



National Policy Report – Belgium

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.

Date: 31/07/2026



**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

Università degli Studi di Macerata, Italy
KMOP – Education and Innovation Hub, Greece
Spoleczna Akademia Nauk, Poland
Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Mykolas Romeris Universitetas, Lithuania
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München



General Information

Partner Institution: Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Country: Belgium

Author(s): Ruoxin SU, Paul QUINN, Oğuzhan Yeşiltuna

Revision History

Version	Date	Partner	Description
0.1	30/04/2026	VUB	First draft of Section 1
0.2	31/05/2026	VUB	First draft of Sections 2-5

0.3	05/06/2026	VUB	Revisions based on 1 st national roundtable comments
0.4	26/06/2026	VUB	Revisions based on 2 nd national roundtable comments
0.5	31/07/2026	VUB	Final version

Table of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	Meaning
PRO-GENDERING	PROMoting Gender mainstreaming iN academia through the enhancement of gender equality and iNclusion in hiGher education
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
HEI	Higher Education Institution
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
ART	Awareness Raising Toolkit
Handbook	Handbook on Implementing Gender Equality Plans in Higher Education Institutions
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
PR	Project Result
OSH	Online Sexual Harassment
IPSH	In-Person Sexual Harassment
VLIR	The Flemish Interuniversity Council
LGBTQI+	People with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics. It includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex individuals, as well as other identities represented by the “+” sign.
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation of the EU

Table of Contents

Executive Summary & Policy Briefing	6
1. Introduction and National Context	9
1.1 National Landscape	9
1.2 Overview of PRO-GENDERING Implementation in Belgium	10
1.3 Project Outputs	11
2. Assessment of Institutional Utility and Impact of PRO-GENDERING	13
2.1 Utility of PRO-GENDERING Tools	13
2.2 Knowledge and Capacity Shifts	14
2.3 Student Engagement and Campus Culture	14
2.4 Reach and Dissemination	15
3. Barriers and Sustainability Needs Identified from PRO-GENDERING	18
3.1 Barriers and Obstacles	18
3.2 Sustainability Needs	19
4. Mapping External Good Practices Nationwide	21
4.1 External good practice #1: Uni4Equity project at University of Antwerp	21
4.2 External good practice #2: Charter Gender in Academia in Flanders of Belgium ²⁴	
5. Policy Recommendations	26
5.1 Recommendations for national and regional policymakers	26
5.2 Recommendations for HEI leadership	27

Executive Summary & Policy Briefing

The PRO-GENDERING initiative (PROMoting Gender mainstreaming in academia through the enhancement of gender equality and inclusion in higher education) is a multi-national project structured to build institutional capacity, support evidence-based policy adjustments, and educate students on Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). At the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in Belgium, implementation bridged high-level macro-governance with daily campus experiences through two core phases.

Phase 1 is for diagnostic mapping. VUB conducted a qualitative documentary analysis of GEPs across Flemish universities, carried out strategic interviews with policy draftspersons, and executed a quantitative survey with university staff and student respondents to map institutional preparedness and community awareness. Phase 2 is action-oriented co-creation: VUB operationalized these findings by deploying the project's Awareness Raising Toolkit (ART) through a student-centered pilot initiative titled the "Gender Lens Campus Walk". Voluntary university students used the toolkit's thematic checklists and reflection templates to audit physical facilities, accessibility, and visual representation, translating abstract gender equality theories into visible campus realities.

Key findings through the research, tool testing, and pilot evaluations conducted under the PRO-GENDERING project are as follows:

- (a) Despite advanced, top-down policy formalization across Flemish Higher Education Institutions (HEI), a severe communication gap exists between university administrations and the campus community. The VUB diagnostic survey revealed that 50% of university respondents knew "nothing at all" about their own institution's GEP, and 71% had never read the document, primarily because they had never received communications regarding its publication or updates.
- (b) Historically, university GEPs in Belgium have focused heavily on academic and administrative personnel—specifically targeting the "leaky pipeline" through parental leave replacement funds and inclusive recruitment toolkits. Measures explicitly targeting

the student body have remained systematically less developed, creating an acute demand for low-threshold, participatory student engagement models.

