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# ATHENA Newsletter

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## ATHENA: Marking the Final Stages with two events!

As ATHENA enters its final six months, we are excited to share the progress we have made in fostering the adoption of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) within research-performing and research-funding organisations in Widening countries.

To mark the culmination of this impactful journey, we are organising two pivotal events:

- **Policy Event:** In collaboration with the European Parliament, on May 13, 2025, in Brussels.
- **ATHENA Final Conference:** On May 14, 2025, also in Brussels.
- Tailored strategies to achieve gender balance in smaller, younger, and remote universities, addressing their specific challenges and opportunities.

These events will showcase two newly developed policy briefs that explore:

- The essential role of gender equality in driving research excellence and innovation across Europe.

The conference will highlight the transformative impact of gender equality on research and innovation, share key findings from the ATHENA project, and provide opportunities to foster collaboration and advocate for systemic change in academia.

Save the dates and join us in shaping a more inclusive academic future!

# Advancing Gender Equality in Research: ATHENA first set of Policy Recommendations

The ATHENA project has published its first policy brief, developed under the Deliverable 6.7: Policy Brief for Feedback to the European Commission - 1 (2023). This comprehensive document offers actionable recommendations to promote gender equality in research and innovation (R&I).

Drawing on the collective expertise of ATHENA and sister projects such as SPEAR, CALIPER, GENDERACTIONplus, and LeTSGEPs, these recommendations target two key groups:

- **Policymakers at the EU and national levels** to advance gender diversity and inclusion within the European Research Area (ERA).
- **Research Performing and Funding Organisations (RPOs and RFOs)** to support the design and implementation of more inclusive Gender Equality Plans (GEPs).

## Key recommendations at a glance

**Promote Gender Equality in the ERA:** Advocate for greater gender diversity in research teams, decision-making



panels, and evaluation boards to foster an innovative and balanced research ecosystem.

**Leverage Funding Programmes:** Strengthen gender mainstreaming in programmes like Horizon Europe to build on its momentum for shaping an inclusive future.

**Empower RPOs and RFOs:** Equip organisations with tools like the ATHENA Toolkit to implement systemic changes through tailored GEPs that go beyond compliance.

### Explore our infographics

To complement these recommendations, ATHENA has developed three infographics that highlight actionable steps for each area. These resources are designed to help stakeholders understand and implement the changes effectively.

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## Policy Recommendations for Promoting GENDER EQUALITY

in the Research Performing and Funding Organisations

### 01 Engage Leadership and Foster Inclusivity

Actively involve top management in the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) process. Ensure transparency and inclusivity to form a well-rounded working group. Promote multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral knowledge exchange for GEP design and follow-up.

### 02 Assign Clear Responsibilities

Designate a specific person for each GEP action. Clearly identify responsible individuals internally to streamline implementation and monitoring processes.

### 03 Define Deadlines & Metrics

Establish actions with clear deadlines and key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure the effective implementation and evaluation of GEP goals.

### 04 Promote Stakeholder Participation

Encourage stakeholder involvement from the initial design phases of the GEP. Collect feedback during implementation to revise or add new actions for subsequent GEP editions.

### 05 Integrate Gender Budgeting

Incorporate gender budgeting measures into the institution's reporting framework. This approach highlights financial commitment and effectiveness in promoting gender equality.

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## Policy Recommendations for Strengthening GENDER EQUALITY

in the European Research Area & Member States

### 01 Remove Barriers for Women in Research

**Gender Balance in Leadership:** Ensure equal representation in decision-making roles.  
**Work & Life Balance:** Encourage family reconciliation policies to support career development.  
**Address Gender Discrimination:** Create national frameworks to support victims of gender-based violence.

### 02 Integrate Gender Perspectives in Research

**Gender in STEM & Innovation:** Include gender perspectives in STEM, AI, and ICT fields.  
**Tackle Societal Challenges:** Apply gender analysis to issues like climate change, poverty, and health.

### 03 Strengthen Support for Gender Equality Plans

**EU Support:** Expand EU Framework programs to fund Gender Equality Plans (GEPs).  
**National Incentives:** Governments to provide support and resources, especially for institutions new to GEPs.

### 04 Enhance Guidelines for Gender Equality Plans Development

**Standardized Tools:** Utilize resources like the ATHENA toolkit, GEAR Tool, and Horizon Europe guidelines.  
**Continuous Improvement:** Encourage ongoing refinement of GEPs to achieve lasting impact.

