



National Policy Report – Italy

**WP4 - FINAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT STUDY AND
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ON GEP
IMPLEMENTATION AT HEIs WITH A FOCUS ON
STUDENT'S INVOLVEMENT**

PROmoting Gender mainstrEaming iN acaDemia through thE enhancement of gender equality and iNclusion in hiGher education

*This document may be copied, reproduced or modified according to the above rules.
In addition, an acknowledgement of the authors of the document and all applicable
portions of the copyright notice must be clearly referenced.*

14/08/2026



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Erasmus+ National Agency INDIRE. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Partners

University of Macerata, **Italy**

KMOP – Education and Innovation Hub, **Greece**

Spoleczna Akademia Nauk, **Poland**

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, **Belgium**

Mykolas Romeris Universitetas, **Lithuania**

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, **Germany**



General information

Institution:

University of Macerata

Country:

Italy

Authors:

Isabella CRESPI, Marta SCOCCO, Melanie Sara PALERMO

Table of Contents

Executive summary and policy briefing.....	4
1. Introduction and national context.....	8
1.1 National context	
1.2 Project implementation	
2. Assessment of impact and institutional utility.....	16
2.1 Usefulness of the tools developed within the project	
2.2 Knowledge and capacity shifts	
2.3 Student engagement and campus culture	
3. Reach and dissemination of results.....	24
4. Challenges identified and prospects for future sustainability.....	30
5. Mapping external good practices nationwide.....	32
6. Policy recommendations.....	37
Final considerations.....	42

Executive summary and policy briefing

This National Policy Report analyses the contribution of the PRO-GENDERING project to strengthening the implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in Italian higher education institutions, with a particular focus on the active involvement of the student body. The report forms part of **Work Package 4 (Final impact assessment study and policy recommendations on GEP implementation at HEIs with a focus on student involvement)**, dedicated to the final impact assessment and the formulation of recommendations for the implementation of Gender Equality Plans in higher education institutions, with a particular focus on the involvement of the student body.

In recent years, the Italian university system has seen a significant evolution in gender equality policies, partly in connection with the European agenda for research and innovation, the GEPs requirement set out in Horizon Europe, the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2026, and the growing role played by the PNRR, the CRUI, the CUGs and the Gender Budgeting initiative. However, the formal introduction of GEPs does not automatically guarantee profound organisational change. Their effectiveness depends on universities' ability to integrate them into routine decision-making processes, to provide them with adequate resources, to monitor their outcomes and to involve all members of the academic community on a sustained basis.

Within this framework, the PRO-GENDERING project has helped to strengthen the awareness, skills and tools available to higher education institutions to promote gender mainstreaming in academia. The activities carried out in Italy, coordinated by the University of Macerata, included research, training, the development of practical tools, workshops, dissemination and participatory initiatives aimed specifically at male and female students. A distinctive feature of the project was precisely its attempt to move beyond viewing the student body as merely the recipients of equality policies, and instead to recognise them as active agents in processes of institutional change.

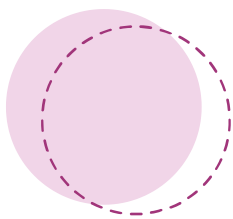
The findings from the project activities and the feedback gathered point to an overall positive assessment of the usefulness of the tools developed by PRO-GENDERING, particularly with regard to understanding GEPs, raising awareness of gender equality issues and promoting participatory practices. The training sessions and workshops have facilitated dialogue between universities, equality bodies, University Gender Committees (CUGs), representatives of the scientific community, students and institutional stakeholders, helping to foster an academic culture that is more attentive to equality, inclusion and the fight against discrimination.

However, the report also highlights a number of critical issues that still exist in the Italian context. These include the fragmentation of initiatives, the risk that GEPs may be perceived as mere formalities, inconsistencies between universities in the implementation of equality policies, the limited institutionalisation of student participation, and the need to strengthen the monitoring of the effects of the actions undertaken. In particular, the involvement of male and female students in GEPs still often appears to be sporadic, linked to individual projects, events or awarenessraising campaigns, rather than being permanently integrated into the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating university policies.

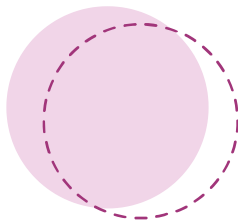
In light of these considerations, the report sets out recommendations for higher education institutions, public decision-makers and stakeholders involved in promoting gender equality. The recommendations emphasise the need to strengthen the governance of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), allocate dedicated resources, improve coordination between governing bodies, the University Gender Committee (CUG), the Vice-Chancellor's delegated authorities, administrative offices and student representatives, promote ongoing training activities and develop permanent channels for consultation and participation by the student body.

The Italian experience of PRO-GENDERING shows that GEPs can become truly transformative tools only if they are placed at the heart of university governance and if they are supported by broad participatory processes, adequate expertise and ongoing evaluation mechanisms. From this perspective, student involvement represents a strategic lever that is still underutilised, yet fundamental to ensuring that equality policies are more closely aligned with the needs of the academic community, more visible in everyday campus life and more sustainable in the long term.

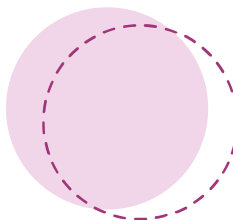
Key findings



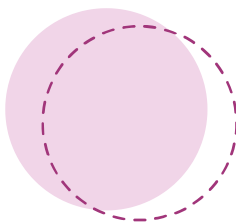
Student Engagement Programmes (GEPs) are now widely used within the Italian university system, but their effectiveness depends on the ability to integrate them into standard governance processes.



