

A F F I R M

RECTOR:

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GENDER EQUALITY PLAN



2021-2024

Approved by Academic Council on 7th of June 2021

1 Introduction

This Gender Equality Plan (GEP) was developed for the Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU) to establish a framework for promoting gender equality (GE) in educational, research, employment and social relations among university community.



In a global context, the Plan is formulated to give adherence to the Agenda 2030 issued by the United Nations (UN)¹, aimed to contribute to the achievement of a future sustainable development for people, planet and prosperity.

More precisely it can be seen as one, even a small step in accelerating the implementation of the one of the 17th UN Sustainable Development Goals – Goal 5. “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”.

The PU GEP development corresponds to an essential aspect in the work of the **European Union** (EU) and all its policies, which refers to the equality between women and men. The Union’s key objectives in this direction are prioritised in the European Commission’s (EC) Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025².

GE in research and innovation is a priority in the policies related to the construction of the European Research Area (ERA) since its launch in 2000, seeking to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention and career progression of female researchers and to achieve gender balance in decision-making. This priority is also maintained in the EC's plans for the new ERA, based on excellence. The new ERA³ will strengthen the focus on participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields and foster entrepreneurship.



The elaboration of the current Plan is motivated both by the above ERA priority as well as by a number of special EU priorities for universities in Europe. The leading EC’s recommendations for stepping up GE policies in universities are set up in the Policy Report⁴ “Towards a 2030 Vision on the Future of Universities in Europe”.

¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

³ <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/eu-law-and-publications/publication-detail/-/publication/aae418f1-06b3-11eb-a511-01aa75ed71a1>

⁴ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a3cde934-12a0-11eb-9a54-01aa75ed71a1/>

In general, **the national context** also favours the PU GEP development as the Bulgarian legislation guarantees equality of women and men in all spheres of public, political and economic life.

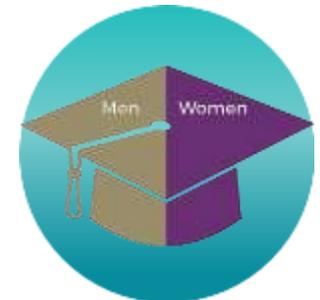


Bulgaria, as a member of the EU and the UN, shares the responsibility of governments and all stakeholders in planning, developing and adapting measures, actions and policies aimed at implementing the UN's Agenda 2030, including the once related to equality between women and men. Proof of this is the Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Bulgaria for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals⁵ prepared in 2020.

The Republic of Bulgaria pursues a consistent policy on equality of women and men, which is specifically tailored to fit the national peculiarities and is relevant with the commitments under international treaties to which Bulgaria is a party, incl. as a member of the EU. This is reflected in the newly adopted National Strategy for Promotion of Equality of Women and Men 2021-2030⁶.

According to the National strategy for development of scientific research in the Republic of Bulgaria, 2017 - 2030 (Better science for better Bulgaria)⁷, GE in the field of research and innovation is taken into account in determining the main goals that the State sets for the development of research and higher education in Bulgaria.

The Plan is completely in line with the integral **institutional policy** and commitment of PU to provide equal learning opportunities and job conditions avoiding any form of discrimination, expressed in the Ethical Code⁸ of the university. The GEP considers the PU mission and its general objective formulated in the "Vision for the development of the University of Plovdiv for the next 15-20 years" (2017)⁹ to advance the scientific, cultural and economic potential of Bulgaria in the interest of and for the benefit of people and society and to establish itself as a leading educational, research and cultural institution equipped with modern infrastructure and covering the highest European standards.



Alongside with the above mentioned, it is important to note that the current Plan **is the first attempt at explicit institutionalization** of GE not only for the university itself but for all scientific and academic institutions in Bulgaria.

⁵ <http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=4980>

⁶ <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/blgarsko-zakonodatelstvo>

⁷ <https://www.mon.bg/bg/143>

⁸ <https://uni-plovdiv.bg/uploads/site/pravilnici/Etichen%20kodeks23112020.pdf>

⁹ https://uni-plovdiv.bg/uploads/site/za_uni/Doklad_Vizi%D0%B0_za_razvitie_PU_Final.pdf

In terms of its content the PU GEP is compiled following the European Institute for Gender Equality guide on how to implement GEPs – Step-by-Step Guide for establishing a Gender Equality Plan (GEAR tool)¹⁰. The GEP is aligned with the EURAXESS principles set out in the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers¹¹ and the requirements concerning GEPs of research organisations and higher education institutions stipulated in the design of the new EU funding programme Horizon Europe¹².