### 05 Establish National Support Centres

**Resource Centres for Gender Equality:** National centres to assist institutions in developing Gender Equality Plans.

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## Policy Recommendations for Strengthening GENDER EQUALITY

in European and National Financing Programmes

### 01 Gender as a Cross-Cutting Issue

Integrate the gender dimension as a cross-cutting issue in EU Framework Programmes and relevant national funding initiatives to ensure its inclusion across all research and innovation activities.

### 02 Dedicated Funding for Gender Equality

Incorporate gender equality as a specific focus area in programmes like Horizon Europe. Maintain funding lines for gender issues in key areas such as Widening Participation, Global Challenges, and Innovative Europe, while supporting the development of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs).

### 03 Tackling Societal Challenges

Ensure financing programmes explicitly address gender aspects of societal challenges tied to the Sustainable Development Goals, including climate change, digital transition, and other critical areas.

### 04 Gender in Rules and Evaluation

Strengthen gender balance and content requirements in financing programme rules. Revise evaluation criteria to include a robust gender perspective for assessing funded projects.

### 05 Expertise in Gender Issues

Include gender expertise within funded project teams, expert groups, and evaluation panels to enhance the quality and impact of financing programmes.

### 06 Continuous Monitoring

Implement regular monitoring and evaluation of gender-related aspects in financing programmes to enable necessary adjustments and ensure the effectiveness of future funding schemes.

The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101019719.
 
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## Looking ahead

A second version of the policy brief and two position papers will be published at the project's conclusion to reflect ongoing insights and advancements.

**Want to learn more?**

Read the news

Download the full deliverable

# Monitoring & Evaluation: Supporting Structural Change in Research Performing Organisations

The implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in research-performing organisations is a dynamic and complex process. It involves diverse stakeholders, intersects with existing processes, and requires engagement at various organisational levels. To navigate these complexities, ATHENA project integrates a robust Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework, fostering reflection, learning, and adaptation.

## A learning-oriented evaluation

The ATHENA project's accompanying evaluation aims to assess the implementation processes of GEPs, evaluate institutional progress, and

identify structural changes brought about by the measures. Our approach promotes learning both within and across participating organisations, ensuring continuous improvement. Key goals include:

- Comparing implementation practices across organisations and their outcomes.
- Assessing the impact of activities through ex-ante and ex-post perspectives.
- Identifying organisational changes and benefits from implemented measures.
- Enhancing ATHENA's learning environment through shared insights.

- Tailored to Cultural and Structural Contexts

ATHENA's M&E system is designed to align with the specific GEPs developed by each partner organisation, and their concrete actions. This includes a conceptual framework for structural change and a flexible evaluation question matrix that integrates diverse stakeholder perspectives while ensuring gender equality and empowerment data is central. Reflexivity is a cornerstone of this approach, encouraging stakeholders to reflect on data, discuss results, and refine practices, supported by a clearly defined evaluation concept, methodology, and tools.

## Key M&E Activities in ATHENA

**Guidelines & Bilateral Support:** Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation guidelines paired with one-on-one support meetings.

**Indicators Framework:** A tailored framework for each GEP to monitor progress effectively.

**GEPVision Configuration:** A digital tool to streamline monitoring activities.

**Internal Monitoring Reports:** Two reports per partner, focusing on organizational-level insights.

**Evaluation Tools:** Development of satisfaction survey templates and evaluation report guidelines with supportive questions.

**Satisfaction Survey:** Conducted to gather feedback from stakeholders.

**Data Collection & Analysis:** Continuous monitoring and in-depth analysis.

## Highlighting the “S” in ESG: Insights from Ana Kamińska

Dr. Ana Kamińska, from Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce, an ATHENA partner, developing an academic article titled **“Going deeper into the ‘S’ of ESG in academia: Relevance and challenges of monitoring and evaluation of institutional**

**and cultural change through GEP implementation. The case study of the ATHENA Project.”** The article explores the often-overlooked social dimension (“S”) of the ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) framework, emphasizing its importance in fostering institutional change within academic settings.

Drawing on ATHENA as a case study, Kamińska examines how GEPs can address recruitment barriers, gender imbalances, and cultural biases while driving meaningful change. She highlights the need for robust monitoring systems and meaningful indicators aligned with GEP objectives to measure progress, enhance reflexivity, and support sustainable development in academia.