- (c) Qualitative stakeholder interviews and student feedback highlighted that traditional, rigid binary gender categories utilized in university data reporting act as a structural barrier to inclusion. There is a growing societal and student-led critique demanding that university monitoring systems evolve toward fully intersectional and non-binary regulatory frameworks.
- (d) Data from the cross-country diagnostics and local evaluations show strong consensus regarding the utility of project outputs. In the Handbook on Implementing Gender Equality Plans in Higher Education Institutions (Handbook), frameworks addressing sexual harassment and equal representation in decision-making bodies were rated highest. Concurrently, interactive features in the ART—such as the spatial auditing prompts of the “Gender Lens Campus Walk”—facilitate turning abstract inclusion concepts into practical, real-world case studies.
- (e) Mirroring broader regional diagnostics like the EU-funded Uni4Equity project, the PRO-GENDERING assessment highlighted that while formal anti-harassment policies and hotlines are positively perceived, critical information regarding investigatory pathways, grievance procedures, and survivor support networks remains invisible or difficult to understand. This results in severe reporting deficits where victims rely almost exclusively on informal networks rather than institutional services.

To guarantee the long-term sustainability of these tools and translate project impacts into permanent institutional structures, the following action-oriented recommendations are prioritized:

First, for national and regional policymakers:

- (a) Modernize Frameworks for Intersectionality: Update regional equality legislation to incorporate non-binary and intersectional data-collection metrics under data privacy compliance, ensuring vulnerable or marginalized groups are accurately represented.

- (b) Standardize Governance and Targets: Implement centralized regional mandates—similar to the Charter Gender in Academia in Flanders of Belgium—enforcing a minimum 33% to 50% gender balance across all academic advice boards, research councils, and recruitment panels using structured positive action protocols.
- (c) Mandate Independent Harassment Tracking: Tie public higher education funding to independent, campus climate surveys tracking both in-person and online sexual harassment, backed by mandatory anonymous, multilingual digital reporting platforms to address underreporting.

Second, for HEI leadership:

- (a) Commit Permanent Funding and Personnel: Transition away from temporary project-reliance by establishing permanent budget lines for GEP execution and gender budgeting. Expand Gender Policy Officer roles into fully funded, permanent administrative units to preserve institutional expertise.
- (b) Institutionalize Student Auditing Tools: Formally embed student-led monitoring practices into the official university calendar as part of mandatory student orientation weeks and the annual Gender Equality Week.
- (c) Support Vulnerable Groups: Build visible, low-threshold support campus infrastructure, including expanded childcare facilities, flexible study-parenting arrangements, and accessible lactation and all-gender facilities across all campus sectors.
- (d) Improve Institutional Communication: Dismantle the current visibility gap where over 70% of the community remains unaware of GEPs. Use student portals, public campus exhibitions, and social media channels to proactively share evaluation results and actionable snapshot data.

1. Introduction and National Context

1.1 National Landscape

1.1.1 Legal and Institutional Framework

The landscape of gender equality within Belgian HEIs is shaped by a multi-layered governance system. At the federal level, Belgium is bound by international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women¹ and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action². The primary federal legislative instrument is the Law of 10 May 2007 to Combat Discrimination between Women and Men (“The Gender Act”), which transposes seven European directives and protects citizens from gender-based discrimination across all sectors, including education.³ Additionally, the central Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, established in 2002, serves as the federal entity responsible for combating discrimination and ensuring compliance with these statutory rights.⁴

However, because education is a competence of the regional Communities, universities in Flanders operate under the Decree of 10 July 2008 establishing the framework for Flemish equal opportunities and equal treatment policy.⁵ To streamline gender equity, the Flemish Department for Economics, Science and Innovation guides HEIs using Horizon Europe guidelines to map GEPs across four phases: analysis, planning, implementation, and monitoring. Furthermore, a landmark 2022 protocol between the Flemish Community and