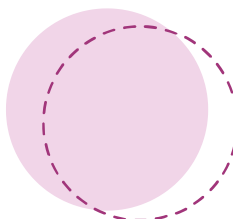
The involvement of the student body remains largely uninstitutionalised, despite representing a strategic lever for strengthening campus culture.



The tools produced by PRO-GENDERING (Handbook, Google Slides Book, Awareness Raising Toolkit and smallscale projects) offer transferable resources for training, awareness-raising, monitoring and co-design.



The sustainability of these initiatives requires organisational continuity, dedicated resources, clear responsibilities and mechanisms for periodic evaluation.



Participatory and peer-to-peer activities can help make equality policies more visible and deeply rooted in everyday university life.

1. Introduction and national context

1.1 National context

In recent years, gender equality policies within the Italian university system have undergone significant development, largely driven by the European agenda on research and innovation.

The European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 has set out the framework for promoting gender equality by combating stereotypes, reducing employment and pay gaps, ensuring balanced representation at decision-making levels, and mainstreaming the gender perspective into public policies. In the higher education and research sector, these objectives have been further developed within the European Research Area (ERA), which identifies equality in academic careers, balanced representation in decision-making processes and the integration of the gender dimension into research and innovation as priorities. In this context, Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) have become one of the strategic tools for translating European objectives into concrete institutional actions. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), a GEP is a systematic and strategic tool aimed at identifying, preventing and reducing gender inequalities within research and higher education organisations by addressing organisational processes, governance practices and institutional culture. Furthermore, from 2022, the adoption of a GEP will be an eligibility requirement for participation in Horizon Europe calls for proposals, thereby reinforcing the role of these tools as a structural element of university policies.

Italy has gradually transposed this European framework through the **National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2026**, which is modelled on the European strategy and identifies, amongst its priorities, strengthening the presence of women in STEM subjects, increasing women's participation in senior positions within the university and research sectors, and promoting gender mainstreaming in public policies.

At the same time, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) has recognised gender equality as one of the three cross-cutting priorities of the entire programme, making the adoption of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) a requirement for access to numerous research funding opportunities. At the institutional level, a central role has been played by the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) and the Single Guarantee Committees (CUG).

The CRUI has promoted coordination initiatives amongst universities, encouraging the implementation of gender equality policies, the establishment of degree programmes dedicated to gender studies, and the development of common tools for monitoring inequalities. Among the most significant initiatives are the establishment of the Commission on Gender Issues (2018) and the publication of the Guidelines for Gender Budgeting in Italian Universities (2019), which have helped to promote systematic practices for data collection and policy evaluation.

The CUGs, established by Law No. 183/2010 within all public administrations, including universities, are responsible for promoting equal opportunities, preventing discrimination and combating harassment in the workplace. Through monitoring, training, advisory services and awareness-raising activities, they represent one of the main institutional safeguards for promoting inclusive university environments that respect diversity. **The introduction of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) and the Gender Budget is now one of the key governance tools adopted by Italian universities. GEPs enable institutions to set measurable objectives, identify priority areas for action and monitor the effectiveness of the measures taken over time, whilst the Gender Report allows for an analysis of the distribution of resources and opportunities between women and men, supporting more evidence-based decision-making processes.**

However, the growing prevalence of Gender Equality Plans and Gender Budgets in Italian universities does not automatically guarantee profound organisational change. **The risk, in some cases, is that these tools are interpreted primarily as formal requirements, mandated by European or national funding programmes, rather than as strategic mechanisms for institutional transformation. Their effectiveness, however, depends on the universities' ability to integrate them into their day-to-day processes of governance, planning, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation.**

From this perspective, GEPs are truly effective when they are not relegated to the margins of institutional activity, but become an integral part of universities' development strategies. **This requires a clear allocation of responsibilities, the consistent involvement of governing bodies, coordination between academic and administrative structures, the enhancement of the role of the Joint Guarantee Committees, and the establishment of consultation mechanisms capable of including the various members of the university community.** Without these conditions, equality policies risk remaining fragmented, largely invisible and unsustainable over time. **A further critical element concerns the ability to move from producing documents and tools to effectively evaluating the changes brought about.** In many university contexts, in fact, the availability of data disaggregated by gender and the presence of actions formally set out in the Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) are not always accompanied by clear indicators, regular monitoring processes, qualitative assessments and opportunities for public feedback to the academic community. Strengthening this evaluative dimension is essential to understanding whether and to what extent the actions taken contribute to reducing inequalities, changing organisational practices and promoting a more inclusive institutional culture. A key area of concern relates to gender inequalities in the Italian academic context, which stem from the interplay of organisational, cultural and structural factors that affect study and career paths in different ways. **This phenomenon takes on an intersectional dimension, as gender is intertwined with other dimensions of identity and inequality, such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ethnic origin, migrant background, socio-economic status, disability, age and care responsibilities, contributing to different experiences of access, participation and progression within the university.**

Gender Equality Plans can fulfil a role that goes beyond mere regulatory compliance: they are tools for organisational change aimed at promoting more equitable and inclusive academic environments, through the analysis of inequalities, the involvement of the university community and the continuous improvement of equality policies. **However, alongside the evolution of institutional policies, the involvement of students in gender equality strategies remains an area still in the process of being consolidated within the Italian university system.**

