

AGRIGEP – ASSESSMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES UNIVERSITIES' FIRST GENDER EQUALITY PLANS IN WIDENING COUNTRIES

ABOUT THE AGRIGEP PROJECT

Agriculture and life sciences (ALS) sit at the crossroads of food security, climate transition and rural development – yet their institutional cultures and career structures often lag behind wider gender equality commitments in the European Research Area. The AGRIGEP project was specifically designed to address this gap: to **move gender equality in Agriculture and Life Sciences universities from a formal compliance to structural lived change within universities**, especially in Central and Eastern European countries undergoing “widening” processes.

From the outset, AGRIGEP’s focus was distinctive: instead of treating gender equality as a generic STEM or social science issue, partners worked with the **specific realities of agriculture and the life sciences** – including fieldwork, labs, internships on farms and in companies, and close links with rural communities and agri-food value chains.

AGRIGEP’s central contribution has therefore been to help ALS universities **move from first-generation, compliance-driven GEPs (GEP 1.0) to more strategic, contextualised, sectoral second-generation plans (GEP 2.0)** – and to document both the struggles and the strategies that made this shift possible.

Explore the collaborative journey of change among six consortium partners, as each higher education and research institution assesses its current implementation of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP). Through a series of capacity-building activities, institutions strive to create a more inclusive and equitable environment. By crafting and enacting specialised GEPs for the fields of agriculture and life sciences, AGRIGEP aims to drive positive and lasting changes. Join us in this transformative initiative and be part of the journey towards a more balanced academic community.

COORDINATOR:

MATE – HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES

EC CONTRIBUTION: **€ 998.237**

DURATION: **36 MONTHS**

START DATE: **1 JANUARY 2023**

END DATE: **31 DECEMBER 2025**



OUR GOALS:

1. Perform a responsible assessment of widening RPOs' current status on GEP implementation.
2. Improve capabilities through intensive capacity building.
3. Develop and implement agriculture and life-science targeted GEP with sectorial-specific measures and strategies.
4. Integrate GEP targets into the academic training materials of RPOs'.
5. Foster and support long-term structural changes of RPOs'.



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WE SUPPORT THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA AIMED AT CREATING A SINGLE, BORDERLESS MARKET FOR RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE EU.



THE CONSORTIUM

We feature our partners in the upcoming newsletters. In the first newsletter, we introduce our Mentor partner UPC from Barcelona (Spain), and one of our widening partners, the CZU from Prague (Czech Republic).

Participant organisation name	Status	Country
Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE)	University	HU
Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU)	University	CZ
University of Primorska (UP)	University	SI
University Politecnica Catalunya (UPC)	University	ES
Yellow Window (YW)	SME	BE
Association of Hungarian Women in Science (NATE)	NGO	HU

You might already know our Mentor partner UPC from Barcelona (Spain), and one of our widening partners, the CZU from Prague (Czech Republic) from our first Newsletter. You also had a chance to get acquainted with our Coordinating institution MATE Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (Hungary) and the mentoring organisation Yellow Window in our second Newsletter. In this third issue, we are introducing the University of Primorska (UP) and the Association of Hungarian Women in Science (NATE).

University of Primorska (UP)

University of Primorska (UP) was established in 2003 as a third public university in Slovenia. It consists of 6 Faculties, 1 Research Institute, 1 Student Residence, and the University Library. The vision of UP is to build and consolidating its position through its scientific research, educational and artistic activities and its commitment to the local and wider society, as a respected and excellent university in the global academic arena.

The UP is a medium-sized, internationally engaged university with **5,643 students**, of whom 1,195 (or 23%) come from **45 foreign countries**. It has **782 employees** and **511 researchers** and education teachers, **69** of whom come **from abroad**. The UP hosts **more than 270 international researchers** every year and enrolls **165 PhD students**.

In 2022, the UP became part of **Transform4Europe (T4EU)**, a European university alliance of over 150,000 students and 10,000 researchers. It became a full member in 2023. In addition to the UP, 9 other universities and one associate member forms the T4EU alliance. Moreover, the UP is **one of the 38 members of the European Network of Innovative Higher Education Institutions (ENIHEI)**, an initiative proposed by Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.

