unite! | Widening

Development of Gender, Inclusion and Equity Plans in Research Careers – Survival Guide to Widening Countries

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This deliverable presents a comprehensive analysis of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) across the Unite!Alliance, with a focus on supporting institutions in Widening countries. GEPs are strategic instruments that promote systemic change in higher education and research by embedding gender equity into governance, policies, and everyday institutional practices. While partner institutions vary in their experience and maturity with GEP implementation, all are committed to advancing inclusive and sustainable academic environments.

The delieverable builds on the methodology established in the Unite!H2020 project and aligns with the European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) GEAR Toolkit and Horizon Europe funding requirements. It includes institutional case studies, comparative assessments, and a detailed mapping of over 330 actions from the nine Unite! partner GEPs. The findings reveal a shift from individual-level interventions ("Fix the Women") toward structural and cultural reforms that promote equal opportunities, inclusive work cultures, and systemic change.

To support this work, a Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository was developed. The tool enables institutions to upload, reflect on, and compare GEP actions, fostering mutual learning and strategic planning - particularly beneficial for Widening partners. The repository is openly accessible via the Unite! Agora platform being integrated into a broader digital infrastructure developed under the Unite!Widening project.

Key findings from the repository analysis highlight common priorities among Unite! partners: work–life balance, career progression, inclusive governance, and addressing structural inequalities. The repository also demonstrates increasing attention to intersectionality and diversity beyond gender alone.

This deliverable affirms the importance of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) as both compliance tools and catalysts for institutional transformation. It provides practical insights, showcases good practices, and strengthens the capacity of Widening institutions to meet EU standards while fostering inclusive excellence well aligned with Smart Objective 6 of Unite!Widening project. Closely integrated with complementary project actions, this work builds on initiatives that have significantly enhanced institutional capacity to implement systemic change. Alongside the Gender Equality Actions Repository, tools such as the Handbook of HRS4R for Widening Countries, the Science & Innovation Skills Academy, and new policy recommendations for research careers have contributed to embedding inclusive, transparent, and sustainable practices across participating universities. By linking this repository to the AGORA platform and aligning it with broader capacity-building and open science strategies, the project ensures that gender balance and equity are not only compliance imperatives but also catalysts for modernised research careers, institutional competitiveness, and stronger collaboration within the European Research Area. The collective commitment of the Unite! Alliance positions it as a model for advancing equity and inclusion, reducing disparities, promoting human capital development, and driving inclusive excellence across the Unite! Alliance and beyond.

1 | Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental European value and a cornerstone of inclusive, innovative, and sustainable research and innovation systems. Despite notable progress in recent years, significant gender disparities persist across higher education institutions (HEIs), especially in countries designated as *Widening* within the [European Research Area](#) (ERA). These disparities are evident not only in access to leadership positions, funding opportunities, and career progression, but also in the structural and cultural barriers that disproportionately affect women and underrepresented groups in academic careers.

Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) are strategic tools that embed gender equity into institutional governance, policies, and practices to drive systemic, long-term change. In higher education, GEPs help address bias, improve transparency in recruitment and promotion, support work–life balance, and foster inclusive environments. They also include measures such as mentoring, gender-sensitive evaluation, and integrating gender dimensions into research, contributing to more equitable and supportive research cultures. Importantly, GEPs align institutions with [Horizon Europe funding requirements](#). For Widening Countries, where entrenched gender norms and limited capacity present additional challenges, robust and context-sensitive GEPs are especially vital. They not only ensure compliance with EU expectations but also strengthen institutional excellence, international cooperation, and researchers' career development.

This deliverable builds on the collaborative work developed within the [Unite!Alliance](#), particularly drawing from the analytical framework and outcomes of the [Unite!H2020 project](#). That foundational work offered a comparative analysis of GEPs across partner institutions, using a shared methodology to map, categorize, and critically assess the transformative potential of institutional actions. GEPs are not merely compliance tools; they are strategic levers for structural and cultural change. Their systematic assessment is essential not only for meeting [Horizon Europe eligibility](#) but also for driving continuous institutional learning, fairness in career development, and inclusive excellence.

The process of defining a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in higher education institutions follows a structured, evidence-based, and participatory approach, as outlined by the European Institute for Gender Equality, named Gender Equality in Academia and Research Toolkit ([EIGE GEAR Toolkit](#)). The recommended procedure includes the following key steps.

The European Institute for Gender Equality has defined a structured, participatory, and evidence-based approach for the development of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in higher education institutions, as outlined in its GEAR (Gender Equality in Academia and Research) Toolkit ([EIGE GEAR Toolkit](#)). This methodology provides clear guidance through key steps such as institutional assessment, stakeholder engagement, goal setting, action planning, and progress monitoring. Building on the comparative work initiated by the Unite!H2020 project, this framework positions GEPs not only as tools for Horizon Europe compliance but as strategic instruments to foster institutional transformation, promote inclusive excellence, and ensure fairness in academic career development.

Within Unite!, GEPs have become a shared area of reflection and innovation, contributing to both institutional transformation and collective learning. However, the experience of implementing GEPs

has revealed persistent challenges in Widening Countries, such as limited institutional capacity, a lack of specialized expertise, under-resourced equality structures, and enduring cultural norms that hinder transformative approaches. Moreover, adapting models developed in non-Widening contexts often leads to implementation difficulties and limited internal ownership.