Although male and female students participate in university governance through the representative bodies provided for by law, and many universities promote awareness-raising initiatives, training events and campaigns against gender-based violence and discrimination, such initiatives are often fragmented and linked to individual projects or the approach of individual institutions. **The student body is rarely involved in a systematic way in the design, implementation or evaluation of Gender Equality Plans, which continue to be developed predominantly by university governing bodies, the Single Guarantee Committees (CUG) and the relevant administrative offices.**

In recent years, however, there have been signs of change. The growing focus on the wellbeing of the university community, the prevention of gender-based violence, the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ identities, mental health and the fight against discrimination has encouraged greater participation by student associations and representatives in advisory bodies and in initiatives promoted by universities. Against this backdrop, the active involvement of students is increasingly recognised as an essential element in making equality policies more effective, inclusive and sustainable over time.

Students experience the university's spaces, relationships and educational practices on a daily basis and can therefore help to identify needs, critical issues and forms of discrimination that do not always come to light through traditional institutional channels. Their participation can also help to embed equality policies more deeply within campus culture, making the GEPs tools that are more closely aligned with the practical experience of the university community. In conclusion, the involvement of the student body is a step that remains only partially developed within the Italian system, but one that is strategic for enhancing its transformative capacity..



The PRO-GENDERING project forms part of this evolution **by proposing an innovative approach that regards students not merely as the recipients of equality policies, but as genuine agents of institutional change.** Through participatory tools, training activities and co-design processes, the project helps to strengthen an aspect of GEP governance that remains underdeveloped in the Italian context, fostering a more inclusive organisational culture geared towards the participation of the entire academic community.

1.2 Project implementation

In the Italian context, the implementation of the project was coordinated by the University of Macerata and took the form of an integrated set of research, training, networking and dissemination activities aimed at the entire academic community and the main institutional stakeholders. The national implementation of the project can be seen as a progressive process divided into several interconnected phases.

In the **initial phase**, PRO-GENDERING contributed to the collection and analysis of evidence on the state of implementation of Gender Equality Plans in higher education institutions, with the aim of identifying the needs, challenges and levels of preparedness of universities with regard to gender mainstreaming. **This phase made it possible to situate the Italian context within a comparative European perspective and to facilitate the development of practical tools to support the implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs).**

A **second phase** focused on the development and dissemination of training materials and support tools aimed at the academic community. These tools served to make content relating to GEPs, gender equality, inclusion and the fight against discrimination more accessible, helping to transform general principles and guidelines into practical knowledge that can be applied in university contexts. **In this regard, the Handbook and the teaching materials produced by the project served as useful resources for both training and raising awareness amongst internal and external stakeholders.**

A **third phase** focused on the active involvement of the student body. Through training activities, opportunities for discussion and co-design processes, students were encouraged to reflect on the significance of gender equality policies in everyday university life and to contribute to the development of concrete initiatives. **This step constitutes one of the most significant aspects of the Italian experience, as it reinforces a dimension that is still not widely institutionalised within the GEPs: the participation of students not only as beneficiaries of equality policies, but as active contributors to their design, implementation and evaluation.**

Finally, **networking and dissemination activities** have fostered dialogue between universities, equality bodies, Single Guarantee Committees, the scientific community, student representatives and institutional stakeholders. **These activities have helped to raise the project's profile, share interim results, gather feedback and promote an exchange of experiences on the conditions that can make GEPs more effective and sustainable tools in the Italian context.**

Work package n°2
Developing a handbook
to foster a gender equal
culture at HEIs

- **Data collection and analysis on the status of GEPs**
Identification of needs, challenges and levels of preparedness at universities
- **Handbook, training materials, slide book**
Strengthening skills and operational capacity

Work package n°3
Engaging university
students in fostering a
gender equal culture at
HEIs

- **Activities aimed at students**
Empowering the student body as agents of change
- **Workshops, discussions with stakeholders, equality bodies and universities**
Dissemination of results and collection of feedback

Work package n°4
Final Evaluation study
and policy
recommendations on
GEP implementation at
HEIs with a focus on
student's involvement

- **Evaluation and policy recommendations**
Translation of project experience into operational guidelines

Key outputs

Work package n°2 Developing a handbook to foster a gender equal culture at HEIs

Handbook for the implementation of gender equality plans in higher education institutions

A handbook comprising innovative methods and tools to support higher education institutions in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of their Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). In particular, the handbook focuses on measures to raise awareness of gender equality, measures to combat gender-based violence, and inclusive campuses with accessible working and learning environments, where everyone is treated with respect.

Work package n°3 Engaging university students in fostering a gender equal culture at HEIs

Awareness-Raising Toolkit

The Toolkit comprises a range of resources aimed at students, including guidelines on setting aims and objectives, structuring content, selecting appropriate methods and/or tools, and drawing up action plans, as well as information, resources, materials and examples of activities (such as worksheets, case studies and images), etc.

Work package n°4 Final Evaluation Study and Policy Recommendations on GEP implementation at HEIs with a focus on student's involvement

Reports on national policies

The report presents an assessment of the impact of the project's results, highlights the key lessons learnt and sets out best practices and policy recommendations for stakeholders, with the aim of strengthening policy dialogue and promoting improvements to relevant policies.