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

³ <https://equal.belgium.be/en/useful-links/legislation>

⁴ <https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/en>

⁵ <https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/belgium-flemish-community/legislation-and-policy>

accredited universities sets data-sharing rules for systemic gender monitoring in full compliance with the GDPR.⁶

1.1.2 Cultural Context and Student Engagement in HEIs

Analyses within Flemish HEIs reveal a strong institutional commitment to “gender equality by design”, broadly integrating the European Commission’s thematic building blocks: work-life balance, leadership balance, recruitment equity, gender mainstreaming in research/curricula, and measures against gender-based violence (GBV).⁷

Despite advanced policy integration, PRO-GENDERING research highlights a significant gap between policy formalization and campus awareness. The baseline survey revealed that while 73% of university respondents perceive improvements in gender equality over the last decade, half know “nothing at all” about their institution’s GEP, and 71% have never read it due to an active communication gap. This lack of familiarity is even more pronounced among students.

Historically, GEP initiatives have focused heavily on academic and administrative staff—specifically addressing the “leaky pipeline” through parental leave replacement funds, flexible working, and recruitment toolkits. Measures explicitly targeting the student body are traditionally less developed, creating a clear need for localized, low-threshold, and participatory student engagement. Furthermore, a growing critique among students and key informants centers on the rigid binary approach to gender in university reporting, highlighting an urgent demand to evolve toward intersectional and non-binary models.

1.2 Overview of PRO-GENDERING Implementation in Belgium

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj/eng>

⁷ See PRO-GENDERING WP2 Country Report - Belgium

The PRO-GENDERING project was implemented at VUB during September 2023 to August 2026 to strengthen HEI capacity and bridge high-level policy with daily student experiences, supporting VUB's *Gender Equality Plan 2024 – 2026*.⁸

During the Phase 1, a mixed-methods design mapped institutional awareness and GEP preparedness at VUB: (a) documentary analysis: evaluated published GEPs from three Flemish universities against actual practices; (b) qualitative interviews: consulted institutional policy draftspersons to identify systemic success factors, financial obstacles, and structural blind spots like a lack of gender budgeting; (c) quantitative surveying: polled 67 staff and students, mapping attitudes, revealing low student GEP awareness, and capturing positive feedback on anti-harassment policies.

The Phase 2 aims to operationalize diagnostics using the ART which was developed by all PRO-GENDERING partners. In Belgium, VUB ran a student-centered pilot in October 2025, titled the “Gender Lens Campus Walk”. 10 voluntary students participated as active “spect-actors” of institutional change. After a briefing on intersectionality and implicit bias, students used maps and checklists to critically observe VUB’s physical and social infrastructure. They evaluated campus areas through specific gender lenses. For example, the diversity of representation in building names and visuals, accessibility and inclusivity of facilities (such as gender-neutral restrooms), and perceived physical safety and lighting design in outdoor spaces at night.

1.3 Project Outputs

The PRO-GENDERING project yielded a distinct set of research, policy, and action-oriented outputs designed to support evidence-based policy adjustment and student engagement (“PRO-GENDERING tools”):⁹

⁸ https://www.vub.be/sites/default/files/2024-02/GenderEqualityPlan_2024_2026.pdf

⁹ https://www.pro-gendering.eu/?page_id=284

- (a) Country report – Belgium: A national evaluation mapping the legal and structural background of gender equality at Flemish universities, incorporating GEP documentary analysis, stakeholder interviews, and quantitative survey data.
- (b) Google Slides Book: A cross-country digital slide book aggregating nationwide research findings from all six participating European partner countries to serve as a comparative diagnostic baseline.
- (c) Handbook on Implementing Gender Equality Plans in Higher Education Institutions: An operational manual providing standardized guidelines for data collection, intersectional indicator design, gender budgeting, and fostering safe, inclusive campus environments.
- (d) Awareness Raising Toolkit: A user-oriented toolkit offering practical, experiential learning frameworks for students and educators, including interactive workshops and spatial observation methods.
- (e) Small-scale student-led activities: Local execution of awareness raising toolkit (e.g., the VUB “Gender Lens Campus Walk” pilot).