ENIHEI is a forum to exchange knowledge, ideas and experience on how higher education can promote an innovation culture, and enable creativity, entrepreneurship and talent. In partnership with the Škocjan Caves Regional Park, the UP launched the **UNESCO Chair of Interpretation and Education for Enhancing Integrated Heritage Approaches**, and within the Teaming instrument, coordinated the project and successfully established the internationally renowned research institute InnoRenew CoE.

The UP in 2024/2025 carries out **79 study programmes** in all three cycles, **17 of which are also held in the English language**. In addition, the UP organises from 5 to 10 international summer schools on various topics every year as well as over 10 international scientific conferences, including at least a major conference, as it has done for several consecutive years, with more than 1,000 participants and under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Slovenia. At the UP, scientific research activity is carried out at all faculties and one research institute. Scientific research activities are carried out in all **7 research disciplines** and specifically in the following research fields: **archaeology, intercultural studies, history and heritage, linguistic studies, economics, management and law, education sciences, mathematics, statistics, computer science, biodiversity and environmental protection, biology, genetics, oncology, Mediterranean agriculture and olive production, sustainable use of wood, psychology, kinesiology and ergonomics, health and preventive healthcare, and tourism studies**.

Internationalisation and project activities go hand in hand with all aspects of UP operations. Furthermore, the UP has recently strengthened its role in the region, where the main priorities are **science communication** (through the activities of the **Science Centre** and science communication events), **work with schoolchildren and teachers**, the **establishment of an Alumni Office**, **innovation and technology transfer**, **student projects carried out in collaboration with companies**, the **promotion of responsible science** and a wide range of additional training courses aimed at different target groups. The UP also ensures the well-being of its community: it has established several student facilities (**library access 24/7, reading rooms, study spaces**), **a university outpatient clinic**, **a centre for holistic psychological support** and **a career centre**. It also advocates a healthy lifestyle among its employees and students, and organises events focused on the reception, orientation and integration of students and staff.



“In advancing gender equality within agriculture and life sciences academia, we are not just fulfilling a policy requirement — we are strengthening the very foundations of research excellence and innovation. By embracing inclusive Gender Equality Plans, we create environments where diverse voices and talents can thrive, fostering enduring institutional transformation and a fairer, more resilient future for all.”

Prof. Štefan Bojnc, Ph.D

The Association of Hungarian Women in Science (NaTE)

The Association of Hungarian Women in Science (NaTE) is a leading Hungarian NGO promoting gender equality (GE) in the field of research and innovation (R&I) in Hungary. NaTE has a wide experience through national and international projects, processes of social innovation and network building, as well as in conducting both quantitative and qualitative research and also in delivering GE trainings.

NaTE has a considerable national network consisting of scientists, teachers, research managers and students, as well as a multi-stakeholder network comprising industrial, academic, governmental organizations, and NGOs. NaTE implemented the international Girls' Day initiative in Hungary and has been running in partnership with industrial partners. The Association has a country-wide Ambassador Network of female high school and university students, who are the flag bearers of the "women in science" initiative among the young generation.

NaTE founded and is managing the national Women in Science Excellence Award, which is supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and UNESCO. NaTE has participated in different international projects and programs, such as H2020 (EFFORTI, CARERA, FAWORIT), CSI-COP, Visegrad Fund (V4 Girls' Day, V4 STEM Camp), and has conducted several projects funded by foreign entities (US Embassy, Association of American University Women) or international companies (ALCOA, Morgan-Stanley); all aimed at attracting girls and women to STEM professions. The Association is a member organization of the European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) and serves as the local National Contact Point for the European Centre for Women and Technology (ECWT).