2. Assessment of impact and institutional utility

This section aims to examine the potential contribution of the PRO-GENDERING project to strengthening gender equality policies in Italian higher education institutions, with a particular focus on the usefulness of the tools developed, changes in awareness and skills, the involvement of the student body, and the project's ability to foster processes of institutional reflection on Gender Equality Plans. Given the nature of the project and the evaluation tools available, the analysis does not aim to measure a causal impact in the strict sense, but rather to assess the perceived institutional value and the observable changes in knowledge, attitudes and participatory practices brought about by the project's activities. From this perspective, impact is understood as a progressive contribution to the development of skills, the dissemination of practical tools and the strengthening of an organisational culture that is more attentive to gender equality, inclusion and the involvement of the academic community.

The evaluation is based on feedback gathered during training and dissemination activities, satisfaction questionnaires, and qualitative observations arising from workshops and discussions with internal and external stakeholders. This evidence makes it possible to identify both the key benefits of the project and the conditions necessary for the tools produced to be integrated more firmly into the institutional practices of universities.

In particular, the analysis focuses on four main areas:

- 1 > the usefulness of the PRO-GENDERING tools for understanding and implementing GEPs**
- 2 > strengthening the knowledge and capacities of the academic community;**
- 3 > the involvement of male and female students as agents of change;**
- 4 > the project's contribution to promoting a more inclusive and participatory institutional culture.**

2.1 Usefulness of the tools developed within the project

The evaluation, carried out using satisfaction questionnaires and qualitative feedback, reveals an overall very positive assessment of the usefulness, clarity and relevance of the tools developed as part of the PRO-GENDERING project.

In particular, the Handbook (PR2) and the teaching materials presented during the local workshops (Google Slides Slide Book – PR1) were considered effective tools for understanding the principles of Gender Equality Plans, the main challenges relating to gender equality in higher education, and possible implementation strategies at institutional level. Participants at the national workshop (PR3) expressed high levels of satisfaction with the clarity of the training objectives, the quality of the organisation and the speakers' preparation, awarding average scores of over 4 out of 5 for all aspects assessed. The relevance of the content to the participants' professional activities and the quality of the materials distributed were particularly appreciated. The comments gathered show that the workshop facilitated a substantive discussion on topics such as the design of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), moving beyond the 'gender-blind' approach in university policies, the prevention of gender-based violence and harassment, and the active involvement of the student body. Many participants highlighted the value of practical examples, real-life cases and opportunities for peer discussion, considering these to be fundamental elements in translating theoretical principles into feasible institutional actions.

The Awareness Raising Toolkit (ART – PR5) also received a very positive evaluation from the student groups involved in the small-scale projects (PR6). The Toolkit was deemed useful both for deepening understanding of gender equality and inclusion issues (average rating 4.4/5) and as a practical aid in the planning and implementation of student initiatives (4.4/5). Participants also recognised the value of the methodological support received during project development, highlighting how the tools provided facilitated the planning of activities and encouraged a more participatory approach.

Overall, the various tools produced by the project proved to be complementary: the handbook provided the theoretical and methodological framework, the workshops facilitated knowledge transfer and dialogue among stakeholders, whilst the ART served as a practical tool capable of supporting students' direct action in promoting a culture of gender equality within the university.

2.2 Knowledge and capacity shifts

The activities carried out as part of the project have helped to consolidate knowledge and skills, as well as raising participants' awareness of gender equality issues and the processes involved in drawing up and implementing Gender Equality Plans. Data collected during the evaluation of the national workshop show that the majority of participants believe they have gained new knowledge on the topics covered and have improved their ability to understand equal opportunities policies and Gender Equality Plans. Similarly, many state that the experience will be useful for their professional work and that, following the workshop, they feel better prepared to address these issues in their respective work contexts.

Analysis of the qualitative comments also highlights a shift in awareness regarding certain key issues that emerged during the discussions, including:

1. the need to move beyond formally neutral approaches that risk failing to address gender inequalities;
2. the importance of establishing clearer institutional procedures for the prevention and management of harassment and gender-based violence;
3. the strategic role of training for teaching and technical administrative staff;
4. the structured involvement of students and student unions in promoting a culture of equality.

The students involved in the pilot projects also report a significant increase in their soft skills and awareness of inclusion issues. Among the skills most frequently cited are the ability to design awareness-raising activities, teamwork, communication, the organisation of initiatives, and a greater focus on equity and inclusion in academic contexts. Several participants emphasised how the experience had changed the way they view university dynamics, making them more aware of the inequalities that still exist and more motivated to promote tangible change.

The dissemination event (multiplier event) also confirmed these findings. Participants expressed a high level of interest in the topics covered, stating that they had learnt new things, wished to take part in further initiatives on the subject, and were willing to help disseminate the project's results.

This finding suggests that the PRO-GENDERING activities have not only led to an increase in individual knowledge, but have also fostered the creation of a community that is more aware and willing to act as a catalyst for gender equality practices within the university.

A decorative graphic consisting of a solid grey circle on the left and a dashed purple line forming a semi-circle on the right, enclosing the text.

Taken together, the results indicate that the project has helped not only to increase participants' level of knowledge, but also to strengthen their ability to translate that knowledge into behaviours, and concrete initiatives, thereby creating the conditions for greater sustainability of gender mainstreaming initiatives in higher education institutions.