To address these specific needs, a digital GEP repository tool was developed as part of this project. Building on the methodology of the Unite!H2020 initiative, the tool enables institutions to self-evaluate their GEPs across key dimensions, including the type of action, the approach to gender change, and the extent to which actions are systemic, inclusive, and sustainable. In addition to enhancing transparency, comparability, and strategic planning, the tool is specifically designed to support institutions in Widening contexts by providing access to concrete examples and practices from across the Alliance. These examples offer targeted suggestions for addressing structural and cultural challenges, enabling institutions to find inspiration, identify transferable practices, and build internal capacity. Together, this deliverable and its accompanying digital tool aim to reinforce institutional commitment, support cross-border collaboration, and promote sustainable progress toward gender equity, inclusion, and career advancement in research.

2 | GEP Experiences within Unite!

The process of defining a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in higher education institutions follows a structured, evidence-based, and participatory approach, as outlined by the European Institute for Gender Equality, named Gender Equality in Academia and Research Toolkit (EIGE GEAR Toolkit). The recommended procedure includes the following key steps:

1. **Institutional Commitment:** The process begins with securing formal support from top management. This includes official endorsement of the GEP, allocation of resources, and the establishment of a dedicated team or structure (e.g. Gender Equality Committee or Working Group).
2. **Assessment and Data Collection:** A thorough assessment of the institution's gender equality status is conducted. This includes the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data across relevant areas (e.g., recruitment, career progression, work-life balance, decision-making, and gender-based violence). Both quantitative (e.g. HR statistics) and qualitative methods (e.g. surveys, focus groups) are used.
3. **Plan Design and Prioritisation:** Based on the assessment, the GEP is drafted with clear objectives, priorities, and tailored measures. The plan should align with EU and national frameworks and focus on removing structural barriers to gender equality in academia and research.
4. **Implementation:** The GEP is rolled out through targeted actions, awareness-raising, training, policy changes, and inclusive practices. Responsibilities are clearly assigned, timelines established, and internal communication ensured.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Progress is regularly monitored using specific indicators. Evaluation mechanisms help assess the effectiveness of the measures, allowing for adjustments and continuous improvement.
6. **Sustainability and Institutionalisation:** To ensure long-term impact, gender equality actions are embedded in institutional strategies, policies, and culture. Continued leadership support and capacity-building efforts are crucial for maintaining momentum.

Throughout the process, stakeholder participation is essential. Involving academic and non-academic staff, students, and decision-makers fosters ownership, transparency, and the integration of diverse perspectives.

Within the Unite! alliance, the experience with Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) is diverse: while some partner institutions have been implementing GEPs for over 20 years, others are only beginning this process. This diversity offers a valuable opportunity for mutual learning. Sharing experiences, methodologies, and institutional procedures can provide meaningful support and inspiration—particularly for institutions in widening countries - by helping them to navigate challenges, adopt effective practices, and develop context-sensitive approaches to gender equality. This exchange strengthens the alliance's collective capacity to promote structural change and foster inclusive academic environments across all partners.

2.1.1 | Experience from Aalto

Aalto University collects data for its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) plan using a mixed-methods approach. Regular staff and student surveys provide quantitative insights, while semi-structured interviews capture qualitative experiences. The process is community-driven, with faculty, staff, and students co-designing priorities and contributing to data collection. Internal statistics and secondary data further contextualise findings, ensuring the EDI plan is inclusive and evidence-based.

Aalto University's EDI framework aligns with the EU's GEAR toolkit and Horizon Europe guidelines, following key steps from analysis to implementation and monitoring. The 2025–28 EDI Plan reflects Horizon Europe's five priority areas and includes structured data collection, training, and evaluation. Gender mainstreaming is integrated across governance, teaching, research, and policies, ensuring alignment with EU standards.

Aalto University's EDI plan was developed through a participatory process led by the Provost and EDI Officer, involving the University EDI Committee with faculty, staff, and student representatives. Each school formed its own EDI task force, and the student union contributed to initiatives on inclusive teaching and accessibility. Researchers also supported data-driven evaluation. This collaborative model ensures an inclusive and evidence-based approach.

2.1.2 | Experience from Grenoble INP-UGA

Grenoble INP-UGA collects data to support its gender equality plan through a combination of internal diagnostics, annual reporting, and feedback from various stakeholders. Data sources include internal databases (such as HR records and the Rapport Social Unique), regular monitoring of recruitment and promotion processes, and the analysis of participation in training and awareness activities. The institution also tracks engagement through attendance at events, page views on intranet resources, and feedback from targeted communication campaigns. Additionally, the plan is informed by national and European guidelines, and the results are presented annually to relevant governance bodies for review and adjustment, ensuring a continuous improvement process.

The framework for Grenoble INP-UGA's gender equality plan is structured around five key action axes: governance, pay gap evaluation, equal access to positions, work-life balance, and combating gender-based violence. This structure closely aligns with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) GEAR tool, emphasizing diagnosis, action planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The plan incorporates EU directives and national legislation, such as the *Loi de transformation de la fonction publique* (the Law on the transformation of Public Service), and is regularly updated to reflect evolving European strategies and best practices. The institution also participates in European projects and uses EU-recommended indicators to benchmark progress and ensure compliance with international standards.

The participatory process at Grenoble INP-UGA involves a wide range of stakeholders. The plan is developed and monitored by a dedicated equality mission team, including vice-presidents, HR representatives, and equality officers from various components. Input is gathered from specialized committees (such as the Comité Social d'Administration and the CHSCT), working groups on quality of work life, and through collaboration with researchers and external experts. Regular consultations and feedback sessions are held with staff, students, and union representatives. The process is further enriched by partnerships with local associations, external consultants, and participation in national

and European networks, ensuring broad engagement and shared ownership of the plan's objectives and actions.

