

AIdesignTEX

Deliverable 21 - D6.1

The Gender Equality Plan Advancement vol.2

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Abstract	This deliverable presents Gender Equality Plan Advancement vol. 2, prepared within the AIdesignTEX project as a joint reflection on the development and implementation of gender-equality policies across the consortium. The document analyses the evolution of Lodz University of Technology's institutional Gender Equality Plans (2022–2024 and 2025–2027), highlighting significant progress in monitoring, work–life balance support, recruitment transparency, and the introduction of a new scope on gender-based violence. It also provides an overview of the gender-equality frameworks at Ghent University, the University of Stavanger, and Universidad Católica de Ávila, demonstrating that all partners operate under different national, organisational, and maturity conditions. The report outlines how gender equality is integrated into AIdesignTEX activities, including governance, mobility, training, communication, and research design. Finally, it formulates recommendations for further strengthening gender equality within the consortium and ensuring alignment with Horizon Europe requirements. The document is intended to support continuous improvement, mutual learning, and the development of inclusive research environments across the AIdesignTEX partnership.
Keywords	Dissemination, communication, exploitation

Disclaimer

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1. Introduction

Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) are recognised by the European Commission as a key mechanism for promoting structural, long-term changes that foster gender balance, equal opportunities, and inclusive organisational cultures within research and innovation institutions. Since 2022, the existence of a publicly available and regularly monitored GEP has been a formal eligibility requirement for participation in Horizon Europe, ensuring that organisations actively address inequalities and integrate gender-sensitive approaches into their governance, recruitment, career progression, research culture, and work-life balance.

1.1. Purpose of the document

Across the European Research Area, the development and implementation of GEPs are supported by several EU instruments, most notably the GEAR (Gender Equality in Academia and Research) Toolkit, developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The Toolkit provides practical guidance for designing, updating, and monitoring GEPs, and has become the main reference framework for European higher education institutions.

Within this context, the AldesignTEX consortium — comprising Lodz University of Technology (TUL), Ghent University (GU), University of Stavanger (UiS), and Universidad Católica de Ávila (UCAV) — recognises gender equality as an essential component of research excellence and institutional development. Although each partner institution has its own equality framework, their GEPs are at different stages of maturity, scope, and implementation.

Because AldesignTEX began in 2024, shortly after TUL completed its first GEP cycle (2022–2024) and adopted a revised Action Plan for 2025–2027, the project provides an ideal moment to assess progress, harmonise practices, and identify shared priorities across the consortium.

This deliverable — Gender Equality Plan Advancement, vol. 2 — constitutes the first consortium-level reflection on gender equality within AldesignTEX.

The title “vol. 2” reflects continuity with earlier GEP-related developments undertaken by partner institutions, in particular:

- the evolution of TUL’s institutional GEP (2022–2024 → 2025–2027),
- gender-equality actions undertaken in previous EU-funded projects involving the partners (e.g., SustDesignTex),
- existing GEPs or equality frameworks already in place at UiS, GU, and UCAV.

Although this is the first gender-focused deliverable produced within AldesignTEX, it builds on and advances these earlier achievements. It compares institutional approaches, identifies progress made since the project submission in 2023, and formulates recommendations for strengthening gender equality throughout project implementation. By analysing developments across partners and mapping them onto AldesignTEX objectives, the deliverable supports the consortium in embedding equality, transparency, and responsible research practices as long-term foundations of collaboration.

1.2. The GEP requirement under Horizon Europe

According to the European Commission, a Gender Equality Plan is “a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through a process of structural change.” A GEP is a mandatory eligibility criterion for higher education institutions and research organisations participating in Horizon Europe. It ensures that gender equality is treated not as an isolated activity, but as a systemic, organisation-wide transformation affecting governance, recruitment, career progression, research content, and organisational culture.

The requirement builds upon the European Research Area (ERA) policy agenda and is supported by methodological resources such as the GEAR Toolkit, which provides step-by-step guidance on GEP development, legal frameworks, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, and examples of good practice.