2. Assessment of Institutional Utility and Impact of PRO-GENDERING¹⁰

2.1 Utility of PRO-GENDERING Tools

The evaluation of PRO-GENDERING tools at the institutional level demonstrates a strong consensus regarding their structural utility and relevance, though it also illuminates distinct operational challenges. Data aggregated from the cross-country diagnostics and localized VUB surveys show that participants overwhelmingly rated measures to combat sexual harassment and promote equal representation in decision-making bodies as the most useful components of the Handbook on Implementing GEPs. Specifically, the Handbook's formalized structures for data collection, intersectional indicator design, and gender budgeting were highly valued by policy draftspersons for introducing systemic accountability into daily university operations.

Within the ART, interactive and experiential methodologies were particularly well-received. In cross-country implementations, modules focusing on the path from stereotype to discrimination (utilizing frameworks like Gordon Allport's Pyramid of Hate¹¹) and practical training on utilizing non-sexist, inclusive language were highlighted as highly effective features. For student-centered learning, the "Gender Lens Campus Walk" guide and its thematic observation prompts were praised for successfully transitioning abstract gender studies concepts into tangible, real-world case studies.

However, stakeholder interviews revealed structural weaknesses in tool utility. Key informants noted that while the Handbook's monitoring models are clear, they often lack

¹⁰ Impact assessment results in sections 2-3 of this report are based on the analysis of relevant PRO-GENDERING activities carried out by VUB-HALL, involving 93 participants in total. Specifically, it includes 2 interviewees, 67 survey respondents, 14 national workshop participants and 10 voluntary participants in student-led pilot activities.

¹¹ https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pyramid-of-hate-web-english_1.pdf

quantifiable KPIs. Furthermore, the lack of dedicated, permanent budget lines for GEP implementation across multiple partner institutions frequently forces these toolkits to rely on limited, short-term project resources or the voluntary discretion of already burdened staff.

2.2 Knowledge and Capacity Shifts

The implementation of the PRO-GENDERING framework generated measurable, self-reported shifts in institutional capacity and community awareness. Prior to the project's deployment, a profound knowledge gap existed: half of the university sample knew nothing about their institution's GEP, and knowledge regarding available parental leave policies or study-parenting support measures was critically low.

Following participation in the workshops and toolkit activities, both staff and students reported substantial improvements in their skills and confidence to address gender inequalities. Students developed stronger observational and critical reflection skills, moving away from passive consumption toward active, data-driven analysis of their academic environment. For HEI personnel, the integration of structural GEP building blocks—such as anti-bias training for recruitment panels and the enforcement of inclusive language parameters—served to subtly embed implicit bias awareness directly into daily hiring, evaluation, and operational procedures.

Crucially, the qualitative interviews highlighted that the co-creative and collective approach utilized in developing and testing these plans served as a powerful capacity-building mechanism in itself. By involving actors from all institutional levels, the project helps to dismantle top-down policy resistance, replaced formalistic compliance with a more engaging approach, and fostered a shared, community-wide responsibility to promote equal opportunities.

2.3 Student Engagement and Campus Culture

In the development of the project's ART, the rollout of student-led small-scale projects—exemplified by VUB's Gender Lens Campus Walk—exerted a direct, positive impact on campus culture and visibility. By engaging students as active observers or “spect-actors”, the

project successfully decentralized gender equality work from restricted administrative offices out into the broader student body.

While staff-student collaboration saw limited operational integration during the initial pilot phase due to administrative constraints and scheduling difficulties, the project established a clear model for how this interaction is intended to function in the future. The co-creation framework is structured so that student groups will directly interface with gender equality officers, faculty, and administrative services to synthesize qualitative snapshot reports and deliver bottom-up data to the university's GEP implementation teams. Future institutionalization of this process is intended to empower the student body, signaling that their lived experiences and observations are recognized as valid inputs for concrete institutional modifications.