The Plan features implementation of the three central ERA's GE objectives, i.e., removing barriers for women's career progression, addressing gender imbalances in decision making processes, and strengthening the gender dimension in research.

It is constructed to meet the challenges outlined in the PU's first Status Assessment on GE (see 1.1) and thus takes into account the latest characteristics and needs of the university in the field of GE. The Plan includes objectives, areas of intervention and measures for the four-year period from 2021–2024. Since gender perspective was not explicitly in the focus of PU community till this moment the PU GEP possesses some characteristics of a strategic document.

The Plan was developed with the support of the SPEAR project¹³ (funded by the European Commission), along with substantial contributions from the Gender Equality Group (GEG) formed at the university by PU SPEAR team and representatives of PU top and middle management, as well as with the help of a wide range of people from the PU community (administrators, academic staff, students and leadership).

The GEP has been approved by the Academic Council of the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" on 7th of June 2021 and further affirmed and signed by the Rector on 1st of July 2021

This Plan can be found on the University's website at the address:

<https://uni-plovdiv.bg/pages/index/2317/>

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¹⁰ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/step-step-guide>

¹¹ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>

¹² <https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/rr-news-europe-horizon-2020-2020-9-gender-equality-plans-to-be-mandatory-for-horizon-europe>

¹³ <https://gender-spear.eu/>

1.1 Areas of intervention

To recognise what are important deficiencies or weaknesses related with GE at the university and as consequence to identify areas of intervention and corresponding activities and measures to be addressed in the PU GEP, a detailed analysis of the gender-related state-of-play in PU have been performed starting from 2019. This PU's first Status Assessment on GE was carried out on the basis of the following methods and sources:

- Deep review of international, national and university policies, practises, initiatives on GE;
- Collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated quantitative data about PU academic staff, non-academic staff, PhD students and students;
- Collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated qualitative data on GE-issues by conducting surveys among students, PhD students and academic staff from all PU faculties;
- Formal and informal discussions, talks and interviews with staff members and students.

Such a thorough approach was chosen to assure the success and the effectiveness of these first steps towards the official integration of the GE perspective in the university organizational, educational and research activities.

On the basis of examination and analysis of the collected data, the identified **Areas of Intervention** (AI) covered by this Plan are:



Area of intervention 1. Designing and driving institutional change towards GE

Area of intervention 2. Commitment of the university and sustainable support towards GE

Area of intervention 3. Building gender-capacity

Area of intervention 4. Gender-sensitive culture at the university

Area of intervention 5. Work-life balance and work or study conditions

Area of intervention 6. Gender dimension in research and education

2 Measure by areas of intervention

This section lays out the actions promoting GE for each of the six areas of intervention for the coming 4-year period. For each area, some specific university data is provided, that justify the planned measures.

PU GEP presents a total of 36 measures/activities along with their descriptive parameters as people involved, and time frame. A set of indicators is juxtaposed to each measure to ensure further monitoring, assessment and reporting of results or achievements related to its implementation.

The planned measures are chosen to build the foundation in all main direction of a GE initiative at PU and to assure achievement of GEP objectives. They are selected following the recommendations to be SMART¹⁴ (according to GEAR tool), but also to be feasible within the overall context – national, societal and institutional. It is essential that they are thought out to be careful and weighed and not to provoke resistance from the very beginning and thus lead to the failure of the whole initiative.

2.1 Designing and driving institutional change towards GE (AI1)



The very fact that the current GEP marks the start of the formal structural integration of the perspective of GE in the PU necessitates the Plan to include measures and activities for designing and driving institutional change towards GE.

The analysis performed in the PU's first Status Assessment on GE also supports this need. For example, the quantitative results show that gender balance is partly distorted at the university as a whole and in some study fields or positions (in favour of women or of men in different cases). For example, a much smaller percentage of female (about 40%) than male (over 50%) academic staff work on high academic positions – as associate professors and professors. Female students (about 75% of all in the field) predominate in the fields of studies such as Pedagogy, Humanities and Social sciences, while over 65% of students in the STEM field are men. There

is also a predominance of male teachers (57.50%) in this field. Recently, such imbalances are recognized as a problem by more and more members of the academic community.