Compliance with the GEP criterion within AldesignTEX ensures:

- eligibility for project participation,
- alignment with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct,
- mainstreaming of equality and diversity standards across all project activities (training, mobility, networking, research design, dissemination).

1.3. Scope and structure of the AldesignTEX GEP Advancement vol. 2

The scope of the GEP includes:

- A comparative analysis of TUL's Gender Equality Plans (2022–2024 vs. 2025–2027), demonstrating strengthened institutional commitment and expanded areas of intervention.
- An assessment of gender-equality frameworks of partner institutions (UiS, GU, UCAV) to identify complementarities, good practices, and opportunities for mutual learning.
- Project-level recommendations on how AldesignTEX can reinforce gender equality within research, training, capacity building, mobility, and co-creation activities.
- Forward-looking guidelines to support continuous advancement of gender equality throughout the project's duration and beyond.

1.4. Collaborative approach to Deliverable D21

The comparative analysis conducted within AldesignTEX has shown that all partner institutions are at different stages of maturity in developing and implementing their Gender Equality Plans. This diversity is both natural and expected, particularly in a consortium that brings together widening and non-widening institutions with distinct legal, organisational, and funding environments. It has also become evident that gender-equality frameworks evolve rapidly across Europe, and no institution can anticipate all requirements from the outset.

For this reason, the partners collectively agreed that the preparation of Gender Equality Plan Advancement vol. 2 should be carried out collaboratively and reflect the progress of the entire consortium, rather than of a single partner. Lodz University of Technology prepared the first full draft to facilitate timely submission, while ensuring that all institutions have the opportunity to provide input and shape the document.

The deliverable therefore adopts a constructive, forward-looking perspective: instead of evaluating gaps or inconsistencies, it focuses on shared learning, mutual support mechanisms, and the continuous-improvement approach encouraged by the European Commission. The analysis highlights that all institutions — including TUL, UCAV, GU, and UiS — are actively strengthening their equality frameworks and that each has introduced measures aligned with the Horizon Europe GEP criteria.

At the same time, the comparison demonstrates that gender-equality work is an ongoing, iterative process. The consortium can benefit significantly from exchanging good practices, aligning monitoring approaches, and jointly developing areas where further enhancement is possible. Consequently, the present deliverable has been shaped as a cooperative effort aimed at supporting all partners in advancing gender equality, ensuring compliance with Horizon Europe standards, and reinforcing the long-term sustainability of the AldesignTEX collaboration.

2. Metodology and sources

This document is based on a combination of institutional, project-level, and policy-level sources:

1. Primary institutional sources

- TUL Gender Equality Plan 2022–2024 – including 28 actions across four scopes focusing on infrastructure, leadership, recruitment, and organisational culture (source)
- TUL Gender Equality Plan 2025–2027 – the updated GEP containing 15 actions across five scopes, including a new section on gender-based violence (source)

These documents were reviewed comparatively to identify developments in policies, monitoring mechanisms, support structures, and implemented measures.

2. Partner institutions' materials

Publicly available GEPs and equality policies from:

- [University of Stavanger \(UiS\)](#),
- [Ghent University \(GU\)](#),
- [Universidad Católica de Ávila \(UCAV\)](#).

These materials were used to map similarities, divergences, and possible alignment areas.

3. European policy and methodological sources

- [European Commission: Horizon Europe GEP Eligibility Criteria \(2021–2027\)](#)
- [EIGE GEAR Toolkit \(Gender Equality in Academia and Research\)](#)
- [EU guidelines on gender dimension in research and innovation](#)

The analysis combines document review, institutional self-assessment, and alignment with European best-practice frameworks.

The design and analysis of the AldesignTEX Gender Equality Plan Advancement vol. 2 follow the methodological principles of the GEAR Toolkit (EIGE), which is the European Commission's recommended framework for developing and institutionalising Gender Equality Plans. While partner institutions may not explicitly reference GEAR in their documents, its structure, terminology, and approach underpin the majority of GEPs implemented across Europe, including those at TUL, UiS, GU, and UCAV.