2.3 Student engagement and campus culture

The involvement of the student body is one of the most innovative aspects of the PRO-GENDERING project and a strategic lever for enhancing the effectiveness of Gender Equality Plans in higher education institutions. In the Italian context, GEPs are generally designed and coordinated by university governing bodies, the Single Guarantee Committees, the rector's delegated bodies and the relevant administrative offices, whilst the participation of male and female students often remains sporadic or limited to individual awareness-raising activities.

PRO-GENDERING helps to move beyond this approach, recognising the student body not only as the recipients of equality policies, but as active participants in building a more inclusive academic culture. Through training activities, opportunities for discussion and small-scale projects, students – both male and female – can help to identify needs, challenges and proposals for change, whilst also acting as agents of awareness within the university community.

In line with this approach, the activities carried out by the University of Macerata have sought to translate student involvement into concrete educational and participatory experiences, aimed not only at acquiring knowledge but also at generating initiatives and messages capable of influencing campus culture.

One of the most innovative aspects of the PRO-GENDERING project was the recognition of the student body as an active force in promoting gender equality, moving beyond a view that sees students solely as the recipients of institutional policies.

Through the implementation of student-led small-scale projects, the initiative has trialled a participatory approach that has fostered dialogue between students, teaching staff and technical and administrative staff, thereby strengthening collaboration amongst the various members of the university community.

At the University of Macerata, the activities were carried out as part of the workshop 'Promoting Gender Equality at University: Practices and Experiences', during which students, supported by the research group and teaching staff, designed awareness-raising initiatives aimed at the academic community. The programme combined theoretical training sessions, practical workshops and co-design processes, enabling participants to develop concrete proposals on the themes of inclusion, inclusive communication and combating gender stereotypes.

The experience has helped to strengthen the relationship between students and university staff, creating opportunities for dialogue that have fostered greater sharing of knowledge and responsibility with regard to equality policies. The direct involvement of participants in the design of the initiatives made it possible to move beyond a purely consultative approach, recognising the value of the student body's contribution to processes of reflection and institutional innovation. The use of the Awareness Raising Toolkit also provided a common methodological framework, facilitating the development of project ideas and promoting collaborative working methods between students and academic staff.

The projects developed addressed issues directly linked to the culture of the university community. The five student-led small-scale projects carried out as part of the activities tackled the promotion of gender equality from different but complementary perspectives, highlighting the student body's ability to identify specific needs and propose innovative solutions for the university environment.

The projects focused on strengthening institutional governance through the creation of interdepartmental networks and ongoing training programmes dedicated to Gender Equality Plans; the promotion of inclusive communication practices and language through awareness-raising campaigns aimed at the university community; the prevention of gender-based violence and discrimination through training and awareness-raising initiatives; improving wellbeing and inclusion in university life through tools for participation and listening; and the development of actions aimed at strengthening a culture of equality and inclusion through the active involvement of the academic community.

Although they differed in terms of objectives and operational methods, all the projects shared the same methodological approach, based on co-design, collaborative learning and the empowerment of students as agents of change within the university.

From an empowerment perspective, the programme has strengthened the students' ability to critically discuss issues relating to gender equality and inclusion, fostering greater awareness of the structural inequalities and often invisible barriers that characterise the university experience.

The feedback gathered highlights how participation in the activities has helped students to recognise the implicit biases present in educational dynamics, to understand the value of diversity as a resource for the academic community, and to view inclusion not merely as a formal objective, but as an everyday practice to be reflected in individual and collective behaviour. At the same time, students reported having acquired transferable skills such as teamwork, effective communication, participatory planning and critical analysis of educational and social contexts, which they considered relevant both to their university studies and to their future careers.

The impact of these small-scale projects has also been reflected in the visibility of gender equality issues within the university. Communication campaigns, the distribution of the materials produced, the public presentation of the projects as part of the Macerata Humanities Festival, and discussions with the University Delegate have helped to broaden the debate on equality policies, fostering greater circulation of knowledge and wider participation from the university community.

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of a solid grey circle partially enclosed by a dashed purple line that forms a larger, irregular shape around it.

Although these were limited initiatives, the experience has shown that the direct involvement of the student body can be an effective driver of cultural change, strengthening the sense of belonging, shared responsibility and the sustainability of gender equality policies within the university context.

3. Reach and dissemination of results

The dissemination strategy for the PRO-GENDERING project was developed with the aim of ensuring the wide dissemination of the results, encouraging the involvement of relevant stakeholders and promoting the transferability of the knowledge and tools developed as part of the project. Communication and dissemination activities ran throughout the entire project lifecycle, comprising a comprehensive programme of events, public initiatives and discussion forums aimed at various target groups, including academic communities, university staff, students, researchers, and institutions and organisations interested in promoting gender equality in higher education.

The events organised as part of the project have been a key tool for broadening the scope of the activities and creating opportunities for exchange and collaboration at national and European level. The variety of initiatives carried out – including project presentation meetings, workshops, international seminars, training activities and events to disseminate the results – made it possible to combine different approaches to engagement, alternating between in-depth theoretical discussion, the sharing of good practices, participatory training and the promotion of the experiences developed by the participants.

The quality and diversity of the events were a defining feature of the PRO-GENDERING dissemination strategy. The activities fostered dialogue between individuals with different areas of expertise and perspectives, creating opportunities for discussion amongst researchers, academic staff, students and institutional stakeholders. In particular, the direct involvement of the student community through participatory activities and the development of dedicated initiatives helped to strengthen the project's inclusive dimension, promoting greater awareness of the issues of gender mainstreaming, inclusion and gender equality in university settings.