Consequently, student confidence to discuss and challenge structural inequalities rose significantly. The pilot project magnified the visibility of critical campus issues, such as the lack of demographic diversity in public visuals, inconsistent physical accessibility, and safety concerns regarding lighting in late-night outdoor areas. To sustain this cultural momentum, participants formulated actionable suggestions to permanently embed these walks into VUB's annual Gender Equality Week¹² and deploy social media campaigns to share diverse stories of inclusion—effectively shifting the campus narrative toward zero tolerance and intersectional awareness.

2.4 Reach and Dissemination

The dissemination strategy of the PRO-GENDERING project focused on maximizing both direct, high-impact engagement with key academic stakeholders and broad, indirect visibility across digital networks. Through localized workshops, strategic tool distribution, and student-

¹² <https://www.vub.be/en/event/gender-equality-week-2025>

led initiatives, the project directly engaged a diverse cross-section of the higher education community:

- (a) University staff: Institutional policy draftspersons, university equality advisors, faculty members, and research personnel were directly involved in the pilot testing of the Handbook, ensuring its metrics and gender budgeting frameworks reached those with direct governance responsibilities.
- (b) Students: At VUB, 67 respondents from staff and student target groups were directly engaged via the quantitative research mapping surveys; 10 students directly participated as co-creators and “spect-actors” in the pilot implementation of the Gender Lens Campus Walk as part of the project’s ART development.
- (c) Policymakers and external stakeholders: The ART and cross-country diagnostics were shared with university administrators and equality boards to integrate localized bottom-up feedback into institutional structures.

To foster structural awareness outside of immediate project participants, digital and promotional communication channels were leveraged to achieve broad public visibility:

- (a) Digital platforms: Project outputs and activities, such as the Google Slides Book (PR1), Handbook and international workshops, were disseminated via the official project website and all partners’ institutional portals.
- (b) Institutional networks: VUB-HALL’s networks include its institutional LinkedIn account, website, mailinglist and offline activities it organized.¹³ Promotional campaigns, international workshops, and information regarding VUB-HALL’s PRO-GENDERING activities were publicized utilizing newsletters, websites, and social media channels, reaching an estimated broader audience of thousands of members from a multidisciplinary community engaging with academia, industry and policymaking (e.g.,

¹³ <https://hall.research.vub.be/>

VUB-HALL has approximately 900 LinkedIn followers, 600 mailing list subscribers, and an active institutional website with regular updates and visits.)

3. Barriers and Sustainability Needs Identified from PRO-GENDERING

3.1 Barriers and Obstacles

The implementation of inclusive practices and GEPs at the institutional level faces several legal, institutional, and cultural barriers. Legally and structurally, a primary limitation within the Flemish higher education context is the absence of centralized local guidelines or active operational frameworks from regional government departments. HEIs are largely left to interpret international European Horizon guidelines independently, creating inconsistencies in policy application. Institutionally, the sheer size and decentralized structure of modern universities introduce severe coordination friction. Because a “whole institution approach” distributes gender equality tasks across multiple administrative, human resource, and research departments, lines of competence frequently become blurred, slowing down policy execution.¹⁴

Furthermore, a significant institutional and cultural barrier is the persistent policy gap regarding the student body. Historically, university-led GEP initiatives have focused heavily on academic and administrative staff—specifically addressing the “leaky pipeline” through parental leave adjustments and recruitment toolkits—leaving student-centered gender equality structures systematically underdeveloped. For student-led initiatives like the Gender Lens Campus Walk, administrative constraints and the limited availability of university staff or dedicated extra resources created structural barriers that prevented the activity from being integrated into formal student orientation programs or the university’s annual Gender Equality Week.

Culturally, implementing these tools revealed a distinct form of institutional resistance characterized by “policy fatigue”. In some departments, key informants noted a strong fatigue

¹⁴ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/duurzaamheid-in-de-lerarenopleidingen/whole-institution-approach>

regarding equal opportunities topics following a history of separate, ambitious transversal action plans, which often leads to the GEP being viewed as a burdensome, formal bureaucratic requirement rather than an added institutional value. This top-down approach can induce passive resistance from university personnel who view gender mainstreaming actions as an administrative chore, significantly hindering ground-level execution.