3. Comparative analysis of TUL GEPs (2022–2024 vs 2025–2027)

This section provides a structured comparison between the first institutional Gender Equality Plan of Lodz University of Technology (TUL) covering 2022–2024 and the updated Action Plan for 2025–2027. The analysis identifies areas of continuity, progress, and structural reinforcement. It also highlights the relevance of these developments for the AldesignTEX project, which began at the transition point between the two GEP cycles.

3.1. Overall evolution of institutional priorities

The first institutional GEP at TUL [GEP \(2022–2024\)](#) laid the foundation for systemic gender equality actions by introducing 28 measures across four strategic scopes (GEP 2022–2024, pp. 12–24). This version focused on building the fundamental structures needed for gender equality: new regulations, monitoring and reporting mechanisms, appointments of equality representatives, anti-discrimination procedures, and childcare support structures.

By contrast, the updated [GEP \(2025–2027\)](#) (GEP 2025–2027, pp. 10–17) represents a shift toward consolidation, deep institutionalisation, and cultural strengthening. Having completed most baseline actions (22 out of 28), TUL now streamlines its approach to 15 actions across five scopes, emphasising:

- targeted support mechanisms (e.g., re-onboarding after parental leave),
- long-term institutional culture change,
- psychological safety,
- communication and awareness-raising,
- digital training modules,
- and a new dedicated scope on gender-based violence.

This evolution reflects a natural institutional learning process: the first GEP built capacity, while the second GEP deepens impact and expands intervention areas.

For AldesignTEX, this progression is valuable because the project started during the transition between the two cycles. This allows the consortium to document and demonstrate TUL’s trajectory toward stronger equality structures — a highly relevant narrative in the context of Horizon Europe.

3.2. Structural comparison of scopes and action areas

2022–2024: Four foundational scopes (GEP 2022–2024 p. 12–24)

1. Institutional infrastructure (Scope 1) Creating monitoring groups, equality representatives, regulations, and training.
2. Gender balance in leadership, decision-making, and research (Scope 2) Monitoring representation, integrating gender dimension into research, fostering balanced committees.
3. Gender equality in recruitment and career advancement (Scope 3) Standardizing recruitment procedures, tracking doctoral progression, gender-monitoring in grants.
4. Work–life balance and organisational culture (Scope 4) Preschool, childcare allowances, part-time leave arrangements, return-to-work procedures.

This plan clearly focused on **establishing systems and removing structural barriers**, especially for women returning from parental leave, early-career researchers, and staff in technical disciplines.

2025–2027: Five advanced scopes (GEP 2025–2027, p. 10–17)

1. Organizational culture and work–life balance
 - re-onboarding procedure,
 - labour-law training for managers,
 - awareness on combining work & parental leave,
 - EQUINI game for emotional intelligence.
2. Gender equality in leadership, decision-making, research, and education
 - continuation of monitoring,
 - Women in Science community building,
 - intercultural integration actions.
3. Gender equality in recruitment and career advancement
 - advanced gender-disaggregated tracking,
 - new campaigns addressing gender imbalance in student admissions.

- Institutional infrastructure
 - cross-university benchmarking,
 - equality-focused communication,
 - new equality-focused e-learning modules.
4. Raising awareness of gender-based violence (new scope)
- anti-discrimination training,
 - psychological support pathways,
 - visibility of available support structures.

The introduction of Scope 5: Raising awareness of gender-based violence marks a significant institutional shift towards psychological safety and modern equality standards, aligning TUL with cutting-edge European practices.

3.3. Key areas of progress between GEP 2022–2024 and GEP 2025–2027

Below is a concise synthesis of major areas in which institutional progress is visible:

1. Stronger institutional capacity

- 2022–2024 created the core structures;
- 2025–2027 strengthens them (e.g., digital training tools, communication strategy, professionalisation of equality activities).