¹⁴ Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-related

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Designing and driving institutional change towards GE	1.1. Establish and operate an University Ombudsman supporting the change in the GE area	GEG ¹⁵ Top Management	2021	Ombudsman established and engaged GE actions carried out with the support of the Ombudsman
	1.2. Ensure GE as an integral part of university ethics policy	GEG Top Management Middle Management	2021	Ethical committee engaged GE adopted in university ethics policy Evidence of integration
	1.3. Perform periodic consultations with stakeholders and the academic community on issues related to both, GEP and GE activities	TLP ¹⁶ SCP ¹⁷ SMP ¹⁸ Top Management Middle Management Internal experts (Researchers in the field of Psychology, Sociology and Statistics) Internal supportive and active stakeholders External stakeholders	Continuous	Consultations with stakeholders and academic community performed Different GEP and GE activities covered Number of participants
	1.4. Make additions/changes in some university regulatory documents affecting equality from the gender perspective	GEG Top Management Middle Management	2021-2022	Regulatory documents revised Scale of the target group
	1.5. Design and maintain continuous GE monitoring based on indicators – procedures, data collection, tools and methods, reporting	TLP MEP ¹⁹ University Information Center HR Office Research and Projects Office	Continuous	GE monitoring designed Monitoring of GE indicators performed GE indicators and monitoring methods and tools enriched Number of monitoring-related activities

¹⁵ PU Gender Equality Group

¹⁶ Team Leading Person – GEG leader

¹⁷ Stakeholder Collaboration Person –GEG member responsible for GE stakeholder collaboration activities

¹⁸ Sustainability and Mainstreaming Person – GEG member responsible for GE sustainability and mainstreaming activities

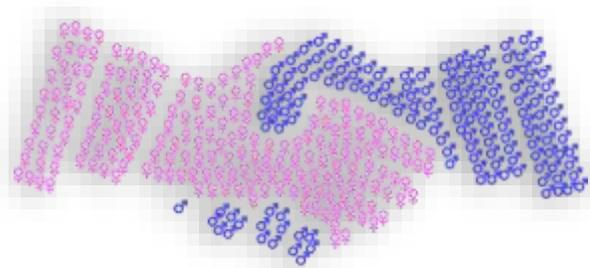
¹⁹ Monitoring and Evaluation Person – GEG member responsible for GE monitoring and evaluation activities

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Designing and driving institutional change towards GE	1.6. Ensure awareness of all University bodies and community about important results from GE monitoring indicators	TLP DCP ²⁰ SCP	Continuous	Awareness initiatives on monitoring data carried out Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	1.7. Stimulate better gender balance at the university where it is distorted, including in decision making bodies, STEM field, etc.	TLP PIP ²¹ DCP Middle Management HR Office	Continuous	Stimulation initiatives organized Different unbalanced areas covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	1.8. Collect and popularize GE and GEP best practices of European universities and research organizations	PIP DCP International Cooperation Office	2021-2022	Best practices collected Popularization initiatives organized Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	1.9. Analyse recruitment and academic career progression criteria as well as other institutional official documents from GE perspective	GEG HR Office EURAXESS Contact Point Middle Management	2022-2024	Analysis of institutional documents performed Number of analysed documents

²⁰ Dissemination and Communication Person – GEG member responsible for GE dissemination and communication activities

²¹ GEP Implementation Person – GEG member responsible for GEP implementation activities

2.2 Commitment of the university and sustainable support towards GE (AI2)



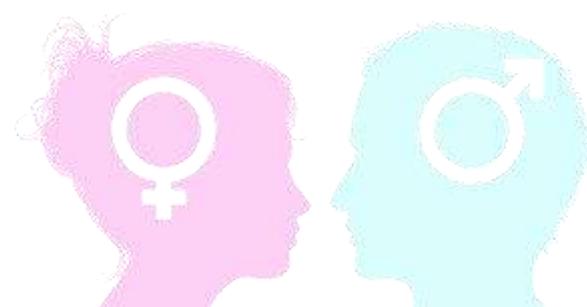
The findings from surveys give a hint that PU community is not really sensitive to gender issues. Some contradictions can be found in the answers received. For example, over 80% of teachers stated that having a managerial position should depend on the professional qualities of the individual, but not on his/him sex. But actually 28% of them think that senior managers should be men and only 9% of male teacher would prefer their direct boss to be a woman. Such contradictions may be due to hidden or at least unconscious resistance to the GE ideas. Therefore, the PU community needs to be convinced that certain standard practices and beliefs in academy may give advantage to some and disadvantage others.

To ensure sustainability in promoting equality in PU, a commitment to the GE initiative will need to be sought among all stakeholders. It is significant to find open and visible support at all levels within and outside PU.