Additionally, emerging cultural critiques center on the rigid binary approach to gender embedded within university reporting structures. The lack of non-binary regulatory models creates exclusion, as evidenced during the research phase where queer students active on campus withdrew from surveys due to binary framing. This tension demonstrates an urgent cultural demand to evolve toward intersectional frameworks. Finally, data collection in student settings faces privacy barriers; many participants prefer absolute anonymity and express reluctance to be photographed due to the personally sensitive nature of disclosing gender identity and sexual orientation.

3.2 Sustainability Needs

To ensure the long-term viability of the project outputs, the Handbook, the ART, and localized student initiatives must transition away from short-term project reliance toward structural embedding. Currently, partner institutions do not operate with permanent, dedicated budgets for GEP execution, especially within the increasingly challenging financial context in academia. Instead, they rely entirely on the ad-hoc approval of temporary funds for specific actions or drawing from general departmental services—such as using standard training budgets when a gender-equality workshop is organized. Once external EU funding concludes, this model threatens project sustainability. HEIs urgently require dedicated, permanent structural funding to finance future GEP iterations, expand visible inclusive campus facilities, secure gender-neutral infrastructure, and install proper campus safety lighting.

In terms of human resources, sustainability depends on moving beyond a system that relies on the volunteerism of motivated individuals. Existing single points of contact for gender equality often have these responsibilities allocated as a minor fraction (approximately 30%) of their primary administrative workload. HEIs require permanent, full-time gender policy

personnel to maintain continuity, as the institutional memory and operational expertise are frequently lost when temporary project staff depart the organization.

Structurally, student initiatives must be formalized within the university's institutional calendar. Moving forward, the Gender Lens Campus Walk should be formally embedded into VUB's annual Gender Equality Week and supported by clear, privacy-sensitive data-collection guidelines and official administration backing. This structural integration must be matched with sustained promotional support, including campus exhibitions and social media communication frameworks, to systematically elevate GEP awareness, maintain student engagement, and foster a permanent culture of inclusion.

4. Mapping External Good Practices Nationwide

4.1 External good practice #1: Uni4Equity project at University of Antwerp

Name of initiative/practice	Uni4Equity (Strengthening universities' response to sexual harassment with an equity approach)
Implementing institution	University of Antwerp (UAntwerp), as part of a multi-country European consortium funded by the EU's CERV-DAPHNE program
Target audience	University students, academic staff, administrative personnel, and institutional code-of-conduct drafting boards
Brief description	The core objective of Uni4Equity is to map, prevent, and systematically respond to both online sexual harassment (OSH) and in-person sexual harassment (IPSH) within academic contexts using a rigorous mixed-methods approach. Rooted in an ecological and gender-transformative framework, the project addresses the structural, institutional, and individual determinants that sustain harassment. The initiative actively engages the campus community through an evidence-based multi-level prevention model: (a) Primary Prevention: Delivering interactive online workshops to challenge deep-seated sexist norms and power imbalances. (b) Secondary Prevention: Organizing participatory sessions and specialized bystander intervention training to encourage active peer reporting and dismantle institutional silence.

	(c) Tertiary Prevention: Developing targeted tools—such as a specialized campus "violentometer"—to minimize the impact of harassment on victim-survivors and actively prevent secondary victimization.
Evidence of success/impact	Uni4Equity is highly successful because it directly bridges academic research with concrete institutional policy changes, as demonstrated by its multi-national diagnostic survey of 7,563 students and staff across six European universities. The empirical results revealed a stark reality: 37% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment (31% in-person and 16% online), with a disproportionately high risk identified among women and LGBTIQ+ individuals. Crucially, the project uncovered a profound reporting deficit—only 17% of online sexual harassment victims utilized university support services and only 6% filed police reports—which informed the structural revision of codes of conduct and the development of tools to help the campus community evaluate acceptable behavior boundaries. Ultimately, these peer-reviewed findings have driven structural protocol overhauls at UAntwerp, moving the institution from simple legalistic compliance to active, metrics-driven accountability.
Comparison with PRO-GENDERING outputs	Uni4Equity heavily complements the baseline diagnostics of the PRO-GENDERING project. The PRO-GENDERING research highlighted that while university staff and students possess high confidence in the existence of anti-harassment rules, they remain unaware of explicit investigatory pathways or victim protection procedures. Uni4Equity expands upon this exactly where the PRO-GENDERING ART focuses on spatial observations (e.g., the Campus Walk) and general anti-bias workshops, Uni4Equity provides highly specific, multi-layered tools addressing the distinct, escalating problem of <i>digital and online</i> sexual harassment—a landscape often left completely unregulated by traditional university GEP reporting models.

