to highlight the situation of gender equality in the institution, identifying the areas of gender inequality. It is also advisable to highlight how unconscious bias can affect the meritocratic assessment, that without specific attention to gender equality (as well as other causes of discrimination, like ethnic origin or disability) may become unequal and less effective (see the [GenderAction Portal](#) for a more detailed analysis). Finally, as pointed out by EIGE ([2016e](#)), a working environment with a balanced presence of women and men can reinforce the effects of meritocracy in fostering quality and innovation in research production.



- **“Job done attitude”**

The fact that important efforts and advancements have been made in the field of gender equality in the institution, sector or country can create the perception that no more intervention is needed. This perception may be present in those higher education institutions where the presence of women and men in academic or management positions is not too much unbalanced (such as research institutions in the field of AHMSSBL compared to STEM disciplines, where the presence of women in academia is higher although the leaky pipeline persists) or where there has been a legacy of efforts to enhance gender equality. The consequence may be a lack of interest and engagement with the gender equality process.

In this case, a possible reply is to clarify that the commitment to gender equality is not a “once-off” activity, and that measures and actions require a continuous maintenance to further improve the situation of gender equality in the institution. Reviewing sex-disaggregated data and the areas where gender inequality persist can also be an effective intervention, as well as emphasizing the benefits of gender equality for the entire organization.

- **Gender “fatigue”**

Gender “fatigue” is an obstacle which increased its relevance in recent times. It can occur when, after some years of commitment towards gender equality, institutions or people start weakening the effort, focusing the attention on other topics or starting to think that the energies spent for gender equality are already too much ([EIGE, 2019](#)).

A strategy to contrast gender “fatigue” is to highlight the positive effects of gender equality and the need for a continuous effort. In this sense, in the context of research institutions, emphasizing Gender Equality Plans as an eligibility requirement for Horizon Europe research funds is a good point (see [HorizonEurope, 2021](#), and [EQUAL4EUROPE, 2021](#), section 3.4.1). Furthermore, existing EU, national or regional awards for gender equality can also act as an incentive for a permanent effort towards gender equality.

→ **Interesting example:** in the context of research institutions, an interesting example is the [HR Excellence in Research award](#), recognized by the European Commission. It is aimed at fostering the implementation of the [European Charter & Code for Researchers](#), a series of good practices encompassing gender balance in the composition of staff at all levels, anti-discrimination policies and gender equality in recruitment of researchers.

→ **Useful tool:** The GENDER-NET project realized an [analysis report](#) providing further details on regional and national award schemes operating in the EU.

Finally, also the endorsement of key-stakeholders, like high and middle management, could contribute to contrast gender “fatigue” among other stakeholders which are important for the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan (Barton, Yee, 2018).

Obstacles and resistances can also come from other people working in the organization. They may assume, for instance, the following forms of resistances:



- Affecting just part of the people working and studying in the organization, or the whole institution (institutional resistance). For example, a group of stakeholders targeted by specific measures about gender equality, like training courses or workshops, might resist not attending to activities, in case they are not valid as professional training or university credits ([FESTA, 2016, p. 37](#)). A kind of resistance affecting the whole institution may consist of a generalised lack of interest about gender equality, which could prevent even a well-developed Gender Equality Plan from producing significant effects ([FESTA, 2016, p. 43](#)).
- Active and passive individual resistances. Active resistance is easier to identify, and consists of being critical, fault finding, ridiculing, raising objections and of other similar behaviours. Passive resistance is sometimes implicit and more difficult to detect. Most common behaviours are agreeing verbally, but not following through concrete practice; withholding information; standing by and making the change fail, etc. ([FESTA, 2016, p. 17-18](#)).
- Further obstacles may not be gender-specific and anyway hinder the effort towards gender equality. For instance, an organization or a group of stakeholders where is rooted an “all is well” approach – that is, never interrogate yourself if something is not working in the institution, but take it as it is – might unconsciously resist against a systematic change, not acknowledging it as necessary ([FESTA, 2016, p. 30](#)).
 - ➔ **Useful tools** developed by EIGE may help in contrasting obstacles and resistances:
 - The **GEAR tool**, in its section [Common obstacles and how to overcome them](#), describes the most common forms of obstacles and resistance, providing solutions to overcome them and related bibliography.
 - The EIGE’s toolkit on Institutional transformation has a specific section aimed at helping agents of change to [Deal with resistances](#).



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