# From Words to Action: The Transformative Impact of Gender Equality Plans in the ATHENA Project

Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) are not just policies — they represent a commitment to creating inclusive environments that allow everyone to thrive. Under the ATHENA project, institutions across Europe have embraced GEPs to address structural inequalities, spark cultural change, and set a new standard for excellence in research and innovation.

Through a recent series of video testimonials, members of the ATHENA consortium have been sharing their insights and experiences, showcasing the transformative power of GEPs in action. We are sharing these testimonials, tips and insights on our social accounts.

## Highlighting achievements across the consortium

One of the standout examples comes from the Jožef Stefan Institute in Slovenia.

Researcher Ita Junkar highlighted significant changes with the establishment of a Human Resources Unit and the adoption of guidelines for gender-sensitive language in the institution. “We even changed internal acts to prevent gender bias,” she shared.

Similarly, Denis Arčon, Head of the Solid-State Physics Department at the same institute, underscored how the project elevated awareness around integration principles.

*“Looking at problems from different angles improves research quality and leads to better, more original solutions”,* he noted, emphasizing the improved working environment and high standards set for the future.

**“GEPs aim to create a fair and inclusive environment for everyone”,** she explained. FRCT’s efforts have sparked dynamic discussions among

colleagues, fostering a culture of reflection and action around gender equality issues.



**Ita Junkar**  
Jožef Stefan Institute

## Real-world impact of GEPs

The ATHENA project has gone beyond raising awareness—it has driven tangible changes. From policy shifts to training sessions, GEPs have transformed organisational cultures, creating more inclusive environments where diverse perspectives thrive. Laura from ACIISI, Canary Islands



**Gabriel Bianchi**  
Slovak Academy of Sciences

Government, highlighted how the project enabled the development of a standalone GEP tailored to their institution’s unique needs. *“Thanks to ATHENA, we’ve implemented training sessions and analysed our processes to promote the presence of women in research,”* she explained.

These changes resonate on an individual level too. Catarina Gonçalves from FRCT described

how ATHENA sessions have sparked meaningful conversations that extend beyond formal settings. *“The sessions generated debates between colleagues, creating a shared space to reflect and exchange ideas,”* she noted. This ripple effect underscores the far-reaching influence of GEPs in fostering lasting cultural shifts.

## Key Lessons learned

The videos also highlighted common challenges and strategies for success. Gabriel Bianchi from the Slovak Academy of Sciences reflected on initial obstacles, particularly engaging stakeholders at all levels.

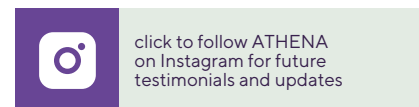
*“We addressed those who were responsive, hoping to create a pool of multipliers to disseminate enthusiasm for gender equality,”* he shared.

Another key takeaway is the importance of tailoring GEPs to specific organisational contexts. As Neuza emphasised, effective GEPs require clear, measurable goals and collective engagement. *“Gender equality isn’t just the right thing to do; it enhances research quality, innovation, and overall success,”* she affirmed.

## Looking to the Future

What lies ahead for gender equality in research? Gonzalo from ACIISI envisions a future with stronger policies, inclusive initiatives, and greater representation of women and marginalised genders in leadership roles. *“Efforts to close the pay and opportunity gap will bring strong results,”* he predicted, emphasising the global benefits of diverse perspectives in research.

The ATHENA project has demonstrated that Gender Equality Plans are far more than theoretical frameworks—they are tools for creating fair, dynamic, and innovative research environments. From tackling unconscious bias to transforming organisational policies, the project has inspired meaningful change.



# Pledge for Zero Tolerance for gender-based Violence in Research and Academia



## Pledge for Zero Tolerance to gender-based violence!



On the latest celebration of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, on 25 November, the GenderSAFE and GENDERACTIONplus projects have launched a joint campaign urging higher education and research institutions to take definitive action against gender-based violence (GBV).

### Why is a zero-tolerance approach important?

Gender-based violence is a systemic issue in the European Research Area (ERA), affecting 62% of students and staff in higher education and research institutions, according to the UniSAFE survey. Despite its prevalence, 93% of students and 77% of staff disclosed not considering the behaviour serious enough to report, not recognising

it as violence at the time, or believing that reporting it would lead to no action. Policies against GBV often lack effectiveness, are poorly implemented, and are rarely monitored.