Policy takeaway	A key takeaway for national policymakers is that gender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing physical and psychological safety on campus. Policymakers should tie institutional funding to the establishment of verified, independent sexual harassment reporting channels and mandate standardized, evidence-based campus climate surveys to ensure that the realities of student and staff safety are systematically monitored and addressed. For example, universities should translate all sexual harassment protocols and reporting channels into multiple languages (to protect international staff and students) and establish anonymous, online, non-judgmental reporting infrastructures to bypass hierarchical academic power dynamics that historically cause victims to fear institutional retaliation.
Relevant URLs	• https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/uni4equity/the-project/ • https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/projects-details/43251589/101094121/CERV?isExactMatch=true&programmePeriod=2021%20-%202027&frameworkProgramme=43251589&topicAbbreviation=CERV-2022-DAPHNE&order=DESC&pageNumber=1&pageSize=100&sortBy=title • Vives-Cases, C., Berbegal-Bernabeu, M., Pérez-Martínez, V., Naves, S., Muñoz-Haba, A., Van de Velde, S., Jaskulska, S., Porru, S., Carta, A., De Cuyper, A., Carrasco, J. M., Manchenko, M., Jankowiak, B., Wallner, M., & Stifter, V. (2025). Strengthening universities' response to sexual harassment with an equity approach: the UNI4EQUITY mixed-methods study protocol. <i>BMJ open</i>, 15(7), e097265. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2024-097265

4.2 External good practice #2: Charter Gender in Academia in Flanders of Belgium

Name of initiative/practice	Charter Gender in Academia (and the associated VLIR Equality Guide)
Implementing institution	The Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) and the Young Academy (Jonge Academie) of Belgium
Target audience	HEI leadership, HR departments, and academic selection committees across all Flemish universities in Belgium
Brief description	The primary objective of the Charter and Equality Guide is to establish structural, uniform HR instruments and binding guidelines across universities to accelerate gender parity in academic careers. It explicitly targets the higher echelons of academia to dismantle the glass ceiling. The initiative actively involves university leadership by committing all Flemish rectors to a shared roadmap. It sets strict structural mandates, including positive action policies (where preference is given to the underrepresented gender among equally qualified candidates) and strict gender quotas for the composition of university advice boards, research councils, and selection juries (typically requiring a minimum 60/40 or 70/30 gender split).
Evidence of success/impact	This initiative is widely recognized as a benchmark national practice because it was approved and formally signed at the highest executive level by the rectors of all major Flemish universities (including VUB, UGent, KU Leuven, UHasselt, and UAntwerpen). It moved gender monitoring from voluntary institutional targets to a formalized regional compliance model. It serves as a basis for biennial external

	evaluations of the Inter-University Charter, ensuring long-term accountability and quantifiable progress in structural data reporting.
Comparison with PRO-GENDERING outputs	While the PRO-GENDERING <i>Handbook</i> offers operational toolkits for localized monitoring, evaluation, and gender budgeting within specific institutions, the VLIR Charter operates at a macro-governance level, imposing uniform legislative and structural compliance across the entire Flemish university network. Furthermore, PRO-GENDERING emphasizes low-threshold, bottom-up student interventions, whereas the VLIR Charter focuses strictly on top-down, structural HR reforms and selection procedures targeting the "leaky pipeline" of academic personnel.
Policy takeaway	Inter-university policy coordination is essential to prevent institutional fragmentation. National policymakers should mandate that all HEIs sign a centralized national charter that enforces standardized gender quotas on selection committees and establishes mandatory, legally compliant data-sharing protocols for monitoring career progression.
Relevant URLs	• https://vlir.be/publicaties/gender-in-academia/ • https://www.vliruos.be/sites/default/files/2024-10/VLIR-UOS%20Gender%20policy%202020-2024%20final.pdf