Veronika Paksi, PhD



Katalin Tardos

"Addressing gender equality in the Central and Eastern European context is still challenging for universities. Nevertheless, Gender Equality Plans (GEP) constitute an essential tool to mobilise stakeholder engagement in gender equality initiatives. Even in a less gender-equal regional context, tailor-made GEPs can advance gender equality and sustainable organizational change. Including GEP measures and actions addressing sectoral and occupational gender-based challenges – for example, in relation to fieldwork, laboratory work or summer internship – supports effective recruitment and retention of students and faculty in the field of agriculture and life sciences."

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OUR THIRD-YEAR HIGHLIGHTS: WHAT MOVED FORWARD IN THE PROJECT?

As AGRIGEP stepped across the threshold of its third project year, the consortium found itself moving from careful groundwork into full stride. What began as a map of intentions gradually became a landscape of concrete actions, joint publications, sectorial-specific inclusive GEP 2.0 development and reflective institutional learning.

Deepened Research & First Scientific Publication

A new scientific publication was developed within the AGRIGEP project, shedding light on the barriers to gender equality in agriculture and the life sciences across universities in Central and Eastern Europe.

Title: Gender Equality Barriers in Agriculture and Life Sciences in Central European Universities

Authors: Veronika Paksi, Katalin Tardos, Judit Takács, Csilla Judit Suhajda, Jana Mazancová, Štefan Bojnec, Julianna Kobolák

Full text and free PDF download: <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.10086>

What is the study about?

While much attention has been paid to gender inequality in STEM fields, this study explores the often-overlooked barriers faced by women in the agriculture and life sciences fields, which are often seen as gender-balanced. Through nine focus groups involving 82 participants from Czech, Hungarian, and Slovenian universities, the research highlights how gendered obstacles persist across academia, particularly in recruitment, promotion, work-life balance, leadership, and fieldwork conditions.

AGRIGEP ANNUAL MEETING

Prague, 23-24 September 2025





The AGRIGEP consortium met for its Annual Meeting on 23–24 September 2025 in Prague, hosted by the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU) at the Rectorate building, with the option to join online via MS Teams. The meeting opened with welcome remarks from CZU leadership and continued with a comprehensive review of the project's overall progress, key work package updates, reflections from the REA Project Officer, and strategic discussions on Gender Equality Plans (GEP 2.0), sectorial strategies, mentoring, training, and communication activities.

In addition to the working sessions, the programme included valuable networking opportunities, such as a CZU Brewery visit and a dinner on campus, as well as the 4th General Assembly Meeting. This session focused on third-year progress, KPIs, risk mitigation measures, and preparations for the final reporting phase, marking an important milestone in aligning partners, sharing achievements, and planning the final stage of the AGRIGEP project.

AGRIGEP FINAL CONFERENCE: ROOTING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE – LESSONS FROM AGRIGEP FOR STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCE UNIVERSITIES

The Final Conference of the AGRIGEP project took place on 25 September at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU), bringing together more than 80 participants from across Europe. The event fostered a vibrant and collegial atmosphere, filled with inspiring discussions and a strong sense of shared purpose. Researchers, policymakers, institutional leaders, and gender equality experts gathered to reflect on lessons learned and shape future strategies for more inclusive academic environments.



The conference was officially opened by **Katharina Buse** – a project officer from the European Commission's Research Executive Agency, who commended AGRIGEP's pioneering role in advancing gender equality within agriculture and the life sciences. In her remarks, she emphasized that the project has become a model of how leadership and institutional commitment can drive meaningful and lasting change.

Participants were also welcomed by representatives of CZU's leadership, including Vice-Rector prof. Michal Lošťák, who emphasised the university's commitment to fostering inclusive, equitable, and forward-looking research environments.



A keynote address by **Marcela Linková**, Head of the Centre for Gender and Science at the Czech Academy of Sciences, explored the indispensable yet often vulnerable role of agents of change in institutional transformation. A Policy Round Table on Advancing Gender Equality in Academia for Sustainability, Excellence, Competitiveness and Economic Growth in Europe brought together policy makers and researchers. Lively panel discussions followed, reflecting on key insights from the first generation of Gender Equality Plans (GEP 1.0) and outlining priorities for the next phase, GEP 2.0. Distinguished experts, including **Margreet van der Burg** from Wageningen University, contributed intersectional perspectives and valuable insights into the connections between gender equality, innovation, and sustainability.