The continuity of dissemination activities throughout the project's duration has made it possible to progressively consolidate the visibility of PROGENDERING and to support the various implementation phases through a constant process of communication, discussion and dissemination of results. The events were not conceived as isolated initiatives, but as integral parts of a process aimed at building a European community of practice on the theme of gender equality in higher education.

Main Events Organised

2024

PRO-GENDERING National Workshop – GEPs and gender equality in Italian and European universities

National workshop – External meeting (blended format: in-person and online)

13 June 2024

Event organised by the University of Macerata to present the initial findings of research into the role of Gender Equality Plans in Italian and European universities. The workshop brought together researchers, institutions and stakeholders with an interest in gender equality policies in academia.

Second PRO-GENDERING National Workshop – Guidelines for the implementation and monitoring of GEPs

Local workshop

27 September 2024

The event explored the topic of implementing and monitoring Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in higher education institutions, facilitating discussion amongst researchers, academic staff and stakeholders on strategies to make gender equality policies more effective. The workshop formed part of the dissemination activities of the European PROGENDERING project, contributing to the sharing of knowledge, practices and tools to promote more inclusive and gender-sensitive academic environments.

How Can Higher Education Become More Gender Equal?

International online workshop

5 November 2024

An international workshop organised by KMOP Education & Innovation Hub in collaboration with the University of Macerata. The event addressed the issue of gender equality in higher education, presenting tools and best practices for the implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), with a particular focus on policy monitoring, combating gender-based violence and building inclusive academic communities.

Main Events Organised

2025
/

Promoting the gender equality within the university: practices and experiences

Training workshop for university students

6, 8, 14 and 19 May 2025

A training programme designed to raise students' awareness of gender equality, inclusion and the development of an equitable university culture. The workshop included participatory activities, discussions on case studies, group work and the development of small-scale projects as part of the PRO-GENDERING project.

International Workshop "Gender mainstreaming in academia: students' small-scale projects"

International online workshop

4 November 2025

An international event dedicated to presenting the projects carried out by students from the project's partner universities. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the initiatives developed to promote a more inclusive and gender-sensitive academic culture.

Main Events Organised

2026
/

International Seminar “Gender research at the European level: Insights from ongoing projects”

International seminar

24 March 2026

A seminar dedicated to European gender research and ongoing project initiatives in the field of gender equality in universities and educational settings. The event facilitated dialogue between researchers, institutions and stakeholders on gender policies, inclusive governance and international collaborations.

National Multiplier Events PRO-GENDERING “Gender Perspectives. Educating, Narrating, Participating”

National dissemination events

20 May 2026

Meetings organised by the project partners to disseminate the key findings, tools and recommendations developed as part of PRO-GENDERING, promoting dialogue with academic communities and national stakeholders on the topic of Gender Equality Plans and inclusion in higher education.

National online roundtable: “PRO-GENDERING Policy Report: a discussion on good practices and policies for gender equality in universities”

Online national roundtable for dissemination and discussion among experts and stakeholders.

15 July 2026

The event was dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the Policy Report developed as part of the PRO-GENDERING project, with the aim of fostering discussion on the strategies, best practices and tools adopted by universities to promote gender equality. The round-table discussion provided an opportunity for dialogue between the academic community, institutions and stakeholders, contributing to the sharing of experiences and recommendations to strengthen the integration of the gender perspective into university policies and organisational change processes.



Overall, the communication and dissemination activities helped to broaden the project's reach, raising awareness of the issues addressed and encouraging the sharing of approaches, methodologies and tools that can be replicated in other academic contexts.

Through a participatory, multilevel strategy, PRO-GENDERING has strengthened its impact, supporting the cultural and institutional change necessary to promote more equitable, inclusive and gender-sensitive university environments.

4. Challenges identified and prospects for future sustainability

The activities carried out as part of PRO-GENDERING have made it possible to identify certain barriers that may limit the effectiveness of Gender Equality Plans in Italian higher education institutions.

These challenges can be examined across **three main dimensions**:

- The first is **organisational** in nature and concerns the fragmentation of responsibilities, the sometimes inconsistent availability of dedicated resources, and the difficulty of integrating GEPs into standard governance processes.
- The second is **cultural** in nature and concerns the risk that equality policies may be perceived as specialist areas or formal obligations, rather than as cross-cutting dimensions of institutional quality.
- The third is of a **participatory** nature and concerns the difficulty of engaging the student body on a long-term basis, particularly beyond individual project initiatives or awareness-raising campaigns

To ensure the sustainability of the initiatives launched by PRO-GENDERING, it would be useful to incorporate the project outputs into the universities' regular processes. The Handbook, self-assessment tools, training materials and student initiatives can be utilised in internal training programmes, in the activities of the CUGs, in future updates to the GEPs and in awareness-raising initiatives aimed at the academic community. Sustainability also requires dedicated human and organisational resources, continuity in institutional coordination and stable forms of student participation.

5. Mapping external good practices nationwide

I. MINDtheGEPs - Modifying Institutions by Developing Gender Equality Plans

<https://www.mindthegeps.eu/w/home/>

Implementing body

A European consortium of universities and research centres under the Horizon 2020 programme, comprising academic lead partners and institutional partners.

