

Gender Equality Plan Communication Strategy

Raise awareness of the GEP to promote its objectives

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Introduction

The Gender Equality Plan (GEP) represents an eligibility requirement in Horizon Europe from January 2022. Universities and other public institutions publish the GEP on their websites, as required by the European Union, and many measures are already being implemented.

Although Italian universities and public institutions have had Positive Action Plans (PAP) and Gender Balance Reports (BdG) for several years, the addition of a GEP leads to the adoption of communication strategies typical of European Union funded projects, which are not traditionally part of PAPs and BdGs. Indeed, these documents are often published on the university's website and presented in a public meeting, but they usually do not include a proper communication plan.

Among the requirements set by Horizon Europe is the communication of the GEP, with a lot of flexibility given in the implementation. Below are a number of informal suggestions that may facilitate the creation of a workable communication plan useful for monitoring and evaluation of the GEP.

The GEP is a strategic document that can have a significant impact on the organisation and often initiates innovative actions in different areas. Collaboration between those with knowledge of the overall content of the GEP and the individual actions (often different people) and those with experience in communication management is essential.

Communication: Where

Instruments and channels

A comprehensive communication strategy is crucial to promote the GEP and its results. The communication plan should set clear objectives tailored to a range of recipients.

It should also be adapted to the scope of the GEP: the number of actions, the duration and the expected impact. Communication can use all available tools and channels, for example:

<i>Websites</i>	<i>Newsletters</i>
<i>Social media</i>	<i>Bulletin boards</i>
<i>Events</i>	<i>Press releases</i>
<i>Publications (brochures, leaflets, flyers)</i>	<i>Intranet</i>
<i>Videos and photos</i>	<i>E-mail</i>
<i>Advertising (posters, banners, billboards)</i>	<i>Project reports and outputs funded by Horizon Europe</i>

Table 1 Where the GEP can be communicated (non-exhaustive list)

Communication: What

The various tools and channels listed in Table 1 can serve as useful means of communicating the GEP. Depending on the place and use of each tool or channel, two types of content are communicated:

- References to the creation and existence of the GEP
- Information about the different actions included in the GEP and their progressive implementation.

References to the GEP

If the GEP has its own logo or even a coordinated image, the dissemination of these elements helps in the recognition of the document and draws attention to the document and the expected results.

In addition to the logo, you can come up with a standard slogan that becomes a memorable tagline. Examples:

- Moving forward together on the path to inclusion
- (Name of the University) promotes equality and inclusion
- On the path to equality and diversity

The logo and slogan can be used, for example, in email signatures, in EU-required logos and disclaimers in the reports and deliverables of funded projects, in the footer of presentation slides and on the back of policy documents or reports.

Discussion on the GEP and its actions

It is not only important to publicise the GEP, but also to talk about it, draw attention to its content and disseminate initiatives concerning the institution's staff or the public in a timely manner.

It is quite common not to limit the publication of the GEP to a webpage on the institutional website, as required by the EU, but to contextualise the initiative with a descriptive text and sometimes to add an English translation of the GEP or a summary.

However, people rarely access the website to download and read the document. An effective communication plan puts extracts of the document where they can be read or seen and influence people.

To achieve this, key targeted messages need to be developed for different groups of recipients. Administrative, teaching and research staff, the students, and the local community surrounding each university will have different interests and roles within a GEP.

In some cases, it will be about helping to implement policies, in others it will be about integrating new methods or strategies into their own work. Sometimes it will also be about demonstrating how the university is aligned with strategies for inclusion that go beyond academia.

The GEP communication plan can also be used to reassure individuals about the existence of initiatives in their work or study environment that aim to reduce potential discrimination.



Involving the press and communications department or experienced staff in these activities is crucial. They can combine all the options described in this document into a coherent communication plan.

Communicate: Why

Promoting activities

A GEP consists of a set of objectives and related activities that are characterised by being SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. These actions are carried out by individuals or working groups. Announcing them in advance through appropriate communication channels will ensure a satisfactory participation rate.

- Has inclusive language been formally adopted? Announcing the guidelines to be followed makes it possible to amend existing texts, draft new texts in line with the guidelines and identify whether an official text is inclusive or not.
- Are events regularly organised (locally or remotely) to promote the fight against all forms of violence in academia? Announcing these events in advance will allow interest people to take the time needed to participate.
- Will the (anonymous) collection of gender and other demographic information of event participants be changed? If the reasons for this decision are publicised, participants can better cooperate and provide the requested information.