2.1.3 | Experience from KTH

Through internal staff and student surveys, workshops and dialogues. We also make use of research and studies that aren't necessarily conducted at or about our own university, but are applicable to it (e.g. studies on the Swedish academic sector or society in general).

The framework for our GEP is defined through national requirements through e.g. legislation and government missions, requirements regarding gender and diversity from research funders (both national and EU), and from our university's own vision and goals related to gender equality, diversity and equal conditions.

In the development of the GEP, workshops are held with important stakeholders. These include the Management Group (consisting of e.g. the heads of school, the university director, the dean of faculty, and is the highest decision-making body of the university besides the Board), the Faculty Council (a university-wide body for the university's work on quality development and collegial dialogue), and the student union. The views presented in those groups should be representative of groups and functions further down in their respective parts of the organisation.

Meetings are also held with specific functions, such as research support, sustainability coordination, and work and study environment functions. Drafts of the GEP are also sent out on referral internally to an even larger group of interested parties.

2.1.4 | Experience from PoliTO

Every three years, in alignment with the life cycle of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP), PoliTO collects gender-disaggregated data on its university population - students, academic and research staff, and administrative staff - and conducts statistical analyses presented in the Gender Equality Report (Bilancio di Genere). These data serve both to monitor the impact of previous actions and to inform the planning of future initiatives.

In addition, every two years, the university administers an Organizational Wellbeing Survey to students, PhD candidates, academic and research staff, and administrative personnel. The findings from this survey inform both wellbeing-related actions and broader Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) measures, which are integrated into a single strategic document: the Gender Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Wellbeing Plan (GEDIW Plan).

PoliTO's strategic framework is informed by both the process-oriented requirements and the content-related recommendations outlined in the GEAR tool and the Horizon Europe Guidelines on Gender Equality Plans. The GEP is conceived as a cyclical process encompassing audit, planning, implementation, and continuous monitoring, and it addresses all the recommended thematic areas. In its most recent iteration, PoliTO adopted the recommendation and emerging best practices to broaden the scope of the Plan beyond gender equality, incorporating other dimensions of diversity and potential inequality, including race and ethnicity, citizenship, gender identity and sexual orientation, disability, and age. The institution also strives to apply an intersectional perspective across these axes of identity.

In addition to the Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI) Observatory - a permanent internal body composed of key stakeholders from the university's leadership and tasked with guiding institutional strategy on EDI - the most recent GEDIW Plan introduced a broader participatory process. Through an open call, over 60 participants were engaged and organized into three working groups, each addressing different thematic areas of the Plan with the aim of identifying specific goals and actions. Furthermore, a Center for Gender Studies has been established, composed of scholars with expertise in gender and academic organizations. This Center is responsible for guiding the scientific underpinnings of the strategy and for coordinating and finalizing the development of the GEPs. The GEDI Observatory then reviews and approves it.

2.1.5 | Experience from TUDa

As part of the GEP and in further developing it, TUDa collects personnel and student data for monitoring purposes, conducts surveys and relies on research data from national and international studies.

The framework is a combination of state, federal and EU-legislation, requirements from third party funders and alignment with institutional strategic goals and ambitions.

The GEP is a central strategic document of TUDa. We implemented an iterative process involving the Gender Equality Office, stakeholders from all status groups (students, academic staff of all departments, administrative staff in various functions) as well as the executive board. The aim is to involve multiple perspectives and to develop a GEP that is conducive to all members and the overall goals.

2.1.6 | Experience from TU Graz

Data collection at TU Graz relies on multiple institutional and national sources. These include the annual Intellectual Capital Statement - a public document submitted to the Ministry of Science - along with data from unidata, the Ministry's data warehouse for universities. Since the previous year, data has also been sourced from TU Graz's internal Equal Opportunities Report, in which individual faculties, the students' body, and the Working Group for Equal Opportunities analyse their specific data and challenges.

Following the methodology of the GEAR tool, TU Graz has developed and published a Gender Equality Plan (GEP), accessible at www.tugraz.at/go/diversitaet. The current GEP is available directly via this link and is scheduled for renewal in 2026/27.

The participatory design of the GEP involved representatives from several units and governance bodies, including the Working Group for Equal Opportunities, the Working Group for Gender & Diversity, the Vice Rectors for Research and for Human Resources and Finance, the Strategy and Organizational Development office, the Human Resource Development office, and the Unit for Quality Management, Evaluation & Reporting.

2.1.7 | Experience from UPC

The current UPC GEP (IV edition, 2022–2026) is structured around 7 axes, 18 goals, and 64 actions. Each action includes a specific performance indicator and a designated responsible party. Two data levels are defined: (1) 12 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and (2) 64 action-specific indicators. KPIs

are collected annually by the Equality Unit and must always be ready for internal and external dissemination. Action-related indicators are gathered at three key points: the start of the GEP, its mid-term review (2024), and its conclusion. Most of this data is automatically extracted from internal databases and displayed publicly on a dynamic Power BI dashboard, disaggregated by sex. However, some indicators cannot be collected automatically. In these cases, responsible parties are notified months in advance to compile the necessary information. Data review and analysis are carried out collaboratively by the Equality Unit, the Social Council, and the Equality Commission.

UPC is nearing the end of its IV GEP (2022-2026). Drawing on lessons from previous plans, the current GEP's monitoring approach includes:

1) collaboration with stakeholders from the design phase - data-responsible units were involved in defining and agreeing on the indicators;
2) prioritizing automatic data collection when possible, enabling transparent, real-time visualization via a Power BI dashboard with sex-disaggregated data;
3) identifying 12 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to offer a concise and relevant overview, updated periodically; and
4) conducting a mid-term review of actions and indicators to ensure the GEP remains flexible, adaptive, and resilient.

