

Gender equality plan of the Egmont Institute

The Egmont Institute is committed to promoting gender equality and transforming its organisational processes and professional culture to a more gender equal work environment. The willingness to ensure gender equality is shared by all the Institute's departments.

Gender inequality and discrimination, as well as other forms of inequality and discrimination, are affecting all spheres of society. Abundant scientific research shows that in our society women, LGBTQIA+ persons or racial minorities are being discriminated against during their education and/or their professional career¹. Research covering the period of the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that women spend more time than men in care-giving roles in the private sphere to the detriment of their career. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a more peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. As such, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is the 5th UN Sustainable Development Goal.²

The aim of the Egmont Institute's gender equality plan (GEP) is to set several commitments and actions promoting gender equality through structural change within the organisation³.

The Egmont Institute draws on the expertise of its own researchers, as well of external specialists, both Belgian and foreign, to provide operational analysis and policy options. The Institute also organises training courses for foreign diplomats and civil servants, mostly from partner countries of Belgium's development cooperation⁴. With 76.0 points out of 100, Belgium ranks 5th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index. Its score is 5.8 points above the score for the EU as a whole⁵. However, gender inequalities persist, including in research, international relations, and academia.

This GEP is based on a survey conducted within the permanent staff of the Egmont Institute in November-December 2023. The responses contributed to drafting future commitments and orientations to improve gender balance, gender sensitivity and gender equality in the Institute.

In total, the survey included five different sections:

1. Gender equality and gender-based violence
2. Leadership

¹ Even if other forms of discrimination have to be tackled as well, the present gender equality plan is limited to gender inequality and discrimination.

² [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG 5\) | United Nations Western Europe \(unric.org\)](https://unric.org/sustainable-development-goals/sdg-5/)

³ https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/what-gender-equality-plan-gep?language_content_entity=en#:~:text=Consequently%2C%20a%20GEP%20is%20a,the%20field%20of%20R%20%26%20I.

⁴ [Pays | SPF Affaires étrangères - Commerce extérieur et Coopération au Développement \(belgium.be\)](https://pays.belgium.be/fr/affaires-etrangeres/commerce-exterieur-et-cooperation-au-developpement)

⁵ [Belgium | 2023 | Gender Equality Index | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/what-gender-equality-plan-gep?language_content_entity=en#:~:text=Consequently%2C%20a%20GEP%20is%20a,the%20field%20of%20R%20%26%20I.)

3. Selection and recruitment process
4. Private - Professional life balance
5. Organisation of work and integration of the gender perspective in the daily tasks of the Institute.

Five pools of strategic objectives to improve gender equality have been formulated covering the period 2024-2030 reflecting the answers collected in the survey.

1. Gender equality and gender-based violence

Generally, the respondents believe that the Egmont Institute should pay more attention to gender equality and gender-related issues, as these aspects are not particularly considered in an official manner or as a transversal topic.

For instance, during events organised by the Egmont Institute, having a gender balance for panels or diversity in age and background do not seem to be always considered.

Most staff have no knowledge of any specific provision on the structural level to increase gender awareness. Such awareness and/or diversity and inclusion campaigns, according to some, would be beneficial.

Concerning gender-based violence and sexual harassment, some respondents stated that this issue is not particularly highlighted or formally put on the agenda. Moreover, in case of harassment or gender-based violence, it is not very clear how to report a case and/or if there is a focal point responsible for handling this kind of situation.

Based on the above-mentioned elements, the Egmont Institute commits to:

Commitment	Measure
<p><i>Raise gender awareness among staff, for example via ad-hoc training on gender-related issues.</i></p>	<p><i>In order to raise gender awareness two workshops on gender and diversity should be organised for the permanent staff every year.</i></p>
<p><i>Tackle gender-based violence and harassment via standardised procedures and initiatives.</i></p>	<p><i>Introduce a specific procedure and focal point responsible for handling, in anonymity, cases of harassment or gender-based violence, together with a protocol procedure.</i></p>

Inform the staff about how to report a case of harassment and/or gender-based violence.

