



# Gender Equality Plan

UNIMED, 2023-2025

## Document dates

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Version 2 elaborated in January 2023 by UNIMED staff upon the suggestions of the GEP Working Group.

## Composition of the GEP Working Group

- Hmaid Ben Aziza - UNIMED Secretary General
- Wail Benjelloun - UNIMED Honorary President
- Rima Mattar - University Saint Esprit de Kaslik, Lebanon
- Marina Petridou Soteriadou - University of Cyprus, Cyprus
- Silvia Serreli - University of Sassari, Italy
- Kherieh Rassas - University of An-Najah, Nablus, Palestine
- Martina Zipoli - Coordinator of this working group, Project Manager
- Amina Hamila - Communication Officer
- Arianna Barletta - Assistant Project Manager
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## Aim of the document

The aim of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) of UNIMED – Mediterranean Universities Union is to ensure equal opportunities for everyone involved in the organization's activities, including both the internal staff and formal representatives (such as the Board of Directors) and all the academics, researchers, administrative staff, experts, practitioners and stakeholders which take part to the actions and initiatives of the network. The GEP proceeds from the principle of gender equality in all activities without compromising on competence and quality. We wish to support all parties, irrespective of gender (as well as sexual orientation, nationality, age, religion, language, physical ability and other individual characteristics), and believe that our vision for the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation will benefit the societies and the communities in the region the most if UNIMED is based on and strongly supports the principles of inclusion, diversity, gender balance and non-discrimination. The GEP objectives relate to the internal organization of the network as well as to the overall mission of UNIMED.

## Background

The current state of gender equality in the Mediterranean region, despite the many efforts put in place over the past decades by many institutional and non-institutional actors, organizations and policy-makers (such as the Union for the Mediterranean, the UN environment programme, the World Economic Forum, the European Women Rectors Association, etc) has not reached the equality of men and women in terms of their position and opportunities. There is a great gender imbalance across academic positions, the proportion of women in the decision-making bodies in academia, and considerably more men apply for and receive research grants than women. In order to improve the indicators of gender equality, it is imperative to tackle these issues systematically, and UNIMED wants to contribute to the process by paying more attention to the aspects of gender in all its activities, and thus contribute to promoting gender equality and raise awareness in the Euro-Med landscape.

## Gender Equality Goals

1. Raising gender awareness among the employees and among the members of institutional bodies.
2. To institutionalize gender equality monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking mechanisms.
3. Adhering to the principles of equal treatment and establish work-life balance mechanisms.
4. Implementing a gender-sensitive communication strategy.
5. To increase opportunities for women career advancement.
6. To increase the number of women in management positions in academia.
7. To support the adoption of formal mechanisms for the integration of a gender perspective in teaching, learning and research.
8. Measures against gender-based violence and sexual harassment

## Gender Equality plan

### Measures targeting the UNIMED employees and members of institutional bodies

#### *Goal 1. Raising gender awareness among the employees and among the members of institutional bodies.*

In order to make fair and inclusive decisions, gender awareness, including awareness of possible problems caused by unconscious bias, is of utmost importance for the members of the staff and institutional bodies, the management of the organisation and institutional representatives. Increased awareness helps to prevent discrimination and ensures making fairer decisions. Gender awareness also contributes to achieving all of the other objectives of the Gender Equality Plan. For ensuring a better understanding of gender equality among the institutional bodies, we will:

- Improve our competences regarding gender equality, incl. by participating in training courses and distributing training material and resources internally at the organisation.
- Integrate the aspects of gender into the institutional activities we organise, if applicable.
- Assemble existing and compile new information materials on gender equality to be shared within the network to reinforce awareness.
- Share our experiences, good practices, and developments regarding gender equality within our organisation, incl. in-house seminars, workshops, etc.

#### *Goal 2. To institutionalize gender equality monitoring, evaluation and adjustment mechanisms.*

UNIMED will appoint a Gender Equality Officer with the following duties and responsibilities:

- Coordinating and facilitating the implementation of the actions in the GEP in coordination and consultation with the Director, the Board of Directors and the institutional representatives, the employees and consultants
- Undertaking monitoring of the actions related to the implementation of the GEP
- Reviewing all institutional documents, procedures and decision-making mechanisms from a gender perspective and suggesting adjustments based on the GEP.
- Assessing the implemented actions, achievements and shortcomings at the end of the third year from the actual plan and develop the new GEP to be put into action.
- Organizing initiatives open to all associated universities to raise awareness about gender equality and discuss related issues to foster ownership of the gender policy.