The definition of the IV UPC GEP was a participatory process - and so is its monitoring. Each of the 64 actions has an assigned responsible unit, ensuring broad institutional involvement. In addition to the Equality Unit, key contributors include the Innovation and Community Office, the Social Council, the Institute of Education Sciences, the Communication Service, the Research and Innovation Support Service, the Planning, Evaluation and Quality Office, Management, and the network of equality officers across centers. Notably, the Planning, Evaluation and Quality Office plays a key role in visualizing data through the Power BI dynamic dashboard. This platform enables the entire UPC community - and the public—to openly consult up-to-date information on GEP progress, with data disaggregated by sex, promoting transparency and accountability.

2.1.8 | Experience from ULisboa and Técnico Lisboa

The University of Lisbon comprises 18 Schools, thus its Plan for Gender Equality, Inclusion and non-discrimination provides a flexible framework for promoting equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination across its diverse units. Each School, Administration, and Social Service is responsible for defining specific actions, setting priorities and indicators based on local context and data availability. The plan focuses on five strategic areas: governance and decision-making structures, recruitment, performance appraisal and career progression, internal and external communication, work-family balance (personal life), and research and education. In this sense, the experience of the GEP of the School of Engineering - Técnico Lisboa is going to be considered.

Técnico Lisboa collects gender-disaggregated data on academic staff, students, and administrative personnel, focusing on recruitment, progression, and representation. An annual well-being survey is distributed to the entire community, addressing inclusion, work-life balance, and institutional support. These data sources provide valuable insights into existing inequalities and inform the development of targeted, evidence-based actions within the Gender, Inclusion, and Equity Plan.

The framework follows national regulations on equality plans (CITE - Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment), ensuring compliance with Portuguese legal requirements for public institutions. It is also structured according to the GEAR tool and the Horizon Europe requirements. This combined framework ensures coherence between national obligations and EU-level expectations, promoting structural change and fostering an inclusive research and academic environment.

The GEP is developed through a participatory process coordinated by the Diversity and Gender Equality Group of the institution. This group, composed of 18 members, includes a diverse representation from the academic community (professors and researchers from different departments), administrative and technical staff (including members from international affairs, communication and image, quality and internal audit, human resources and the technology transfer offices), and students. Their collaborative work ensures that the plan reflects institutional realities and promotes inclusive and effective measures, which are regularly monitored on the basis of an annual Action Plan. The group operates with the support and endorsement of the school's vice-presidents, which reinforces alignment with broader institutional strategies. After a comprehensive and consultative drafting process, the final version of the GEP is submitted for approval to the governing board of the school, ensuring top-level institutional commitment and accountability. This structured and inclusive approach guarantees that the GEP integrates multiple perspectives and benefits from wide institutional ownership, facilitating implementation and monitoring at all levels.

2.1.9 | Experience from WroclawTech

At WroclawTech, the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan is supporting by three structured data sources:

- **Internal HR statistics analysis** - regular reports on recruitment, promotions, grants, parental leave, and salary structures, enabling quantitative monitoring of gender inequalities.
- **Online surveys** (including the "Work-Life Balance" survey) distributed to staff and students, allowing us to assess satisfaction with flexible working arrangements, promotion opportunities, and to identify structural barriers.
- **In-depth interviews and consultations** conducted by the Community Development Team - conversations with senior management, HR teams, academic staff, doctoral candidates, and students, providing insights into cultural contexts and individual experiences.

Each of these methods - quantitative statistics, surveys, and qualitative interviews - together creates a comprehensive picture of gender equality at the university.

The Gender Equality Plan framework is based on the six pillars of the EIGE GEAR Toolkit - leadership commitment; data collection and analysis; plan design; implementation; monitoring; and institutionalization - as set out in the Equality, Diversity, and Well-Being Policy document.

Each pillar corresponds to specific actions (e.g., formal endorsement by University Authorities, mandatory gender-disaggregated reporting, dedicated training modules), ensuring consistent integration across all units. These frameworks have been thoroughly vetted against the European Commission's Horizon Europe requirements - particularly the obligation to maintain a formal Gender Equality Plan, to use standardized reporting formats, and to apply ERA benchmarking indicators - thereby guaranteeing full alignment with EU gender-mainstreaming objectives and facilitating access to grants.

The development and implementation of the Gender Equality Plan at WroclawTech involve a broad range of stakeholders:

- University Authorities (Rector and Vice-Rector for Community Development and Integration) as well as the Rector's Plenipotentiaries for Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility, who provide strategic support and formal approval of actions.
- Community Development Team – an interdisciplinary group of experts (HR specialists, psychologists, and faculty representatives) responsible for coordinating activities, collecting data, and formulating recommendations.
- Anti-Discrimination Committee and trade union representatives, who ensure adherence to equality principles and integrate the perspectives of vulnerable groups.
- Focus groups and consultations with academic staff, administrative personnel, doctoral candidates, and students, enabling the gathering of qualitative feedback and the validation of proposed inclusive-culture measures.

This multi-level process ensures transparency, democratic engagement, and alignment of the Plan with the actual needs of the entire academic community.

3 | Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository

3.1 | Purpose and context

The development of the Digital Gender Equality Plans Repository is rooted in the collaborative work carried out within the Unite! H2020 project, specifically under Work Package 5 (WP5) on "Strengthening Human Capital". One of the central objectives of this work package was to support partner institutions in building inclusive research environments through shared strategies, with a strong focus on mentoring, research assessment, and gender equality.