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Commitment of the university and sustainable support towards GE	2.1. Ensure tailored support towards GE from PU leadership, different PU units, and all stakeholder groups (vertical and horizontal support)	GEG	2021-2024	Actions to ensure support organized Different management levels/units/ stakeholder groups covered Evidence of support Scale of the target group
	2.2. Motivate PU community to support GE institutional change (mass support)	TLP PIP SMP DCP	Continuous	Motivation initiatives organized Different channels used Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	2.3. Establish and develop a network of gender practice in a local level with effective and competent GE practitioners	TLP SCP SMP PIP External stakeholders	2021-2023	Local network of gender practice established Networking evidence Scale of the network

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Commitment of the university and sustainable support towards GE	2.4. Establish collaboration with national and international GE-networks and communities to explore and exchange experience	TLP SCP SMP Internal active stakeholders External stakeholders International Cooperation Office	Continuous	Collaboration initiatives performed Collaboration evidence Number of established contacts
	2.5. Keep track and popularize European GE policy and initiatives	PIP DCP SMP	2021-2024	EU GE policy and initiatives tracked Popularization initiatives organized Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	2.6. Maintain a special local GE website as a multipurpose channel allowing to reach the widest possible audience	TLP DCP SMP University Information Center	Continuous	Local GE website maintained Different GE topics and GEP activities covered Scale of the target group

2.3 Building gender-capacity (AI3)



The results of the conducted surveys and analysis of quantitative data about academic staff and students outlined the need of building gender capacity among the academic community. The analysis of the opinions on issues related to equality between women and men in academia shows that about 41% of PU teachers have not paid any attention to the topic before. For some staff members and students it is particularly difficult to recognize some forms of inequality and gender biases as it is evident from the conducted survey in cartoons collecting qualitative data on the attitudes toward some traditional and contemporary stereotypical perceptions and prejudices about the role of women/men in professional and family life. Though not a small number of the female teachers recognise the lack of women in senior positions in the academy as a problem and think there is a vertical segregation ("glass ceiling").

These lack of expertise and experience should be compensated by accumulating the necessary gender knowledge and then transforming it into gender-specific management applicable to the PU structure and procedures.

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Building gender-capacity	3.1. Build sensitivity, understanding and knowledge about gender equality by various type of initiatives	TLP PIP SCP SMP Internal experts (in GE) External experts (in GE)	2021-2024	Capacity building initiatives organized Different stakeholder groups covered GE sensitivity/understanding/capacity/ knowledge evidence Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	3.2. Collect and popularize showcases on different gender-based inequalities and preventive actions – (un)conscious gender biases (as glass ceiling), rooted professional role models for women and men, gender-based violence, etc.	PIP DCP MEP Internal active stakeholders	2022	Showcases on gender-based inequalities and preventive actions collected Popularization initiatives organized Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	3.3. Study and ensure the research staff awareness of options supporting career/professional development	TLP MEP DCP SCP HR Office EURAXESS Contact Point	2022	Awareness on career supporting options studied Awareness initiatives on career supporting options organized Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	3.4. Raise awareness on the use of gender-sensitive language in professional communication	PIP DCP Internal experts (Researchers in Psychology and Sociology)	2022	Awareness initiatives on the use of gender-sensitive language organized Different stakeholder groups covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	3.5. Perform and communicate a deeper analysis on equal treatment regardless of gender among staff and students	GEG Internal experts (Researchers in the field of Psychology, Sociology and Statistics) HR Office University Information Center Research and Projects Office	2022-2024	Analysis on equal treatment regardless of gender performed Analysis on equal treatment communicated Different stakeholder groups covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Gender-sensitive culture at the university	4.3. Study and communicate the hidden gender inequality issues	GEG Internal experts (in GE) External experts (in GE)	2023	Hidden gender inequality issues studied Hidden gender inequality issues communicated Different stakeholder groups covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	4.4. Collect and popularize appropriate from GE perspective professional role models (top managers, decision makers, women/men in science and education, etc.)	PIP DCP MEP Internal active stakeholders	2024	Professional role models collected Popularization initiatives organized Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	4.5. Promote understanding of current changes in the roles of women and men in family life and a culture of equal family responsibilities among academics, students and administrative staff	TLP PIP DCP Internal experts (Researchers in Psychology and Sociology)	2024	Initiatives to promote understanding of new family roles organized Different stakeholder groups covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group

2.5 Work-life balance and work or study conditions (AI5)



Formally PU ensures special privileges and financial support for socially disadvantaged students (incl. mothers) and flexible working conditions. The university documents include some measures that allow flexibility in managing time and work-life balance (e.g. suitable working conditions, reduction of attending lectures for mothers, giving scholarships, etc.). But in practice, academic staff members often do not take advantage of the granted rights, such as in the case of parental leave, as it disrupts their career development. According to the surveys' results, around half of the surveyed teachers and students do not know what privileges they have and under what conditions the PU provides them, which they can take advantage of as university students and teachers.