A zero-tolerance approach ensures institutions take decisive steps to prevent violence, support victims, and build trust in their policies. It sets the foundation for effective prevention, support, and cultural change in academia and research.

### Take the pledge

We call on higher education institutions, research organisations, and individuals across the ERA to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to GBV. By committing to this pledge, you can:

- Support safer, more inclusive academic and research environments.
- Promote respect, equality, and dignity for all.
- Stand with institutions already leading the way in fostering change.

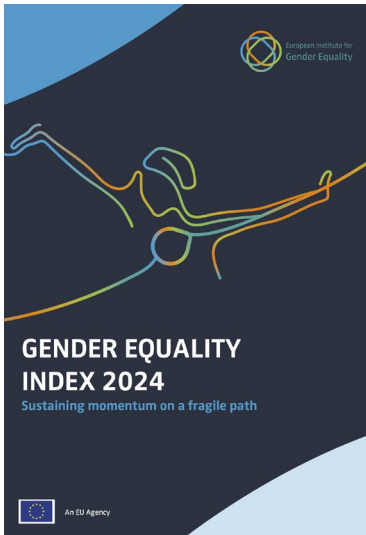
Together, we can eliminate gender-based violence in academia and research. Sign the pledge today!

#### How to Sign

1. Visit [GenderSafe Pledge](#).
2. Choose your signing option:  
For Organisations: Complete the organisational commitment [form](#).  
For Individuals: Fill out the individual pledge [form](#).
3. Share your commitment to inspire others.

# News on Gender Equality

Relevant publications and news around Europe!



Gender Equality Index 2024:  
Sustaining Momentum  
on a Fragile Path

Corporate author(s):  
[European Institute for  
Gender Equality \(EIGE\)](#)

Click [here](#)



SUPPORTER Project Policy Brief  
1: support to the implementation  
of inclusive Gender Equality Plans

Corporate author:  
[SUPPORTER Consortium](#)

Click [here](#)



Progress Toward  
Gender Equality in Research &  
Innovation – 2024 Review

An in-depth analysis of research participation,  
career progression and research contributions  
across the globe



Progress towards Gender  
Equality in Research &  
Innovation – 2024 Review

Corporate author(s):  
[Elsevier](#)

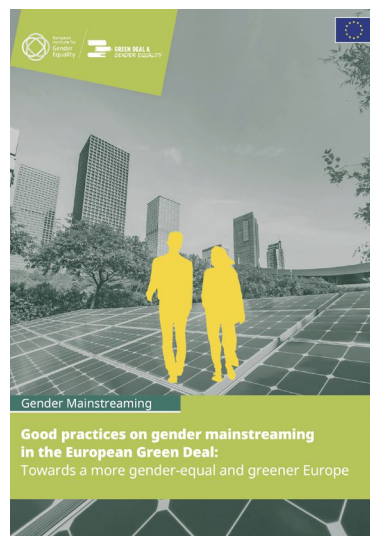
Click [here](#)



Global Gender Gap 2024

Corporate author(s):  
[World Economic Forum](#)

Click [here](#)



Good practices on gender  
mainstreaming in the European  
Green Deal: Towards a more  
gender-equal and greener Europe

Corporate author(s):  
[European Institute for  
Gender Equality \(EIGE\)](#)


Click [here](#)



# Upcoming events


## International Conference on Gender and Technology 2025

 16-19 January 2025

 Kerala, India  
Find out more [here](#).


## Global Women's Breakfast 2025: Reaching for the Quarks

 11 February 2025

 Online  
Find out more [here](#).

## 3rd World Conference on Gender Equality (GECONF)

 12-14 June 2025

 Vienna, Austria  
Find out more [here](#).

## Working with a gender perspective – Taking a gender aware approach to research & teaching

 13 January 2025

 Online  
Find out more [here](#).


## GENDERACTIONplus Final Conference | Towards new Horizons: Inclusive Gender Equality in FP10 and Beyond

 12 February 2025

 Brussels, Belgium, and online  
Find out more [here](#).

## 7th Global Conference on Women's Studies (WOMENSCONF)

 25-27 July 2025

 Copenhagen, Denmark  
Find out more [here](#).