People of different ages use social media differently. When designing communication activities, it can be beneficial to involve people who use different social media platforms because of their age and personal or professional interests. They can provide insights on how to tailor the message to the particular medium and consequently to the target group that uses it more often. Encouraging diversity within the team responsible for developing and implementing the communication plan helps to ensure wider dissemination (leading to more interest and engagement).

Call to action

GEPs are dynamic documents that are constantly evolving and changing. In some cases, they have been developed by small working groups to meet deadlines set by the EU. However, in the long term, it is important to encourage the whole academic community to take action by proposing new initiatives, highlighting issues not yet included in the GEP implementation, and pointing to initiatives

adopted in other contexts (both academic and non-academic) that could be adapted and proposed at the first review of the GEP (usually at the end of each calendar year).

To stimulate this participation, it is important to outline the ways in which contributions can be made.

Feel free to share your suggestions with us by sending an email to xxx@www.xx based on the insights you've gained from this document.



Interested in joining the working group that will be crafting next year's GEP? Submit your application and let us know how you'd like to contribute.

Have you come across a section of the website (a document, a form, etc.) that might not align with the university's guidelines for inclusive language? Help us out by filling out the form and bringing it to our attention.

Ensuring sustainability

One of the objectives of a communication plan for a European project is to ensure the sustainability of its results. In this context, sustainability refers to the ability to continue gender equality and diversity activities indefinitely, balancing resource use and replenishment.

Strategic use of the objectives and actions outlined in the GEP will facilitate the path towards its ultimate goal: the achievement of gender equality as envisaged in Horizon Europe's Gender+ strategy. This strategy recognises that while the primary form of inequality addressed is gender, it looks at the interaction with other sources of inequality and reasons for discrimination from an intersectional perspective whenever possible.

In the case of activities related to research and innovation, which are central to academia, gender integration in research and teaching programmes (Area 4 of a GEP, as recommended by HE) "involves the consideration of sex and gender throughout the research and innovation process. It is distinct from consideration of gender balance and equal opportunities among project team members or participants in project-organised events (e.g., conferences)." (APRE, Horizon Europe Guide, 17 December 2021, p.17)

The discussion on sustainability is crucial as GEPs are linked to the ninth Framework Programme, Horizon Europe, and there is currently no assurance of their mandatory inclusion in the tenth Framework Programme. It might therefore be helpful to reflect on the fundamental vision of GEPs, which is based on the institution's perspective and therefore remains stable in the future.

The objectives of the GEP are achieved through a range of activities that fall mainly into two overarching categories that theoretically unfold in chronological order but effectively coexist:

- Positive Action, where balance is achieved through temporary measures. Positive action should cease to exist when its purpose is fulfilled.
- Gender mainstreaming, which, in the context of a GEP, involves integrating a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, normative measures and expenditure programmes with the aim of promoting gender equality and combating discrimination. Gender mainstreaming requires both integrating a gender perspective into the content of various strategies and policies and addressing the issue of representation of women and men. More recent approaches emphasise how respect for diversity and the promotion of inclusion complement both the adopted perspective and issues of representation.

These two overarching categories are reflected in the five areas of intervention that the EU requires to be addressed as a minimum in a GEP.

To ensure the sustainability of the GEP, the strategies and measures must be implemented and consolidated in such a way that they may not require a formal commitment in the future. However, to achieve this result, cultural and social change is required, which takes a lot of time.

When communicating the GEP and its activities, it is important to make it clear whether the actions taken are positive action or gender mainstreaming. Remember that positive action needs to quickly create a starting point that makes it no longer necessary. However, from this starting point there should be a way to continue the journey through gender mainstreaming.

For example, when communicating the GEP, it is crucial to show the connections and relationships between the individual measures. These measures are never developed in isolation, but they all start (or should start) from an analysis of the existing situation and a clear vision of what is to be achieved.



A disaggregated data collection based on gender, age, and ethnicity serves as a starting point for...

Adopting inclusive language will enable...

Gender bias training will ensure...



Collaboration between those who are knowledgeable about the vision and mission of the GEP and those who have the conceptual and practical tools to create the communication plan, its components and its implementation is therefore essential in developing a communication plan for a GEP.

Communication: When

The communication plan ideally follows the phases of development, implementation and evaluation of the GEP.