*Goal 3. Adhering to the principles of equal treatment and establish work-life balance mechanisms.*

UNIMED supports equal treatment of all people, refraining from any form of discrimination based on gender (also from indirect discrimination, which occurs when seemingly neutral rules give an advantage to some target groups). Among other things, we pay particular attention to the impact that being on parental leave has on one's career. Time allocated to care related needs and activities and the gendered division of labour in private life pose disproportionate challenges to women's careers, performance levels and career advancement as well as sense of accomplishment. Moreover, measures for the reconciliation of work and life benefit all parties regardless of gender. In order to ensure equal treatment, we will:

- Examine our rules and regulations to make sure that they ensure equal opportunities for everyone.
- Take into consideration a justified leave of absence from work, such as a parental leave, so as to minimise impact on the professional development.
- Adhere to the principles of equal treatment in the decision-making process.
- Set up rules for distance-working. Provide all staff optional flexible work hour options and implement ICT-based systems to enhance flexibility.
- Provide clear information to staff regarding all types of care leave.
- Set a directive on working and communication hours, restraining administrative e-mailing and meetings to be set after work hours, on weekends or on short notice.

*Goal 4. Implementing a gender-sensitive communication strategy.*

One of the key roles of UNIMED is communicating, with the associated Higher Education Institutions, with the institutional partners, with the general public and the society at large, including sharing information with international and regional organisations, and decision-makers. Gender equality will also be promoted through communication activities. We will remain gender-aware in all our channels of communication and will:

- Monitor our use of language and refrain from reproducing gender stereotypes.
- Monitor the representation of men and women in illustrative materials.
- Proceed from the principles of gender diversity when writing press releases, news, articles, etc.
- Try to ensure gender balance among the speakers at institutional events, if at all possible.
- Emphasise the need to underline the aspects of gender in various materials and statistics: the data, wherever possible, will be disaggregated by gender.
- Give voices to women in power positions in the Euro-Med academic arena.
- Developing and implementing of a gender-sensitive language policy with non-sexist and inclusive language in all official documents and means of communication of UNIMED (e.g., emails, social media, letters, press, documents etc.)

*Goal 8. Measures against gender-based violence and sexual harassment*

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence is often under estimated in research organisation and universities. All organisations are subject to national laws, and are encouraged to set specific measures to combat behaviours violating dignity and creating an environment which is hostile, intimidating, humiliating or offensive. UNIMED takes a zero-tolerance approach towards gender-based violence and sexual harassment and commits to:

- Adopt a code of conduct to harmonize behaviours, clarify when relationships are and are not considered harassment, ensure support to victims for reporting instances. Include information on the principles of ethical code of conduct on the organisation website.
- Encourage reporting of critical situations and take all instances seriously to be investigated fairly.

- Provide support to potential victims providing advice, options, counselling, etc. and guidance to report potential abusers to the police and/or through legal proceedings.
- Raise awareness to generate a culture of zero tolerance towards gender-based violence.
- Integrate gender perspective in the Ethics Plan and add anti-mobbing and antiharassment clauses.

## Measures targeting the UNIMED associated universities

### *Goal 1. Raising gender awareness among the employees and among the members of institutional bodies.*

In order to make fair and inclusive decisions, gender awareness, including awareness of possible problems caused by unconscious bias, is of utmost importance for the members of the staff and institutional bodies, the management of the organisation and institutional representatives. This applies to UNIMED in relation to its internal structure, but it also applies to the UNIMED associated universities. Increased awareness helps to prevent discrimination and ensures making fairer decisions. Gender awareness also contributes to achieving a better gender-sensitive approach in all institutional dimension. UNIMED will provide assistance to its member universities to raise awareness among employees, representatives as well as the overall educational community, with the scope to:

- Improve competences regarding gender equality, including by participating in training courses and distributing training material and resources.
- Integrate aspects of gender equality into the institutional activities, if applicable.
- Assemble existing and compile new information materials on gender equality (mapping, monitoring, reporting) to be shared within the institution to raise awareness on strengths and gaps.
- Encourage sharing of experiences and good practices within the network members.