A major outcome of this collaborative effort was the creation of guidelines for Gender Equality Plans, informed by a comparative and critical analysis of existing GEPs across the Unite! alliance. This analysis revealed a wide diversity of experience among institutions: while some partners have well-established Gender Equality Plans and practices, others are at the beginning of this journey and still developing their frameworks. This range of maturity presented an opportunity for mutual learning and solidarity within the alliance.

To build on this work, the Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository was conceived as a practical instrument to operationalise the framework developed under WP5. The online tool provides higher education institutions with a structured and user-friendly way to:

- Obtain a comprehensive overview of gender equality actions and their institutional reach;
- Monitor and assess the impact and effectiveness of those actions;
- Identify areas for improvement, diversification, or increased focus;
- Strengthen internal engagement by providing a clear visualisation of progress over time.

The tool is particularly valuable for institutions in widening countries, which often face more structural and institutional barriers to implementing gender equality strategies. By offering a clear methodology, shared terminology, and visual outputs, the tool can help these institutions:

- Navigate the initial stages of GEP development with greater clarity;
- Learn from more experienced partners in a collaborative and non-prescriptive way;
- Build a strategic foundation that aligns with EU policy frameworks, such as the EIGE GEAR Toolkit;
- Demonstrate compliance with funding requirements under Horizon Europe.

Ultimately, this tool supports a community-based approach to institutional change, fostering alignment across the Unite! alliance while respecting the unique contexts and capacities of each partner. By promoting visibility, reflection, and strategic planning, the Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository contributes to more inclusive and effective gender equality efforts, and helps reduce disparities between more and less experienced institutions - strengthening the alliance and widening countries as a whole.

Looking ahead, the Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository is openly accessible through the Unite! Agora platform, fostering an inclusive and collaborative space where all institutions can continuously

exchange practices, compare outcomes, and co-develop innovative strategies for gender equality in a trusted and evolving environment.

Looking ahead, the Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository is openly accessible via the Unite! Agora platform, cultivating an inclusive and collaborative environment where all institutions can continuously exchange best practices, assess progress, and jointly develop innovative strategies for gender equality. The Unite! Agora platform, developed through the European University Alliance Unite! and the Horizon Europe project aUPaEU, serves a broader mission: to make digital tools available not only within Unite! but also to other European university alliances and related initiatives. As part of this mission, one of the key milestones under the Unite!WIDENING project is the public unveiling of the Digital Campus, which incorporates key functionalities including a repository for Gender Equality Actions, a catalog of training actions from the Widening project, a QA framework dashboard, and an interactive KPI dashboard. These tools, introduced progressively, aim to foster transparency, alignment, and innovation across participating institutions in a trusted and evolving digital space.

To support institutions at different stages of Gender Equality Plan (GEP) development and implementation, the Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository offers two main user pathways:

1. Explore and Identify Gender Equality Actions and Ideas

This option is ideal for institutions initiating their GEP journey or looking to strengthen their existing plans. Users can:

- Browse a curated database of GEPs from various institutions and countries.
- Search by thematic area (e.g., recruitment, work-life balance, leadership).
- Filter actions by impact, scope, institution type, or Widening vs. non-Widening status.
- Gain inspiration from successful strategies and adapt them to their own institutional context.

2. Upload Actions for Reflexive Analysis

For institutions with a draft or existing set of GEP actions, this option enables a structured and self-guided reflection. Users can:

- Upload their current or planned GEP actions.
- View how actions are categorized (e.g., structural, cultural, operational).
- Identify potential areas for enhancement, such as monitoring frameworks or stakeholder engagement.
- Explore and compare their actions with examples from similar actions in the repository.

This two-pronged approach not only fosters knowledge sharing and capacity building but also aligns closely with the goals of Unite!Widening WP2 - supporting institutional reform, human capital development, and inclusive collaboration for excellence. As a sustainable, open-access tool, the Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository advances gender equality across the Unite! Alliance, other University Alliances, and Widening Countries more broadly. By providing a shared, adaptable framework and access to proven practices, the repository empowers institutions to embed equity into their core missions and drive meaningful transformation in recruitment, career development, and research environments - promoting long-term learning, collaboration, and the reduction of structural disparities across the European Research Area.

3.2 | Main Features and Functionalities

The Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository is a structured and user-friendly platform designed to help institutions evaluate and strengthen their GEPs, with particular support for those in Widening contexts. Below is a summary of its main features and functionalities:

1. **Action Submission Interface**
   - Institutions can input individual GEP actions using a guided form.
   - For each action, users specify the objective, type, target group, approach to gender equality, and institutional level.
2. **Typology-Based Assessment Framework**
   - Actions are categorized according to established frameworks, such as:
     - Type of action (Equal Treatment, Positive Action, Gender Mainstreaming)
     - Approach to gender change ("Fix the women", "Value the feminine", "Create equal opportunities", "Revise work culture")
   - An "Other" option is available for custom classifications.
3. **Access to Good Practices and Examples**
   - Gain inspiration from successful, real-world strategies tailored to diverse institutional contexts.
   - Improve the quality and alignment of Gender Equality Plans with tested, adaptable actions.
   - Support capacity building and institutional learning for more efficient and inclusive policy development.
4. **Multi-Level Institutional Analysis**
   - The tool supports assessments across different levels (departmental, institutional, alliance-wide).
   - It helps institutions identify gaps, prioritize efforts, and ensure alignment with strategic goals.
5. **Support for EU Policy Alignment**
   - The framework is compatible with Horizon Europe requirements and integrates principles from the EIGE GEAR Toolkit, supporting compliance and funding eligibility.
6. **Collaborative Platform Integration**
   - Integrated into the Unite! Agora platform promotes interaction and sharing among institutions.
   - Encourages cross-border dialogue and the co-development of inclusive strategies.