5. Policy Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for national and regional policymakers

- (a) Mandate the standardized transition to intersectional and non-binary GEP frameworks

National and regional legislative authorities must modernize existing equality frameworks—such as the Flemish Decree of 10 July 2008—to move beyond a strict gender binary. GEP guidelines issued by public funding bodies should incorporate explicit requirements for intersectional data collection. This must include standardized, legally compliant protocols under GDPR to register and monitor non-binary gender identities, protecting vulnerable groups while capturing the unique barriers faced by racialized, international, and LGBTQI+ students and staff.

- (b) Establish centralized operational guidance and quantifiable KPIs

To combat institutional fragmentation and bureaucratic fatigue, regional departments of education and innovation should provide uniform, localized operational tools rather than delegating GEP interpretation entirely to individual institutions. Policymakers should tie state research funding allocations to the adoption of concrete, verifiable KPIs and uniform data-sharing structures, building upon benchmarks like the Flemish 2022 Protocol for Gender Monitoring.¹⁵

- (c) Introduce binding gender quotas and positive action across all HEIs

¹⁵ <https://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/2022-12/Protocol%20gendermonitoring%20drie%20Vlaamse%20SOCs%20-%20imec%2C%20VIB%20en%20Flanders%20Make.pdf>

Drawing from national best practices like the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) Charter Gender in Academia, policymakers should mandate a minimum 33% target—moving toward a strict 50% gender balance—for all university advice boards, research councils, selection juries, and recruitment committees. This should be legally reinforced by positive action protocols, allowing selection committees to give structured preference to equally qualified candidates from underrepresented genders to structurally dismantle the academic “leaky pipeline”.

(d) Legislate mandatory independent campus climate reporting mechanisms

To address the widespread underreporting of campus harassment identified by other similar regional initiatives like Uni4Equity, national authorities should require all accredited HEIs to implement multi-channel, anonymous, and multilingual digital reporting platforms. Institutional funding must be contingent on executing regular, independent campus climate surveys that measure both in-person and online sexual harassment, ensuring transparency and shifting accountability away from passive legalistic compliance toward strict institutional liability.

5.2 Recommendations for HEI leadership

(a) Formalize and structurally fund GEP operations

University executive boards must transition away from short-term project-reliance and temporary funding mechanisms. HEIs must allocate permanent, dedicated budget lines specifically for GEP implementation, gender budgeting, and infrastructure improvements. Furthermore, the role of Gender Policy Officers must be professionalized, expanding these positions from minor fractional workloads into fully funded, permanent administrative units to preserve institutional expertise.

(b) Institutionalize student representation and experiential learning tools

HEI leadership must systematically integrate student voices into the formal monitoring and evaluation cycles of their GEPs. Practical, student-led auditing tools

developed in this project should be permanently embedded into the official university calendar. HEIs should integrate these walks into annual, institution-wide campaigns like Gender Equality Week and mandatory student orientation programs, backed by clear, privacy-sensitive data-collection procedures.

(c) Expand targeted support for vulnerable groups

Universities must address the critical knowledge gap among the student body regarding work-life and study-life balance. HEIs should implement visible, low-threshold support infrastructures, including expanded on-campus childcare facilities, flexible study-parenting arrangements, and accessible lactation/all-gender facilities across all campus sectors.

(d) Target institutional communication and transparency deficits

To bridge the gap where over 70% of the campus community has never read their institution's GEP, HR and communication departments must execute active, multi-channel internal dissemination strategies. GEP targets, annual quantitative evaluation reports, and localized snapshot outcomes should be proactively publicized through student portals, mandatory curriculum components, and visible campus exhibitions rather than remaining confined to internal administrative councils.



www.pro-gendering.eu