### *Goal 2. To institutionalize gender equality monitoring, evaluation and adjustment mechanisms.*

UNIMED will encourage member universities to create a dedicated office / unit / committee for Gender Equality and Diversity Management, with the following duties and responsibilities:

- Development of the institutional GEP in each Higher Education Institution
- Coordinating and facilitating the implementation of the actions in the GEP
- Undertaking monitoring of the actions related to the implementation of the GEP
- Reviewing all institutional documents, procedures and decision-making mechanisms from a gender perspective and suggesting adjustments
- Organizing initiatives open to employees, decision-makers, students and stakeholders of the university to raise awareness about gender equality to foster ownership of the gender policy.

### *Goal 4. Implementing a gender-sensitive communication strategy.*

UNIMED encourages all associated universities to implement a gender-sensitive communication strategy. UNIMED promotes a gender balanced approach in the institutional communication activities of its members, being gender-aware and inclusive in all institutional channels of communication, using a neutral language to refrain from reproducing gender stereotypes. UNIMED encourages associates to:

- Monitor the representation of men and women in illustrative materials.
- Proceed from the principles of gender diversity when writing press releases, news, articles, etc.

- Try to ensure gender balance among the speakers at institutional events, if at all possible.
- Give voices to women in power positions in the academic arena.
- Developing and implementing of a gender-sensitive language policy with non-sexist and inclusive language in all official documents and means of communication (e.g., emails, social media, letters, press, documents, etc.)

*Goal 5. To increase opportunities for women career advancement*

UNIMED encourages its members to maintain a gender-equality perspective into institutional mechanisms in relation to the career progression processes. Issues to be tackled are: the percentage of women among the university staff members and students' representatives; the collection of data on women career progression processes (including female students' academic progression and percentage of graduates); while the large majority of administrative staff are composed of women, there is a lack of opportunities for career advancement and a gender parity perspective in promotions to manager and directorial positions. UNIMED will raise awareness and assist member Higher Education Institutions in implementing measures such as:

- Encourage a systematic gender segregated data collection regarding career progression.
- Encourage setting targets for all faculties, centres, and academic programs for raising the percentage of women faculty members.
- Aim for gender balance in institutional committees.
- Promote transparency and gender sensitivity throughout all phases of promotion, advancement and career development.
- Provide guidance on promotion and performance evaluation processes, covering such issues as implicit bias, gendered language, and gender-based discrimination.
- Encourage the analysis of gender wage gap at all academic and administrative levels.
- Promote career advancement of administrative staff, especially for managerial positions.

*Goal 6. To increase the number of women in all management positions in academia.*

To ensure gender equality in decision-making and leadership, and benefit from diversity in order to improve decision quality, UNIMED commits to promote a set of principles within the associated universities and in the framework of its institutional activities and partnerships. UNIMED devotes to support and encourage associated universities to tackle a set of issues related to the lack of women in upper management and decision-making positions; the significant imbalance in terms of gender parity in committees and decision-making bodies; gender bias towards women in leadership positions. In order to do so, UNIMED will assist universities in:

- Strongly support women in all management positions by understanding critical gender barriers in access to leadership positions.
- Raise awareness on gender bias and equality among decision-makers.
- Contribute to develop policies and support mechanisms for acknowledging the benefits of gender diversity and increasing the number of women at all levels of management and decision-making bodies.
- Encourage the development of gender-equality and gender sensitivity guidelines for decision-making processes, such as including "promoting gender equality" as a SMART objective in the university Strategic Plan and its subprocesses, as well as in the performance evaluation of all managers.
- Engage in awareness-raising activities regarding implicit biases and the use of gendered language in leadership definitions and communications.
- Support annual gender bias and gender-equality training for all levels of management (including committees).