Most of the PU academic community members, regardless of their gender, succeed to achieve a balance between their professional/education and personal life (70% of teachers; 62% of students) and are satisfied by their academic growth/study results. But about a half of the surveyed teachers and students (incl. PhD) think that there is a need for improvement of the administrative/regulatory measures that help them in getting better work-life balance while performing their teaching/research/training activities. Many women (45%) at the university believe that there are more obstacles in front of them and that their professional growth is more difficult compared with the men's one.

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Work-life balance and work and study conditions	5.1. Collect and popularize measures supporting the reconciliation of work/study and private life laid down by national law, university or faculty regulations	PIP DCP SMP Top Management Middle Management	2023	Regulatory measures supporting work-life balance collected Popularization initiatives organized Different stakeholder groups covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	5.2. Promote possibilities for flexible working/study time and distance work/learning	PIP SMP Top Management Middle Management	2021-2024	Possibilities for flexible working time and distance work promoted Different stakeholder groups covered Scale of the target group
Work-life balance and	5.3. Study and communicate satisfaction of personal development (professional/educational) and work-life/study-life balance among academics and students	PIP DCP MEP HR Office Research and Projects Office	2022-2023	Satisfaction of personal development and work-life/study-life balance studied Academics and students satisfaction communicated Different stakeholder groups covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Work-life balance and work and study conditions	5.4. Organize work-life balance and time management trainings and guidance related to competitions for occupation of academic positions	TLP PIP SCP Internal supportive stakeholders	2023-2024	Training and guidance activities on work-life balance and time management for academics conducted Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	5.5. Organize courses, discussions, mentoring programs on work-life balance and time management targeting particularly PhD students and young scientists	TLP PIP SCP Academia Iuventutis ²²	2021-2024	Activities on work-life balance and time management for PhD students and young scientists conducted Number of participants/Scale of the target group

2.6 Gender dimension in research and education (AI6)



Regarding the gender dimensions in education, the PU's first Status Assessment shows that gender aspects are included mainly in sociology subjects. Unfortunately a small number of students study in this field. There are also academic disciplines in fields such as economics, philosophy, history, psychology and pedagogy where gender perspective is partly reflected but not in STEM field.

Despite the fact that gender is part of some research designs in PU there is definitely a need of a broader integration of the gender dimension in research. The results from the conducted surveys indicate that there are only some single cases where university researchers (academics or PhD students) from different fields (e.g. in the social sciences and humanities) are doing more deep researches related to gender or women studies. When it comes to who is doing research – men or women – an interesting fact is that 60.61% of all project leaders at PU are women.

²² University centre for young scholars, PhD candidates, and post-doctoral researchers

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Gender dimension in research and education	6.1. Collect and popularize useful research topics and data sources to attract young scientists and PhD students to GE cross-disciplinary field	PIP DCP SMP Internal experts (Researchers in the field of Psychology, Sociology) Academia Iuventutis	2024	GE research topics and sources collected Popularization initiatives organized Young scientists and PhD students attracted Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	6.2. Conduct gender-related joint initiatives and courses with Academia Iuventutis	PIP SCP DCP Head of Academia Iuventutis Internal active stakeholders	2021-2024	Joint initiatives and courses with Academia Iuventutis conducted Different GE aspects and GEP activities covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	6.3. Study, communicate and stimulate gender balance in research projects participation	PIP DCP MEP Top Management Research and Projects Office	2021-2024	Gender balance in research projects participation studied Gender balance in research projects participation communicated Stimulation initiatives organized Different types of projects covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	6.4. Provide project management useful showcases, success stories and guiding (especially for men)	PIP DCP SCP Research and Projects Office	2022-2023	Project management showcases and success stories collected Project management showcases and success stories popularised Project management guiding provided Number of participants/Scale of the target group

AI	Measure/Activity	People Involved	Time Frame	Indicators
Gender dimension in research and education	6.5. Introduce, enrich and stimulate gender dimension in education, incl. in the STEM field	TLP PIP DCP Internal experts (Researchers, incl. in STEM)	2021-2024	Gender dimension in education introduced/enriched Stimulation initiatives organized Different types of topics/disciplines/themes/activities covered Number of participants/Scale of the target group
	6.6. Carry out a pilot gender-sensitive expert evaluation of training courses and materials	PIP MEP SMP DCP Internal experts (in GE)	2023-2024	Gender-sensitive evaluation of training courses and materials performed Number of evaluated courses and materials