2. Improved monitoring and transparency

- Both GEPs emphasise gender-disaggregated data, but the new GEP expands reporting frequency and adds grant monitoring, doctoral progression, and student recruitment.

3. Enhanced support for parents

- The preschool & childcare allowances of the 2022–2024 GEP are complemented by structured re-onboarding and clearer evaluation deferral mechanisms in 2025–2027.

4. Cultural transformation

- The new GEP includes Women in Science networks, anti-bias teaching, intercultural training, and emotional-intelligence interventions.

5. New focus: gender-based violence

- This aligns TUL with new ERA priorities (2022–2027) and modern European GEP structures.

Table 1. Comparison of TUL Gender Equality Plans (2022–2024 vs 2025–2027)

Category	TUL GEP 2022–2024 (Foundational Plan)	TUL GEP 2025–2027 (Advanced Implementation Plan)	Key Evolution / Added Value
Number of actions	28 actions	15 actions	Streamlining due to completion of foundational tasks; shift from building structures → strengthening culture and sustainability
Number of scopes	4 scopes: 1. Institutional infrastructure	5 scopes: 1. Organizational culture & work–life balance	New dedicated scope fully aligned with ERA Policy Agenda 2022–

	2. Leadership & decision-making 3. Recruitment & career advancement 4. Work-life balance & organisational culture	2. Leadership, decision-making, research & education 3. Recruitment & career advancement 4. Institutional infrastructure 5. <i>NEW</i> : Awareness of gender-based violence	2024 and EC expectations on GBV prevention
Strategic orientation	Setting up systems, structures, committees, monitoring, policies	Consolidation, implementation, cultural change, improved monitoring mechanisms	Maturity shift: from <i>building</i> to <i>institutionalising</i> equality infrastructure
Institutional infrastructure	• Appointment of equality representatives • Establishment of monitoring groups • Anti-mobbing regulations planned • Launch of GEP website	• Cross-university benchmarking • Equality-focused communication campaigns • E-learning modules on equality and recruitment • Updated employee satisfaction surveys with equality dimension	More emphasis on communication, transparency, inter-university learning , and monitoring tools
Leadership, decision-making, research	• Monitoring gender in leadership annually • Recommending gender-balanced committees • Integrating gender dimension into research via publications & Q&A mechanism	• Continuation and expansion of monitoring • Women in Science community-building• Intercultural integration actions for doctoral candidates • Promotion of equality actions (Girls to Science / Dziewczyny do Nauki)	Stronger emphasis on research culture, professional development , and intercultural sensitivity
Recruitment & career development	• Standard recruitment templates & procedures • Tracking gender in doctoral progression • Monitoring gender of PIs in grants	• More advanced gender-disaggregated tracking (doctoral, grant & scholarship participation)• Campaigns addressing gender imbalance in study fields• Continued monitoring & transparency improvements	Enhances the analytical depth and links recruitment to student pipeline challenges
Work-life balance & support structures	• Preschool and daycare creation • Childcare allowance • Part-time parental leave promotion • Return-to-work procedure planned	• Implementation of re-onboarding procedures (structured) • Training for managers on labour law & parenthood • Awareness campaigns for combining work & care duties • Polish version of EQUINI game (emotional intelligence)	Shift from infrastructure creation → managerial competence , emotional intelligence, and continuous support
Gender-based violence	Mentioned in general terms; addressed via anti-mobbing committee	NEW SCOPE: • Dedicated anti-discrimination & anti-mobbing training • Psychological support pathways • Visibility of support structures • Doctoral/student support integration	Substantial strengthening aligned with EU-wide pressure to address GBV in R&I (2022–2027)
Monitoring & reporting	• Surveys scheduled (2022, 2023, 2024) • CAWI + IDI methodology • First structural baseline	• Annual monitoring across scopes • Updated reporting in GEP website • Equality questions added to Exit Interviews • Advanced institutional data tracking	Monitoring becomes more regular, integrated, and transparent
Relevance for AldesignTEX	Provides baseline (diagnosis, initial structures) at start of project design (2023)	Provides updated, improved institutional framework during project implementation (2024–...)	Demonstrates continuous progress , which is key for Twinning excellence justification

The comparison between the two TUL GEP cycles clearly demonstrates the institution's progress from foundational equality structures (2022–2024) to an advanced implementation and cultural transformation phase (2025–2027). Many basic actions—such as establishing childcare services, creating equality committees, and standardizing recruitment—have been completed, allowing the new plan to focus on deeper systemic change, improved monitoring, leadership development, and prevention of gender-based violence.