*Goal 7. To support the adoption of formal mechanisms for the integration of a gender perspective in teaching, learning and research.*

Beyond those institutions with Gender Equality committees, Diversity management units, and/or similar bodies, gender-focused courses rarely exist in Higher Education Institutions in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Moreover, while a number of faculty and researchers produce cutting-edge, high impact research in gender studies, the integration of gender dimension and gender diverse perspectives into research remains a matter of personal discretion as there are no institutional measures for gender mainstreaming in research management and content. Through the institutionalization of mechanisms and procedures for integrating gender in research, the universities will also advance in their positioning in international ranking systems in higher education. Issues to be addressed: the lack of institutional policies and mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in teaching and curriculum across disciplines; the lack of gender-aware practices in teaching; the need to review students' program choices and career trajectories with a gender perspective; lack of institutional policies for the integration of gender dimension and perspectives in research content and management in all research fields; the lower numbers of research projects and research funding received by women researchers; redefine scientific excellence with sensitivity to gender including research impact and inclusiveness where applies.

UNIMED will promote:

- Incorporation of a gender perspective in teaching curricula and into course content.
- Gender sensitive teaching methods and inclusive classrooms.
- Integration of gender perspective into counseling and mentoring mechanisms.
- Informing students on gender bias in teaching and teaching evaluations.
- Establishing incentive mechanisms with the aim of recruiting women students to programs where they are underrepresented.
- Inclusion of gender perspective in research and scientific production.
- Inclusion of gender perspective in curriculum design, lectures, learning activities, course structure and teaching methods.
- Providing financial and organisational support for women researchers, if underrepresented.
- Applications to external funding opportunities for gender research.
- Establishment and promotion of award programs for women scientists in the Euro-Med region.
- Visibility of research projects of women scientists and/or research projects that incorporate a gender perspective. Visibility of related publications.
- Gender diversity in research teams.

*Goal 8. Measures against gender-based violence and sexual harassment*

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence is often under estimated in research organisation and universities. All organisations are subject to national laws, and are encouraged to set specific measures to combat behaviours violating dignity and creating an environment which is hostile, intimidating, humiliating or offensive. UNIMED takes a zero-tolerance approach towards gender-based violence and sexual harassment and commits to support and strongly encourage member universities to:

- Adopt a code of conduct to harmonize behaviours, clarify when relationships are and are not considered harassment, ensure support to victims for reporting instances. Include information on the principles of ethical code of conduct on the organisation website.
- Create a climate where reporting of critical situations is encouraged and supported, to be investigated fairly by dedicated officers and bodies.

- Make sure institutions provide support to potential victims providing advice, counselling, and guidance to report potential abusers to the police and/or through legal proceedings.
- Raise awareness to generate a culture of zero tolerance towards gender-based violence.

## Commitment

The responsibility of promoting gender equality is shared by all of the representatives of the network, as they all agreed upon during the process and at the final approval stage. The Plan has been discussed internally between the employees and within the institutional bodies. Specific activities for achieving the set objectives are detailed in the current plan. Monitoring of these activities will be performed, and a revision of the plan for necessary adaptations will be carried out once a year. The next GEP is foreseen for the period 2026-2028.

## Follow-up measures

UNIMED will work in the coming months to operationalise the GEP. The Gender Equality Officer will guide the implementation of a preliminary set of actions within the organisational structure, and the definition of KPIs for the monitoring and impact assessment of those actions. Moreover, a dedicated committee will be established for the network, with the involvement of representatives from the UNIMED staff and the UNIMED associated universities to: 1) perform a mapping exercise on the current measures in place in the associated Higher Education Institutions; 2) define KPIs to assess the level of awareness, commitment and engagement of the associated Higher Education Institution in relation to the gender-equality dimensions of institutions; 3) report on the outcomes of the mapping and assessment on a bi-annual basis; 4) organize raise awareness workshops and events; 5) support a strategic, collaborative and participatory approach within the UNIMED members to support change in the Euro-Mediterranean academic arena.

## Regional Policy Framework

The UNIMED Gender Equality Plan will be implemented within a context of gender policies and declarations for the Euro-Mediterranean region, among which it is worth to mention the Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, adopted by the Union of the Mediterranean in Cairo, Egypt, on November 2017. UNIMED work is in coherence with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, and specifically with SDG5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. UNIMED will be among the promoters of Gender Equality in Higher Education on occasion of the upcoming 1st Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education in late 2023.