One of the highlights of the day was the engaging poster session, where students and early-career researchers presented their work in a friendly and open setting. The session created space for informal dialogue, networking, and the exchange of fresh ideas.

The conference concluded with a clear and inspiring message: achieving sustainable gender equality requires leadership commitment, institutional courage, and collective engagement.



With its warm and constructive spirit, the AGRIGEP Final Conference at CZU was not only a reflection on what has been achieved but also a celebration of teamwork, shared learning, and inspiration for the future.

Conference Conclusions

The AGRIGEP Final Conference confirmed that gender equality in agriculture and life sciences (ALS) universities is no longer a peripheral concern but a **structural prerequisite for research excellence, innovation, and sustainable development**. Positioned at the intersection of food security, climate transition, and rural innovation, ALS institutions face distinctive gendered challenges that generic equality approaches often fail to address. AGRIGEP demonstrated that meaningful progress requires moving beyond formal compliance towards deep, contextualised institutional change.



A central achievement of AGRIGEP has been supporting the **transition from first-generation, compliance-driven Gender Equality Plans (GEP 1.0) to more strategic, embedded and sectorial-specific GEPs (GEP 2.0)**. While the Horizon Europe eligibility criterion triggered rapid adoption of GEPs across many widening countries, including a dramatic expansion in Central and Eastern Europe, the conference discussions highlighted the risks of “tick-box” approaches with weak ownership, limited budgets, and fragile governance. AGRIGEP provided evidence that GEPs

become effective only when they are **fully integrated into institutional strategies, leadership structures, and everyday decision-making**.

Leadership emerged as a decisive factor, not in rhetoric but in action. Structural change requires visible commitment through regulations, budgets, workload models, and transparent handling of discrimination and harassment. Participants emphasised that safe, fair, and **psychologically supportive working environments are not “soft issues” but core conditions for innovation and academic quality**. At the same time, the conference highlighted the vulnerability of change agents. Equality officers and task-force members often carry a disproportionate emotional and organisational burden, making institutional progress fragile. Sustainable change, therefore, depends on **formalising roles, sharing responsibility across teams, and recognising equality work as legitimate, resourced labour**.

A key lesson from AGRIGEP was the underestimated **importance of knowledge, communication, and capacity building**. Many ALS academics lack formal training in gender or social analysis, making awareness-raising and conceptual clarity indispensable. The project’s training programmes, mentoring activities, and locally adapted materials showed that continuous **education must be treated as a core pillar of GEP implementation**, not as an optional add-on.

The conference further stressed the **importance of robust data, monitoring, and accountability**. Compliance checks alone are insufficient; institutions must track budgets, implementation processes, and the lived experiences of staff and students. **Stakeholder mapping and participatory approaches** proved essential for identifying allies, understanding resistance, and amplifying the voices of students and early-career researchers. Gender equality cannot be driven solely by rectorates; it must be co-created across institutional levels.



Importantly, AGRIGEP highlighted ALS-specific conditions that demand tailored responses: fieldwork, labs, internships, and rural placements expose students and staff to particular risks, including harassment in remote or external settings. **Integrating safety protocols, ethical standards, and gender-sensitive supervision into ALS practices is therefore a structural necessity.** Beyond universities, persistent stereotypes and pipeline challenges underline the need for outreach, mentoring, and challenge-based education that links gender equality to sustainability, innovation, and rural futures.

In conclusion, AGRIGEP confirms that **structural change in ALS universities is both possible and necessary**. It requires alignment between EU-level frameworks, courageous institutional governance, supported change agents, and everyday practices in teaching, research, and engagement. Gender equality, when rooted in sector-specific realities, strengthens not only fairness but the long-term resilience and societal relevance of agriculture and life sciences.