For the **AldesignTEX project**, this evolution offers a strong institutional backdrop: the consortium begins its implementation phase during a period of strengthened equality governance, which enhances fulfilment of Horizon Europe requirements and supports the project's commitment to excellence, transparency, and inclusive research practices.

3.4. Relevance for AldesignTEX

The progression between the two GEP cycles is particularly meaningful for AldesignTEX for three reasons. However, its relevance extends even further when analysed from the perspective of Twinning objectives, institutional transformation, and long-term sustainability. The updated narrative below strengthens the link between TUL's institutional evolution and the strategic benefits for the consortium.

Why the evolution of TUL's GEP is strategically important for AldesignTEX:

1. *Project timing: institutional transition aligned with project launch*

AldesignTEX began at the exact intersection of two GEP cycles at TUL (end of 2022–2024 cycle → beginning of 2025–2027). This timing allows the project to:

- document institutional progress and demonstrate compliance with the Horizon Europe GEP requirement from the very beginning,
- show a trajectory of improvement, not just a static situation,
- use fresh policy updates and new support mechanisms as part of project implementation,
- position AldesignTEX as a project supporting and benefiting from TUL's ongoing structural change.

2. *Enhanced internal support systems strengthening project delivery*

The strengthened ecosystem introduced in the 2025–2027 GEP — including:

- structured psychological support pathways,
- new e-learning modules for recruitment and equality,
- intercultural integration activities for international doctoral candidates,
- formalised re-onboarding procedures for staff returning from parental leave,
- strengthened monitoring of doctoral and early-career progression - directly benefits AldesignTEX participants and reduces risks associated with mobility, career interruptions, or unequal participation.

3. *Stronger alignment with EU expectations and ERA policy priorities*

The 2025–2027 GEP introduces alignment with:

- ERA Policy Agenda 2022–2024 (gender equality as a cornerstone of research excellence),
- updated EC recommendations on gender-based violence,
- the increasing requirement to integrate gender dimension in research content,
- the Horizon Europe emphasis on institutional reform under widening actions.

This alignment enhances the consortium's credibility because:

- AldesignTEX is a Twinning project explicitly designed to strengthen institutional excellence.
- Gender equality is now considered a component of excellence, not an administrative requirement.
- The new GEP better reflects what evaluators expect to see during the interim technical review (M17) in March 2026.

Thus, the consortium benefits from TUL's improved compliance and can use this as a model for internal alignment across UiS, GU and UCAV.

4. *Increased capacity for cross-learning and joint actions*

The updated 2025–2027 GEP introduces several elements (e.g., benchmarking with other universities, new equality-focused communication tools), which open opportunities for:

- joint cross-consortium activities,
- shared training modules,
- harmonisation of internal procedures among partners,
- building a common framework for mobility safety, inclusion, and wellbeing.

This facilitates smoother cooperation across institutional cultures and supports Twinning's goal of long-term strategic collaboration.

5. *Improved visibility and communication supporting project dissemination*

The new GEP strengthens institutional communication channels, including:

- equality-themed webinars,
- awareness campaigns,
- visibility of support services.

AldesignTEX can leverage these tools to:

- disseminate project results,
- promote inclusive project culture,
- increase participation in project training and events,
- reinforce the project's responsible research approach.

This contributes to WP7 (dissemination and communication).