Share the protocol procedure and the contact data of the focal point person responsible for handling harassment and gender-based violence via email, ad-hoc campaigns, etc.

2. Leadership

Leadership and career opportunities seemed a more controversial topic in the answers provided by the respondents. On the one hand, women are highly represented at the Egmont Institute, both in terms of permanent staff and associate fellows. However, with 2 out of 7 management functions (director-general and director levels) they remain under-represented in positions of leadership or power.

Moreover, some of the respondents found it difficult to express views about the representation of women at the executive and board levels of the Institute, as the decision-making process is not perceived as transparent.

Based on the above-mentioned elements, the Egmont Institute commits to:

Commitment	Measure
<i>Actively involve women in leadership positions.</i>	<i>Whenever a vacancy in a leadership position is available, appoint a candidate of underrepresented gender if the candidates are of equal standing.</i>
<i>Train female staff to undertake leadership positions and men to accept female leaders.</i>	<i>Organise leadership coaching and/or mentoring activities for staff at least once a year.</i>
<i>Promote gender balance in leadership positions.</i>	<i>Strive at gender balance in leadership positions.</i>
<i>Make the executive and board levels more transparent.</i>	<i>Share the organigramme with staff to inform them about who is represented at board and executive levels.</i>

3. Selection and recruitment process

As previously stated, women are overall well represented at the Egmont Institute within the different departments. However, this aspect is not seen as the consequence of a particular strategy to improve gender balance.

As the Institute is made up of different teams, some respondents pointed out that since each programme is responsible for its own recruitment process, it is difficult to assess to what extent gender balance is ensured or taken into consideration overall, as disparities between departments and their recruiting criteria are present.

Moreover, women are highly represented mainly in traineeship and/or junior positions, with limited career opportunities, lower incomes and more precarious or part-time contracts, despite being often top-skilled.

Based on the above-mentioned elements, the Egmont Institute commits to:

Commitment	Measure
<p><i>Ensure gender balance in the recruitment processes in a systematic manner.</i></p>	<p><i>In the final stage of the recruitment process, prefer a candidate of the underrepresented gender if the candidates are of equal standing.</i></p> <p><i>Work towards a 50/50 gender balance in every team, and not just in junior/traineeship positions.</i></p>

4. Private - Professional life balance

Overall, according to the respondents, the Egmont Institute ensures a sound private-professional work balance and flexible working arrangements, although some periods of the year can be heavier than others, depending on the workload.

Some aspects of private life are mentioned as particularly important, such as taking care of children or elderly parents (tasks which disproportionately fall on women), meeting friends and/or partners, hobbies, etc.

A specific part of the questionnaire focused on parental leave, investigating to what extent the Institute informed permanent staff about their rights and obligations.

The majority of the respondents did not feel concerned, as they are not parents. But in general, a lack of information is perceived concerning parental leave and the rights and obligations associated with it. When applicable, some of the respondents stated that they do not receive any specific support from the Egmont Institute after a parental leave.

Moreover, parental or family leaves are mainly taken in the aftermath of a child's birth. No specific leave is available in case of elderly parents, sick children, or older children. Introducing such measures, according to some, would improve working life balance and working conditions in general.

Based on the above-mentioned elements, the Egmont Institute commits to:

Commitment	Measure
<i>Inform staff about rights and obligations concerning parental leave, even when not applicable immediately.</i>	<i>Upon request, organise ad-hoc meetings on parental leave. New staff should be informed as soon as they start working about the terms of parental leave. Current staff will be invited to take part in such meetings.</i>
<i>Introduce additional family leave to facilitate care-giving activities.</i>	<i>Introduce additional family leaves in the Institute's Employment regulations with respect to elderly parents, older and/or sick children, or any other relevant personal circumstance, in conformity with Belgian legislation.</i>
<i>Support the reintegration of staff taking parental leave to the widest extent possible.</i>	<i>Ensure additional flexibility, implement an information session for returning parents to make them aware of any changes within the organisation or department, etc.</i>

5. Organisation of work and integration of the gender perspective in the daily tasks of the Egmont Institute

The last part of the questionnaire focused on the organisation of work and the integration of a gender-sensitive approach in the daily tasks and programmes of the Institute.