This tool not only enhances transparency and self-assessment but also acts as a strategic learning platform for institutions aiming to build or strengthen their GEPs within a shared European framework.

3.3 | Future steps

Within the scope of WP3, the Unite!Widening project will offer 21 capacity-building training actions for researchers in Widening countries, particularly from Portugal and Poland, though not exclusively. A one-week training action is foreseen under the theme of EQUITY, INCLUSION, GENDER EQUALITY | Transparency, Cultural Diversity, Gender Balance. This training will take place at one of the nine universities of the consortium, bringing together six Polish and six Portuguese researchers from consortium institutions (directly funded), along with a few open slots for self-paying researchers from other Widening institutions.

The topic of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) is an institutional asset at various levels, particularly by enhancing institutional competitiveness in Horizon Europe proposals (as institutions with active GEPs are more highly valued), and by raising awareness within Widening countries regarding the adoption of equity-based institutional policies. Key principles in the adoption of a GEP include: capacity building (training), public availability of information (dashboard), and community engagement (transparency).

The GEP Actions Repository supports Unite! Widening WP4 by promoting mutual learning and inclusive practices across Widening countries. It provides concrete examples of gender equality actions that can guide the inclusive design and implementation of WP4 activities - such as mentoring schemes, inclusive matchmaking events, research career development, and stakeholder engagement strategies. In turn, the inclusive methodologies and practices developed through WP4 can contribute to and enrich the Unite! Alliance's repository, fostering a two-way exchange of knowledge and reinforcing systemic change across the network.

4 | Results obtained from the GEP repository

After uploading all the actions from the GEPs of the Unite! Alliance partners, it was possible to establish a state-of-the-art overview of the directions and initiatives being implemented across the Alliance institutions and to identify the most common patterns.

As shown by Figure 1, a total of 332 actions were collected across 9 GEPs of the Unite! Alliance. The distribution is uneven, with some GEPs including significantly more actions than others. WroclawTech reports the highest number of actions (75), while KTH and Técnico ULisboa present the lowest (13 each). However, these data should be interpreted with caution. The number of actions in each GEP may be influenced by various factors, such as the scope and level of detail of each action or the institution's prior engagement with gender equality initiatives. Therefore, the number of actions should not be viewed as a direct indicator of institutional commitment. Rather, it reflects differing institutional strategies, reporting practices, and contextual realities.
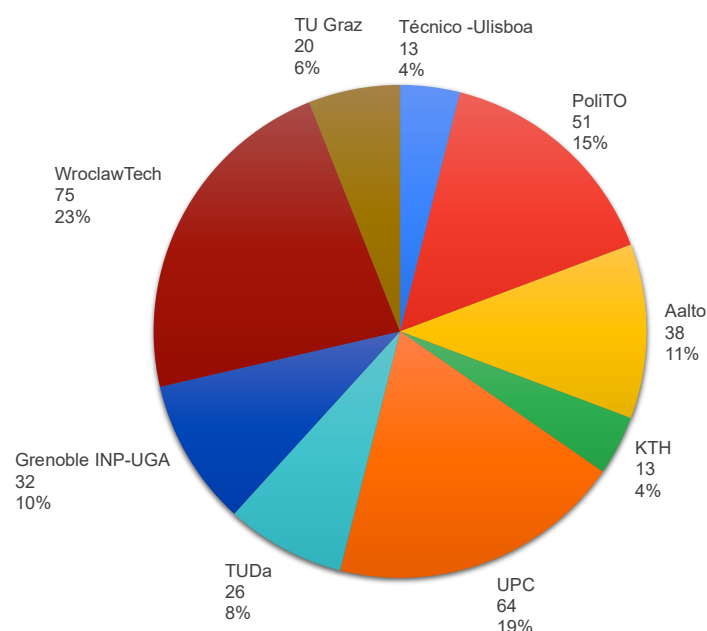
Figure 1 - Gender Equality Actions distribution per Unite! Partner

In terms of approaches to gender equality, shown in Figure 2, the "Fix the Women" (also referred to as "Equip the Women") approach appears marginal, with only 13 actions categorized under this framework. This suggests that organizations are increasingly moving away from individualistic interventions aimed at adapting women to existing institutional norms. Instead, the dominant approach identified is "Create Equal Opportunities," with 123 actions, followed by "Assess and Revise Work Culture." These findings indicate that the Alliance partners are adopting more systematic strategies that seek to expose and address power imbalances within academic institutions, with the aim of leveling the playing field or dismantling mechanisms of inequality. The "Value the Feminine" approach also remains notable, represented by 43 actions, often in a complementary role. Finally, 56 actions do not fit neatly into any of these categories; these primarily involve efforts to build internal