6. *Reduced risk of inequalities impacting project participation*

By clarifying parental leave procedures, return-to-work processes, and flexible arrangements, TUL reduces risks such as:

- dropout of staff involved in key tasks,
- delays due to absences,
- unequal participation in mobility or leadership opportunities.

These issues are explicitly highlighted in EC guidelines as relevant to project risk assessment. Thus, the new GEP increases project resilience.

4. Overview of partner institutions' GEP frameworks

This section provides a structured overview of gender-equality frameworks implemented by the three partners of the AldesignTEX consortium — University of Stavanger (UiS), Ghent University (GU), and Universidad Católica de Ávila (UCAV) — and compares their maturity, scope, and alignment with Horizon Europe requirements. It highlights areas where partner institutions already demonstrate strong practices and identifies aspects that can support mutual learning within the Twinning collaboration.

The comparison is organised according to the main components of the Horizon Europe GEP eligibility framework and the GEAR Toolkit:

- public availability and institutional commitment,
- dedicated equality structures,
- training and capacity building,
- gender-sensitive HR processes,
- integration of gender dimension into research and teaching,
- measures against gender-based violence.

4.1. University of Stavanger (UiS) — Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan

UiS operates one of the most advanced equality frameworks in the consortium. Norway has long-standing national obligations in gender equality and anti-discrimination, and UiS has a well-established Equality, Inclusion and Diversity (EID) Action Plan, regularly updated and integrated into the university's strategic management system.

Key features

- **Strong legal alignment:** Norwegian law requires universities to adopt action plans, conduct annual equality reporting, and perform activity and transparency assessments.
- **Governance structure:**
 - a central Committee for Gender Equality and Diversity,
 - EDI officers at faculty level,
 - systematic annual reporting and follow-up.
- **Measures include:**
 - targeted recruitment measures for women in STEM professorial positions,
 - mentoring programmes for early-career researchers,
 - internationalisation-sensitive policies,
 - flexible work arrangements and work–life balance initiatives,
 - systematic training on harassment prevention.
- **Gender dimension in research:** UiS integrates gender dimension requirements into ethics procedures and research design support (Research Support Division).
- **GBV and harassment prevention:** UiS operates formal procedures for reporting harassment, plus mandatory training for staff and students.

Relevance for AldesignTEX

UiS brings high-maturity practices in monitoring, anti-harassment systems, and gender integration into research — helpful for improving consortium-wide standards.

4.2. Ghent University (GU) — Gender & Diversity Policy Framework

Ghent University is a European leader in institutional equality policies. It has implemented a comprehensive **Gender Equality Plan 2021–2025**, accompanied by a broader **Institutional Diversity Policy Plan**, which promotes intersectional approaches extending beyond traditional gender topics.

Key features

- ***Embedded equality governance:***
 - Central Diversity & Gender Equality Office,
 - Faculty diversity coordinators,
 - systematic data collection and transparency via annual diversity reports.
- ***Measures include:***
 - gender-balanced recruitment committees and monitoring dashboards,
 - strong focus on gender-sensitive research content (mandatory in internal funding calls),
 - leadership training tailored for women researchers,
 - inclusive teaching guidelines,
 - integration of diversity competences into quality assurance for programmes.
- ***Work–life balance and parental support:***
 - extensive childcare services,
 - flexible academic career pathways,
 - support for dual-career families.
- ***GBV prevention and psychological support:***
 - Ombudspersons for staff and for students,
 - dedicated centres for psychosocial well-being,
 - detailed anti-harassment rules and confidential advisors.

Relevance for AldesignTEX

GU contributes top-tier best practices in diversity governance, data collection, recruitment monitoring, and research integration — valuable for comparative benchmarking.

4.3. Universidad Católica de Ávila (UCAV) — Equality and Anti-Harassment Framework

Unlike TUL, UiS and GU—which operate under Horizon Europe-style GEP structures—UCAV follows the Spanish national framework for equality, which is based on legally required institutional Equality Plans (Planes de Igualdad) and mandatory anti-harassment protocols. This results not from institutional gaps, but from the different regulatory environment in which Spanish universities function.

