

Shaping Gender Equality in Academia: Lessons from AGRIGEP and Visions for the Future

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The **AGRIGEP project (Assessment and Implementation of Agriculture and Life Science Universities' First Gender Equality Plans in Widening Countries)** concluded with its Final Conference, hosted by the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (ČZU). The event gathered 64 participants in person and 17 online, creating a vibrant forum of exchange among researchers, policymakers, institutional leaders, and gender equality practitioners.

The conference was officially opened by **Katharina Buse (Research Executive Agency, European Commission)**, who emphasized AGRIGEP's unique position among Horizon Europe projects:

"What really makes AGRIGEP so special is its focus on agriculture and life sciences. These sectors are crucial for Europe's green and digital transitions. AGRIGEP has developed context-sensitive and sector-specific approaches that respond to the realities of partner institutions while aligning with European standards. In this way, AGRIGEP embodies what Horizon Europe's eligibility criteria set out to do: establish Gender Equality Plans as drivers of institutional change. Once more, AGRIGEP has shown that leadership really matters – commitment at the top must be translated into policy documents, budget decisions, and the allocation of time and resources."

Over its course, AGRIGEP has delivered 18 outputs and 10 milestones, including 17 capacity-building trainings, summer schools, mentoring, and the creation of monitoring tools. The project produced scientific publications, training materials in four languages, and collaborative webinars with sister projects. The concrete achievements include strengthening institutional capacity for sustainable gender equality practices, integration of gender equality in teaching and research in agriculture and life sciences and development of systematic tools for monitoring, evaluation, and sustainability.

Marcela Linková, Head of the Centre for Gender and Science at the Czech Academy of Sciences, followed with a keynote on the indispensable yet vulnerable role of *agents of change*. These individuals often drive institutional transformation through personal commitment, but their work is too often undervalued or stigmatized as "troublemaking." Linková stressed that agents of change carry emotional burdens and risk isolation, making leadership support and institutional recognition essential. True leadership means not only



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endorsing gender equality but practicing institutional courage: ensuring psychological safety, acknowledging harm, and rewarding work on inclusiveness and equity.

Lessons from GEP 1.0

The panel discussions highlighted crucial insights from the implementation of the first generation of GEPs:

- Institutional anchoring is vital: gender equality efforts cannot rely solely on voluntary personal engagement.
- Organisational culture and personal habits are decisive factors that can either enable or hinder progress.
- Sustainable change requires a long-term approach combining bottom-up initiatives with top-down leadership commitment, including the involvement of students through focus groups and participatory methods.

Recommendations for GEP 2.0

Looking forward, participants outlined priorities for the next phase of gender equality strategies in academia:

- Strengthen the exchange of evidence-based practices at national and international levels.
- Provide institutionalised support for change agents, such as gender equality officers, with adequate resources.
- Move beyond quantitative targets toward cultural transformation and awareness-building within institutions.
- Ensure continuous monitoring and accountability frameworks that reward leadership fostering inclusivity and well-being

Stakeholder Engagement as a Driver of Change

As noted during the conference,

“Stakeholder engagement is the backbone of effective Gender Equality Plans, ensuring they are not static documents, but co-created strategies rooted in institutional realities. For agricultural and life sciences universities, this is especially vital, as inclusive approaches strengthen both fieldwork safety and the integration of gender perspectives into agri-food research and education. By engaging students, staff, and external partners, we build ownership, legitimacy, and innovation capacity, empowering our universities to educate the next generation of experts for a more just and sustainable society.”

— **Jana Mazancová**, AGRIGEP project, Senior Researcher at the Department of Sustainable Technology, Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague.



Contributions from the Academic Community

Margreet van der Burg (Wageningen University) contributed a rich perspective drawing on her expertise in intersectional gender studies and the history of food, agriculture, and rural development. She highlighted how embedding gender equality in these domains not only addresses structural inequalities but also strengthens the relevance and impact of research. Van der Burg stressed that:

- Inclusive research environments enhance fieldwork safety, particularly for women and minority scholars.
- Gender perspectives must be woven into curricula and agri-food research to equip the next generation with the tools to tackle global challenges.
- Recognising historical and cultural contexts is vital for designing GEPs that are not merely formal requirements but transformative instruments for institutional change. Her intervention underscored that agriculture and life sciences, as sectors at the heart of Europe's green and digital transitions, stand to gain significantly from embracing gender equality as a driver of innovation and sustainability.

A Collective Effort

The Final Conference not only marked the culmination of AGRIGEP's work but also opened discussions on shaping the future of gender equality in academia across Europe. As one participant noted: *"The sustainability of gender equality work depends on embedding it into the very DNA of institutions – supported by leadership, protected by policies, and nurtured by communities of practice."*

The conference underscored that while GEP 1.0 laid the foundations, GEP 2.0 must drive systemic transformation, ensuring that universities and research institutions become environments of excellence, safety, and inclusivity for all.

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