structures and capacities necessary for developing and implementing effective gender equality, diversity, and inclusion strategies.
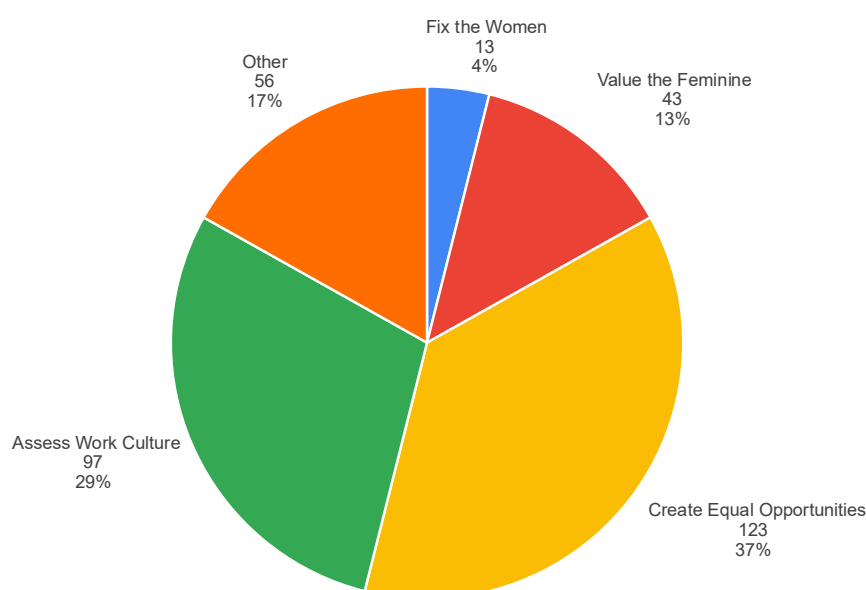

Figure 2 - Gender Equality Actions distribution per Gender Equality Approach

Regarding the issues addressed by the GEP actions, Figure 3 shows that the majority fall into two categories: Work-life balance and organizational culture (32%) and Recruitment and career progression (29%). This distribution reflects the fact that all the Alliance partners are STEM-focused universities, where gender disparities in recruitment and career advancement for women, particularly students and academics, are a central concern. Many actions within the Work-life balance and organizational culture category focus on supporting parenthood, especially motherhood, and on accommodating the needs of individuals with caregiving responsibilities - roles that are still predominantly fulfilled by women. In the Recruitment and career progression cluster, actions often include awareness-raising campaigns to increase female participation in STEM, as well as training initiatives and process reviews aimed at mitigating unconscious bias in evaluation and hiring procedures. Notably, actions aimed at improving Leadership and decision-making representation are the least frequent, despite the persistent underrepresentation of women in senior positions - a gap clearly highlighted in the European Commission's *She Figures 2024* report.
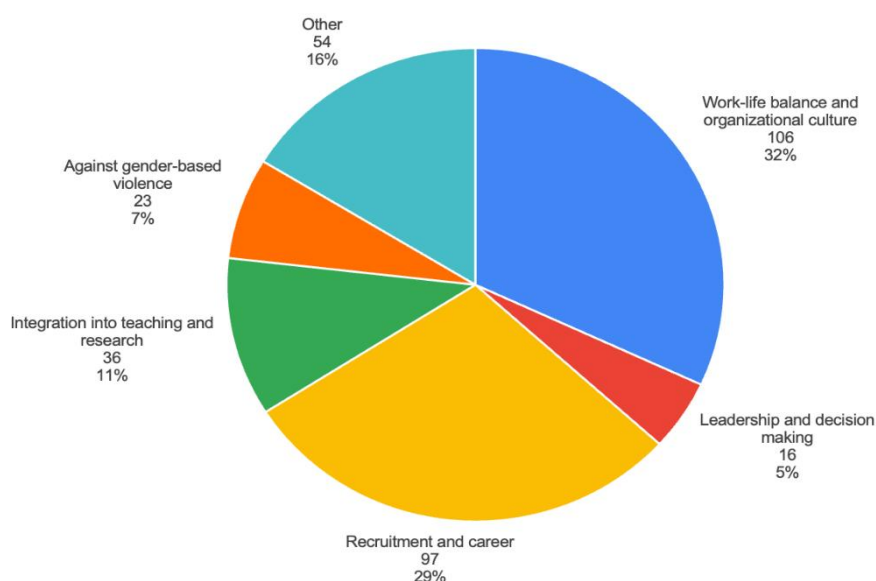
Figure 3 - Gender Equality Actions distribution per Issue Tacked