- University of Turin – Research Center for Women’s and Gender Studies (CIRSDe) – Italy (project coordinator)
- National Research Council of Italy (CNR) – Italy
- Automotive Technology Centre of Galicia (CTAG) – Spain
- Jagiellonian University – Poland
- University of Gdańsk – Poland
- Munster Technological University (MTU, Tralee) – Ireland
- University of Belgrade – School of Electrical Engineering – Serbia
- Elsevier – Netherlands
- Knowledge & Innovation (K&I) – Italy
- Uppsala University – Sweden

Target audience

Universities, research centres, scientific institutions and policy-makers in the field of research and innovation (R&I).

Breve descrizione

MINDtheGEPs is a European project aimed at developing, implementing and monitoring GEPs in academic and research institutions. The approach is geared towards institutional change, with a particular focus on integrating the gender dimension into decision-making processes, career paths and organisational culture.

Evidence of success/impact

The project has led to the adoption of GEPs in several pilot institutions and to the production of guidelines, methodological tools and monitoring indicators. It is recognised as a European best practice for the structured implementation of GEPs and for strengthening gender equality policies in research.

Policy recommendations

The MINDtheGEPs experience highlights that the effectiveness of GEPs depends on strong institutional commitment, robust monitoring systems and the integration of the gender dimension into decision-making and organisational processes.

II. LETSGEPs – Leading Towards Sustainable Gender Equality Plans in Research Institutions

<https://letsgeps.eu/partners/>

Implementing body

A European consortium of research institutes and universities funded under Horizon 2020, with partners from various European countries.

- University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (UNIMORE) – Italy
- RWTH Aachen University – Germany
- Mathematical Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MISANU) – Serbia
- University of Messina (UNIME) – Italy
- University of Tirana – Albania
- Max Planck Society (MPG) – Germany
- Institute of Marine Sciences (ICM-CSIC) / Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) – Spain
- CY Cergy Paris Université – France

Target audience

Universities, research institutes, public research organisations and stakeholders in the R&I sector.

Brief description

LETSGEPS aims to develop and consolidate sustainable Gender Equality Plans within research organisations. The project focuses on the operational implementation of GEPs, their long-term sustainability and their integration into institutional governance systems.

Evidence of success/impact

The project has produced GEPs implemented in various pilot institutions, operational toolkits, self-assessment tools and replicable models. It is regarded as a best practice for the sustainability of GEPs and for embedding them within organisational processes.

Policy recommendations

The sustainability of Gender Equality Plans requires their integration into organisations' governance systems and routine processes. LETSGEPs demonstrates the importance of operational tools, training and selfassessment in ensuring continuity and effectiveness over time.

A decorative graphic on the left side of the text block, consisting of a solid grey circle partially enclosed by a dashed purple line.

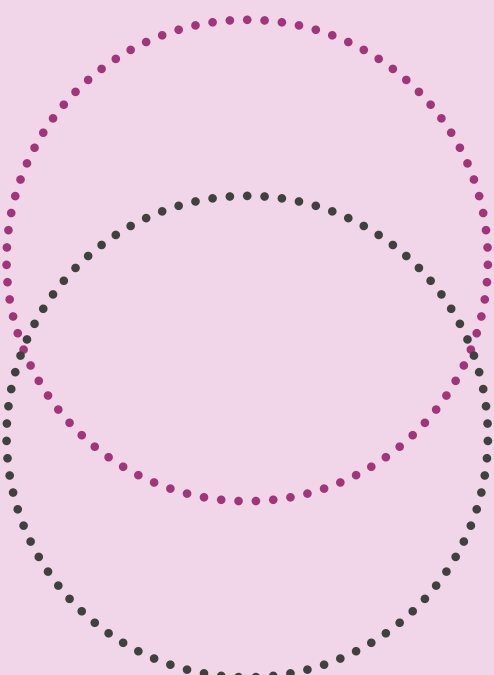
Overall, the good practices analysed confirm certain recurring elements that are also relevant to PRO-GENDERING: institutional commitment, the presence of monitoring tools, the integration of GEPs into routine governance, the availability of dedicated expertise, the sustainability of actions beyond the duration of the projects, and the ability to adapt common tools to the specific needs of individual university contexts. Compared with these experiences, PRO-GENDERING takes a broader approach, focused on the transferability of tools across different university contexts and on harnessing the student component as a specific added value in the implementation of GEPs.

6. Policy recommendations

In recent years, Italy has made significant progress in promoting gender equality within the university and research system thanks to the introduction of Gender Equality Plans, the strengthening of the national regulatory framework and the impetus provided by European policies, in particular Horizon Europe.

However, the evidence emerging from the range of activities carried out as part of the PRO-GENDERING project shows that significant structural and cultural inequalities still persist, affecting career opportunities, access to decisionmaking positions, the work-life balance, participation in governance and the promotion of a culture of gender equality.

The findings also highlight the need to move beyond an approach limited to regulatory compliance, by adopting a more systemic, participatory and inclusive perspective. Gender equality policies should involve the entire university community, promote the active role of students and incorporate an intersectional perspective that recognises the diversity of identities and forms of discrimination present in academic settings.