For more information, visit: <https://agrigepl.eu/agrigepl-final-conference/>

POLICY BRIEF 2 FULL OF LESSONS LEARNT

Policy Brief 2 provides an overview of the lessons learnt and key enablers identified by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) participating in the AGRIGEP project, in promoting gender equality (GE) and implementing their first Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), as well as their responses to challenges encountered during implementation, and the measures and strategies they have introduced.

Document type:	Policy Brief
Dissemination level:	Public

This document is inseparable from and builds upon "Policy Brief 1: Implementing Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in Higher Education and Research in Widening Countries: The case of Agriculture & Life Sciences"1 which reviewed the main difficulties and hindrances encountered by these institutions, providing comprehensive information on their background, both on organisational (intrinsically gendered academic institutions), sectoral (STEM field and the subsectors of agriculture and related life sciences), societal and policy (widening countries in CEE) levels. While Policy Brief 1 mapped the structural barriers and the initial conditions, Policy Brief 2 focuses on the evolution of implementation capacities, institutional learning, and the development of sector-specific strategies that emerged during the AGRIGEP project. It provides actionable insights for institutions that have already passed the initial compliance stage. This Policy Brief serves both as a reflection on institutional learning and as a roadmap for HEIs and RPOs preparing for second-generation GEPs in the ALS sector.

For more information see <https://agrigepl.eu/deliverables/>.

WHAT HAS WIDENING RPOS LEARNT FROM THE GEP 2.0 DEVELOPMENT?

Toward Sustainable Change: Preparing GEP 2.0

With the research results and training experiences of the second year in hand, AGRIGEP is now looking ahead to the next stage of institutional transformation. Here, widening partners reflected on what "GEP 1.0" achieved and what "GEP 2.0" should become. Discussions centered on sustainability, integrating practices into long-term strategies, and ensuring that gender equality becomes more than a project-driven novelty, but an integral part of institutional reform. The experience and lessons learnt from the project were not an ending, but a doorway: a shared vision for robust, future-proof Gender Equality Plans tailored to the specificities of agricultural and life-science universities.

Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE)

MATE achieved one of the strongest institutionalisation processes. By embedding gender-equality objectives into the HRS4R process and the MATE 2030 Strategy, the university anchored GEP actions in long-term structures, performance frameworks and HR development pathways. Linking gender equality to transparency, fair recruitment, well-being and international competitiveness proved crucial for sustainability.

MATE also established durable equality governance structures, including Institutional Equality Referees, a dedicated GEP Officer, and an Equal Opportunities Committee, providing a stable foundation for coordination and accountability.

Significant improvements were made in data collection and monitoring, with a new bi-annual, sex-disaggregated and partially intersectional data system now institutionalised for continuous reporting and evidence-based decision making.

Progress was visible in recruitment, career development, and sexual harassment, supported by HRS4R-aligned procedures and forthcoming transparency requirements.

Work-life balance and well-being also expanded through continued partnerships with childcare institutions, strengthened mental-health and legal-support services, and planned needs-assessment surveys for all employees.

Finally, organisational culture shifted noticeably: awareness of gender-equality issues grew across units, GE is increasingly recognised as a core university value, and institutional capacity to manage resistance and sustain gender-sensitive routines has clearly strengthened.

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU)

Jana Mazancová on behalf CZU: *"The key lessons we learnt are, first, that developing a GEP 2.0 takes time—especially if we truly want it to be participatory and co-creative, rather than just a document written by a small team. Another strong lesson is the importance of recognising and actively engaging stakeholders across the entire university throughout the process. We also greatly benefited from AGRIGEP, because it enabled us to receive valuable feedback from external mentors. Finally, we learnt that we must dedicate enough time to reflect on what the self-evaluation of GEP 1.0 actually tells us: to unpack the lessons from implementation, to work through the data we collected across students, teaching staff, research and projects, and to understand the messages behind those numbers. All of this is demanding in terms of human resources, so realistic time allocation is not optional; it is a key precondition for doing the work well."*

One of our main achievements is the way we shaped GEP 2.0 at CZU. We established it as a long-term strategy, with a five-year framework plan and annual action plans that clearly outline the activities and budget. That structure provides continuity and makes the plan more resilient to changes in top management, while also strengthening our ability to react to the monitoring results. Another important achievement is the expansion of our network of allies, both within the university and beyond. We can already see new project ideas and initiatives emerging from these connections.