- Announcing the start of work on the GEP is important to draw attention to this new programmatic document. It is also beneficial to state that although it is a requirement linked to Horizon Europe funding (and for Italy, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan), the University attaches great importance to the document and will take all the necessary steps to produce a document that will have a real impact on the institution and the people who study or work there. Indirectly, a well-crafted GEP has local, national and even international impact through the networks it facilitates and the European projects it can facilitate. In emphasising the value of the GEP, it is important to clarify that all areas of intervention will have an impact on all academic areas and all people.

- The construction process usually takes place over several months. Additional messages can highlight important milestones, such as the formal establishment of the working group responsible for the design of the GEP, the identification of other contributors and the establishment of links with other public institutions involved in the development.



In many cases, the communication plan is designated as one of the measures to be implemented and, as such, is often developed only after the GEP has been formally approved. However, public institutions almost always have press/communications offices that can initiate the flow of information at the idea stage, albeit in an informal way.

If communication is done by email or on the intranet, it is the staff involved in the working group who prepare and disseminate the content.

- When officially publishing the GEP, which should be easily accessible on the institution's website, it is advisable to take certain measures. For example, giving the file a name that clearly indicates its content, such as GEP_year_university_name or other combinations of the same information. The metadata on the page should also make it easier to find the document quickly.

- Visibility of the GEP publication through all available media will help draw attention to the document: press conferences, online or face-to-face workshops, sharing information on sector websites or in posts, sending informative emails to staff and students.
- Informing ongoing project partners and collaborative organisations will convey that the institution is willing to participate in future projects if it meets EU requirements.
- Once published, the responsibility lies with those implementing individual actions or sub-actions. Again, it is useful to write a text explaining the content of the action and the expected results. The press and communication department can then adapt it to the different target groups and means of communication. Table No. 2 can serve as a starting point for determining the content, recipients and means of communication for individual actions or sub-actions.
- The GEP is an evolving document and usually the monitoring and evaluation process at the end of each calendar year leads to changes in some actions. These might be moved or modified, or new actions on similar topics might be added. All changes are communicated, highlighting the path taken, the challenges faced and the new challenges being addressed.
- In general, for any activity related to the GEP, it is worth asking: are there aspects that would be useful to communicate? To promote activities, generate interest or commitment, highlight excellence and promote good practise?
- Finally, should the communication plan be communicated? All staff need to be informed of the existence of the communication plan, which should be accessible for obvious reasons. It might also be useful to produce an extract summarising the most important aspects of the communication plan and publish it on the website, preferably on the same page where the GEP is uploaded.

<i>Organisation name</i>	
<i>Action/subaction code</i>	
<i>Description of action</i>	
<i>Products/results/impact</i>	
<i>Target groups</i>	<i>Students</i> <i>Faculty members</i> <i>Researchers</i> <i>Administrative staff</i> <i>General public</i>
<i>Communication channels</i>	<i>Websites</i> <i>Newsletters</i> <i>Social media platforms (please specify)</i> <i>Bulletin boards</i> <i>Events</i> <i>Press releases</i> <i>Publications (brochures, leaflets)</i> <i>Intranet</i> <i>Videos and photos</i> <i>Emails</i> <i>Advertisements (posters, banners, billboards)</i> <i>Reports and Deliverables of European projects funded by Horizon Europe</i>
<i>Date</i>	<i>(Time limit for publishing information, emailing or other)</i>
<i>Other</i>	
Table 2: Communication plan for GEP action/sub-action Sheet	

Bibliographical references

This text is based on first-hand experience gained through participation in numerous European Union funded projects and through participation in the Horizon 2020 SAGE project - Systemic Action for Gender Equality, coordinated by Trinity University Dublin, The University of Dublin.

In addition to the documents mentioned above, the following documents and websites were consulted:

REA. COMMUNICATION, DISSEMINATION AND EXPLOITATION. WHY THEY ALL MATTER AND WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE? <https://rea.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/Communication%2C%20Dissemination%20and%20%20Exploitation-2021.pdf>

Fondazione CRUI. Vademecum per l'elaborazione del Gender Equality Plan negli Atenei Italiani: <https://www.cru.it/archivionotizie/vademecum-per-l-elaborazione-del-gender-equalityplan-negli-atenei-italiani.html>

APRE. HORIZON EUROPE – LA GUIDA. COS'È, COSA FINANZIA, COME PARTECIPARE: <https://apre.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/guida-Horizon-Europe.pdf>

EIGE. What is gender mainstreaming. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>

EIGE. Istituto europeo per l'uguaglianza di genere. Guida ai cambiamenti strutturali nel mondo accademico e nelle organizzazioni di ricerca. [ti_pubpdf_mh0417155itn_pdfweb_20170905223005.pdf](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming)

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