The following recommendations take into account the outputs produced by the PRO-GENDERING project, in particular the Handbook on Implementing Gender Equality Plans in Higher Education Institutions, the Google Slides Book, the tools for self-assessment and institutional reflection, and the student initiatives developed through the small-scale projects. These materials represent resources that can be transferred and adapted to different university contexts, useful not only for raising awareness but also for training, monitoring, co-design and the sustainability of the actions envisaged by the GEPs. Incorporating them into universities' day-to-day processes can help ensure that the project's results are not confined to the duration of European funding.

1

STRENGTHENING GENDER EQUALITY GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

It seems appropriate to continue consolidating the role of Gender Equality Plans as governance tools, by promoting their progressive integration into universities' strategic planning and, where appropriate, into the systems for monitoring and evaluating institutional performance. At national level, it might be useful to promote the establishment of dedicated roles, such as Gender Equality Managers, Gender Data Analysts and Gender Equality Officers, by providing adequate financial and professional resources to support their activities. At the same time, accountability mechanisms aimed at fostering greater holding governing bodies accountable for the pursuit of gender equality objectives. From this perspective, the GEP could gradually take on a cross-cutting role in shaping university policies – from recruitment to teaching, from research to welfare, from communication to third – fostering a more integrated and structured approach, without necessarily being confined to limited or projectbased initiatives.

2

STRENGTHENING MONITORING, EVALUATION AND DATA COLLECTION

A further area of focus that emerged from the research concerns the availability of structured monitoring systems and indicators measurable. From this perspective, it might be worth considering the introduction of nationally agreed benchmarks or standards for defining key performance indicators (KPIs), accompanied by the possibility of introducing regular reporting on the progress of GEPs. It might also be useful to develop integrated systems for data collection and analysis, capable of supporting ongoing monitoring of the composition of the university population, academic careers, recruitment processes, access to funding, positions of responsibility and participation in decision-making bodies. Such systems could gradually adopt an intersectional perspective, moving beyond an exclusively binary understanding of gender and, in compliance with data protection legislation, enabling us to consider the possible interactions between gender, age, disability, geographical origin, socio-economic background and other factors.

3

PROMOTING FAIRER CAREER PATHS AND INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

The evidence confirms the persistence of the glass ceiling, with women being significantly under-represented in senior positions within the academic career structure. To combat this phenomenon, it is recommended that:

- introduce recruitment and promotion procedures that are more sensitive to gender issues;
- give greater weight in evaluation processes to career breaks related to motherhood and care responsibilities;
- make training on unconscious bias compulsory for selection panels;
- develop structured mentoring, leadership and networking programmes aimed at female researchers and young female academics;
- provide incentives to departments that achieve tangible results in terms of gender balance.

Such measures could form part of a broader strategy for organisational transformation, capable of tackling the structural causes of inequalities rather than merely their effects.

4

STRENGTHENING MEASURES TO PROMOTE A BALANCE BETWEEN WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE

Balancing work and family responsibilities remains one of the main factors contributing to inequality. It would be particularly useful to promote national policies that encourage:

- parenting and care support services;
- family-friendly university campuses;
- flexible working arrangements;
- programmes to facilitate a return to work after parental leave;
- funds dedicated to resuming research activities following career breaks;
- initiatives to encourage greater take-up of parental leave by men.

Such measures could also be extended to groups that are currently often excluded from university welfare policies (undergraduates, PhD students, non-tenured staff, and researchers on fixed-term contracts), recognising that work-life balance concerns affect the entire academic community.

5

STRENGTHENING THE CULTURE OF GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH TRAINING, COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

The survey highlights that a significant proportion of the university community, particularly the student body, still has limited knowledge of the Gender Equality Plan. With this in mind, it might be useful to strengthen communication and engagement strategies through:

- regular information campaigns on GEPs;
- training opportunities on the topics of gender equality, unconscious bias and diversity;
- promoting the use of inclusive language;
- awareness-raising initiatives aimed at the various members of the university community.

Training activities could also adopt an inclusive and intersectional approach, taking into account the various forms of discrimination and potential disadvantages that may affect the university community.

6

FOSTERING SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSITYSENSITIVE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENTS

The prevention of gender-based violence, harassment and discrimination is a particularly important area for university policies. With this in mind, it might be appropriate to:

- promote greater visibility and accessibility of psychological support and counselling services;
- to establish clear and transparent procedures for reporting and managing incidents of harassment;
- consider developing networks of Safe Zones and appointing Trust Advisors;
- expand training opportunities on the prevention of violence and discrimination, targeting the various members of the university community;
- promote greater integration of gender perspectives into research, teaching and innovation processes.

Such initiatives could be developed from an intersectional and post-binary perspective, helping to create inclusive university environments that respect the rights of all people.

Final considerations

The Italian university system now has a regulatory framework conducive to the promotion of gender equality. The challenge for the coming years lies in moving from an approach focused primarily on the formal adoption of Gender Equality Plans to their full implementation, sustainability and impact assessment.

This requires a paradigm shift: from one-off measures to structural and integrated policies; from a perspective focused exclusively on the differences between men and women to an intersectional and inclusive approach; from initiatives targeting specific groups to the active participation of the entire academic community, with particular attention to the role of male and female students as agents of change.

Particular attention can be paid to the active involvement of the student body, not only as the beneficiaries of gender policies, but as a group capable of contributing to the design, implementation and evaluation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). Forms of regular consultation, participation in working groups, peer to peer activities, co-design workshops and small-scale projects can foster greater ownership of equality policies in everyday campus life.

This integrated approach can contribute to making gender equality an increasingly important element of the quality of research, teaching and university governance.