Regarding the target populations of the actions, respondents were allowed to indicate more than one group per action. Figure 4 illustrates how many times each population group was identified as a target. Most actions are aimed at the entire university population: this is typical of awareness-raising campaigns, communication initiatives, and public events. Among specific groups, academic staff are the most frequently targeted, reflecting the emphasis on addressing inequalities in academic careers, which remain particularly pronounced in STEM institutions. Academic staff are also commonly included in training and awareness programs designed to equip them with tools to implement gender equality and EDI initiatives. Administrative staff are also addressed, although often more gender-balanced - or in some cases female dominated - their role as potential promoters of equality makes them relevant recipients of such actions. In contrast, students are less frequently targeted, which may suggest a gap in GEP interventions. Finally, the "Other" category typically refers to groups external to the institution, such as civil society actors or prospective students (e.g., high schoolers) reached through recruitment or outreach campaigns.
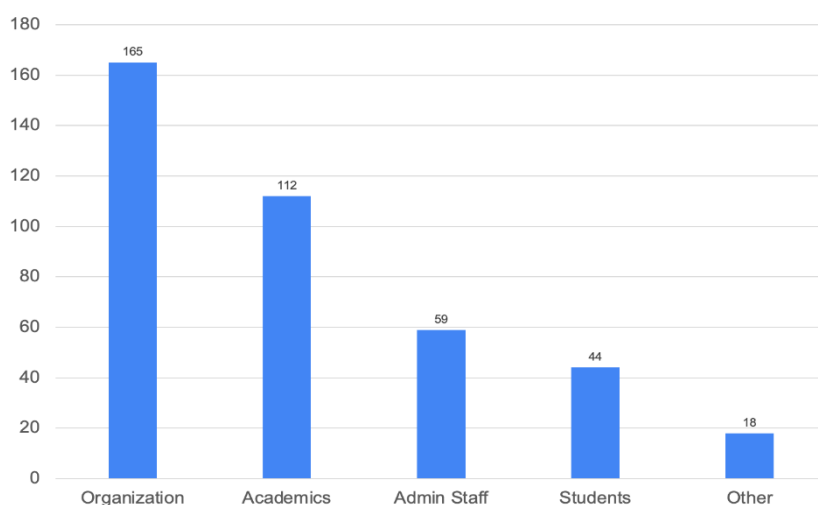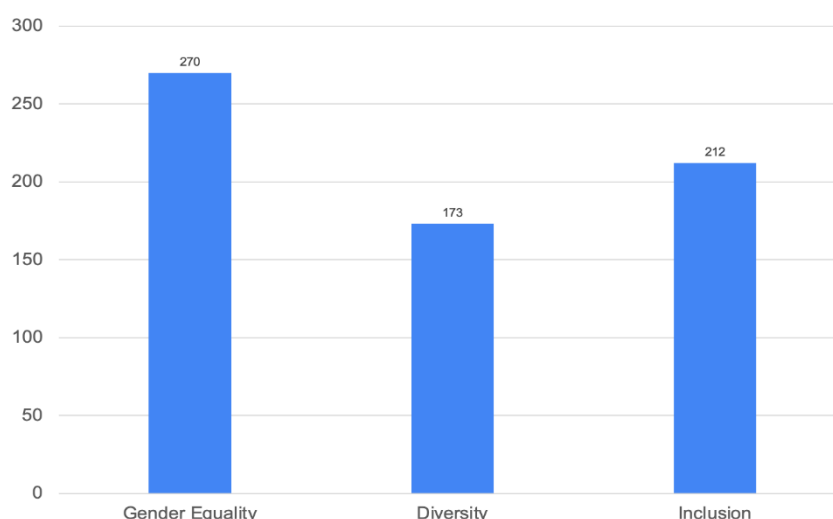

Figure 4 - Gender Equality Actions distribution per target population

Finally, Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of the different identity perspectives represented in the actions. Respondents could select multiple perspectives - Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion - for each action. While Gender Equality remains the predominant lens, the data suggest a clear trend: organizations are increasingly using GEPs as tools to address broader issues related to inequality, accessibility, and exclusion. This reflects a shift toward more inclusive and intersectional approaches that go beyond gender alone.

Figure 5 - Gender Equality Actions distribution per identity perspective

To test the functionality of the repository and demonstrate its potential, the project team conducted a sample search for all the GEP actions targeting the recruitment and career progression of academic staff. The results indicate that such actions are among the most frequently included in the GEPs submitted to the repository. However, the number and distribution of these actions across institutions reflect vary significantly across institutions, likely due to national and local specificities in gender equality planning, as well as differences in the length and scope of individual GEPs.

From a qualitative perspective, it is possible to distinguish between actions that address academic staff as candidates for recruitment and career advancement, and those that target academic staff in their roles as recruiters and decision-makers.

In the first category, many actions aim to increase the applications and advancement of underrepresented academics - most commonly women, but in some cases also broader marginalized groups such as migrant or racialized scholars. These actions include awareness-raising campaigns that either seek to valorize femininity and encourage women to apply for specific roles, or provide training in skills deemed essential for career progression - implicitly suggesting a skills gap among women. Other actions focus on improving the dissemination of key information related to recruitment processes, grants, and promotion opportunities, through awareness-raising campaigns or, more rarely, dedicated networks. These initiatives aim to address informational disparities that often arise from unequal access to informal, closed networks, thereby promoting more equitable access to opportunities.

The other half of actions are directed at tackling structural inequalities in academic careers by engaging those in decision-making roles or by addressing systemic barriers to equality. While some actions

involve training of decision-makers in recruitment and evaluation committees to mitigate bias, many adopt a more structural approach. These include efforts to analyze and eliminate potential sources of discrimination within the procedures themselves - such as reviewing existing rules and practices for embedded biases, or integrating evaluation criteria explicitly designed to promote equality and transparency.

5 | Conclusions

This deliverable has presented an in-depth analysis of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) across the Unite! Alliance, with a special focus on supporting institutions in Widening countries, contributing to the Smart objectives 4 and 6. By combining institutional case studies, comparative insights, and the implementation of the Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository, the deliverable highlights the transformative potential of GEPs when supported by structured, participatory, and data-driven approaches.

The analysis demonstrates that Unite! Alliance institutions are increasingly moving beyond individualistic interventions toward more systemic and intersectional strategies. These strategies aim not only to promote gender equality but also to address broader issues of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. The variety of approaches, target populations, and institutional contexts reflected in the GEP actions illustrates the importance of flexibility and local adaptation, particularly in Widening contexts where institutional capacity and cultural barriers may present additional challenges.

The Digital Gender Equality Actions Repository emerged as a valuable tool to support these efforts. It enables institutions to map and assess their actions, reflect on gaps and opportunities, and learn from peers across the alliance. Importantly, it fosters a shared space for institutional learning and mutual support - core principles of the Unite!Widening project. As more institutions contribute to and engage with the repository, its value as a strategic and community-based instrument for institutional change will continue to grow.

Moving forward, the integration of GEPs into broader institutional strategies - such as research career development, leadership, and innovation - will be key to advancing inclusive excellence. The participatory and comparative processes showcased in this deliverable have not only strengthened local capacities but also laid the groundwork for a more aligned, collaborative, and sustainable approach to gender equality across the European Research Area. The ongoing work of Unite! Alliance including the Widening partners signal a strong commitment to reducing structural disparities and enabling all researchers to thrive within more equitable and inclusive academic environments.