At the same time, our biggest challenge was very practical; we underestimated the demands of this work in terms of personnel and time. Mobilising stakeholders, explaining why this kind of strategic document matters, making the case for their role in it, and pushing for real institutionalisation at all levels required close to full-time commitment from the CZU AGRIGEP team. This HR need must be reflected even in the case of Annual Plan preparation."

AGRIGEP presentation at CZU

Key AGRIGEP deliverables and outcomes were presented at the annual meeting held at the Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences, CZU, during the discussion on **10 December 2025**. In his speech, **Prof. Michal Lošťák**, who will take office as Rector in **February 2026**, highlighted the transition from **GEP 1.0 to GEP 2.0**, shared key lessons learned, and underlined that once institutional transformation begins, it should continue. This commitment will be further strengthened under his leadership.



University of Primorska (UP)

Prof. Štefan Bojnec on behalf of UP: *“Between 2021 and 2025, the UP actively developed and refined its GEP, demonstrating an institutional commitment to promoting inclusiveness, fairness, and the integration of gender-sensitive practices across its educational, research, and administrative functions.*

The UP’s GEP 2 builds upon its first plan, reflecting both the institution’s participatory learning process, strong institutional commitment and increasing maturity in gender policy work. GEP 2 takes a more systems-oriented, participatory, and decentralised approach, adjusting to the size and culture of a smaller institution.”

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE AT MATE!

On 18 November, the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE) proudly presented its **Teaching and Impact Awards** for the second time at the **Szent István Campus** in Gödöllő. The event brought together educators, researchers, and university leaders to celebrate achievements that exemplify innovation, dedication, and meaningful societal contribution.

Established in **2024** as part of the **MATE 2030 Strategy**, these awards recognise outstanding educators and high-impact initiatives that go beyond academic excellence. They highlight work that contributes to societal well-being, responds to real-world challenges, and advances the vision of a **knowledge-based, inclusive, and responsible society**. Strengthening teaching quality, educational effectiveness, and impactful engagement remains a cornerstone of the university’s long-term development and international competitiveness.



Heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Katalin Szabó on receiving the **third-generation Agóra Impact Award**! This prestigious recognition reflects not only professional excellence, but also a deep commitment to creating positive and lasting impact within and beyond the university community. We wish her continued success and inspiration in her future work.

We are especially proud that **MATE acknowledges the importance of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP)** and recognises the dedicated, collaborative efforts behind it. This recognition reinforces the university’s commitment to gender equality values that are essential for excellence in education, research, and innovation.

Congratulations to all awardees and contributors who help shape MATE’s future and strengthen its role as a socially responsible, forward-looking university.



A YEAR OF CONSOLIDATION AND MOMENTUM

If AGRIGEP's first and second years were about preparation, the **third year was about momentum**. Research matured into publication; training evolved into institutional learning; local conversations grew into international dialogues. The consortium now stands on solid ground, with evidence collected, capacities developed, and networks strengthened, ready to guide partner universities toward deeper, more sustainable change.

AGRIGEP's journey continues, and Years 2 and 3 have proven that transformation, once begun, has a way of gathering its own energy. The sectorial-specific inclusive GEP 2.0 at the widening RPOs are the proof of the result.

INVITATION TO JOIN US

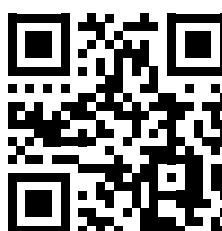
We warmly invite higher education institutions to join the AGRIGEP network (through a Memorandum of Understanding) and become part of a growing community committed to advancing gender equality in academia. By joining, institutions can build on AGRIGEP's comprehensive teaching and learning materials, follow our tested and transferable route, and benefit from our practical experience gained through the preparation and implementation of Gender Equality Plans 2.0, while contributing to mutual learning, collaboration, and sustainable institutional change.

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