In general, most respondents did not acknowledge a divergent distribution of tasks according to one gender, as they are allocated according to experience, skills, affinities, timing etc.

Nevertheless, some noticed that, at times, it falls often on female staff to tidy the meeting rooms after an event, clean the kitchen, make coffee, etc. Some female colleagues felt that they face a more demanding management, characterised by easier criticism which contributes to an environment where women feel they are held to higher standards.

Concerning the integration of a gender-sensitive approach in the missions and programmes of the Institute, many initiatives are seen to be taken by staff: choice of female speakers, gender-related research topics and publications, gender balance in panels, etc. However, again, this is perceived as the result of a personal choice and commitment by the organisers/managers of these initiatives, rather than part of a particular strategy officially implemented by the Institute.

Based on the above-mentioned elements, the Egmont Institute commits to:

Commitment	Measure
<i>Consciously and systematically pay attention to gender in the choice of experts; promote gender balance in experts' panels.</i>	<i>Establish a routine aimed at an equal number of female experts where possible; strive at gender balance in experts' panels.</i>
<i>Consciously and systematically pay attention to gender in the choice of research topics and in delivering publications.</i>	<i>Introduce projects and draft research articles which tackle gender-related issues in all departments of the Institute.</i>
<i>Draw the attention of top managers of possible gender biases when distributing tasks and responsibilities.</i>	<i>Organise a workshop on how to deal with unconscious gender biases for DG and directors.</i>
<i>Plan a formal and equal distribution of tasks among the staff for cleaning common areas, meeting rooms, reception areas, etc.</i>	<i>Introduce a shared calendar to distribute the management of common areas and cleaning tasks, make mandatory rules (i.e. the team organising an event is responsible for cleaning the meeting room, etc.).</i>

Conclusion

The first version of the GEP was finalised in April 2024. The first revision will take place in February 2025 to evaluate to what extent the previous commitments have been reached and respected. The following questions may guide the evaluation of the objectives:

Gender equality and gender-based violence	Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did the Institute address the objective of raising gender awareness? Did the Institute organise workshops on gender-related issues and, if yes, were these successful? - Is there a focal point for handling harassment and gender-based violence cases within the Institute? - Is there a protocol procedure for introducing a complaint for harassment and/or gender-based violence? Is the staff formally informed about it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How many female staff hold leadership positions? - Did female staff take part in leadership trainings, monitoring, or coaching activities? - Is an organigramme of the executive and boards committees available for the staff to be consulted? - How are the executive and boards level made up in terms of gender balance?
Career opportunities and recruitment	Personal-private life working balance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are the teams made up in terms of gender balance? When job vacancies had to be filled, did the Institute recruit female staff? - Are the salaries equal between men and women for the same work/position? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How many meetings have been organised to inform new and current staff about parental leave? - To what extent the Employment regulations have been modified to include additional leaves (sick children, elderly parents, etc.)? - If applicable, how has a colleague been reintegrated to its team after a parental leave? Which initiatives have been taken in this sense?

Integration of the gender perspective in the daily tasks of the Egmont Institute	Organisation of work and distribution of tasks
<p>- How many female experts took part in conferences and other events organised by the Egmont Institute?</p> <p>-How many publications or other relevant activities about gender-related issues were issued/organised?</p>	<p>- Are tasks distributed equally? What tools have been implemented to achieve this goal?</p> <p>-Did managers participate in unconscious bias training to avoid a gender-based distribution of tasks?</p> <p>-Which measures have been taken to distribute equally tasks related to the management of common areas, reception of guests, meeting rooms, etc.?</p>