Existing structures at UCAV

- ***Legal basis:*** Spanish Royal Decrees RD 901/2020 and RD 902/2020 require all universities to maintain:
 - an Equality Plan based on a diagnostic assessment,
 - measures addressing recruitment, training, work–life balance and pay transparency,
 - a mandatory protocol for the prevention and response to harassment.
- ***Common measures under the national template include:***
 - equal access to employment and transparent selection procedures,

- monitoring of pay gaps,
- family-friendly policies and leave arrangements,
- formal reporting procedures for harassment cases.

These instruments ensure that UCAV complies with Spanish national equality standards, which focus strongly on labour-law compliance and workplace protections.

Characteristics of the framework (in comparison to Horizon Europe–style GEPs)

The Spanish Equality Plan model prioritises employment-related equality obligations, while Horizon Europe GEPs additionally require elements specific to research and innovation, such as:

- gender dimension in research content,
- monitoring mechanisms dedicated to academic careers,
- integration with international research strategies.

Because Spanish national legislation does not mandate these research-oriented components, Equality Plans at universities like UCAV naturally have a different scope compared to GEPs of large research-performing institutions.

Relevance for AldesignTEX

UCAV brings an important perspective to the consortium, representing institutions that operate in nationally regulated equality frameworks rather than research-specific GEP systems.

Within AldesignTEX, this creates an opportunity for mutual learning and capacity building, particularly in strengthening:

- gender-equality practices linked to research and innovation,
- monitoring related to academic careers and project participation,
- alignment with Horizon Europe GEP expectations where relevant.

This diversity within the consortium reinforces the Twinning objective: partners grow together by exchanging experience, adapting approaches to their institutional context, and progressively aligning with European standards.

5. Gender equality within AldesignTEX activities

Gender equality is one of the foundational principles of the AldesignTEX project, embedded both in its scientific objectives and in its operational design. As a Twinning initiative, AldesignTEX aims not only to enhance research excellence in AI-driven textile innovation but also to promote inclusive, responsible, and equitable research cultures across the consortium. The comparative review of institutional GEPs (Sections 3–4) has demonstrated that all partners are committed to gender equality, although they operate at different stages of maturity and under different national frameworks. This diversity provides an opportunity for shared learning and joint enhancement of gender-sensitive practices.

This section outlines how gender equality is integrated into AldesignTEX activities, with a focus on recruitment, training, mobility, communication, research methodologies, and project governance.

5.1. Integration of gender equality in project governance

AldesignTEX ensures that gender equality is embedded in all strategic and operational structures:

- Balanced representation (aiming at the 40% Horizon Europe target) in the Project Steering Board, WP teams, and advisory bodies.
- Monitoring of gender balance in project meetings, expert groups, and selection panels.

- Appointment of GEP focal points in each partner institution to streamline coordination.
- Gender equality included as a standing item in annual meetings and internal reporting.

5.2. Gender-sensitive recruitment, mobility, and participation

To ensure inclusive access to project opportunities, the consortium applies:

- open and transparent procedures for participating in training, exchanges, and mobility;
- gender-balanced monitoring of participation in all activities;
- mechanisms preventing gender bias in selection processes;
- flexible formats supporting researchers with caring responsibilities (hybrid participation, adjusted schedules);
- support for women in AI-, technical-, and design-oriented tasks where gender gaps are more visible.

5.3. Practical equality measures implemented within AIdesignTEX

Although AIdesignTEX is not itself an institutional GEP, the consortium has actively incorporated gender-equality principles into the organisation and implementation of project activities. These practices complement the institutional GEPs of the partners and demonstrate the project's commitment to inclusiveness, balanced participation, and equal opportunities.

Practical measures implemented during the first project period include:

- **Flexible mobility arrangements supporting researchers with caregiving responsibilities** - The project enabled long-term mobilities for female researchers who are mothers of young children, ensuring that mobility opportunities are not restricted by family obligations. Partners demonstrated high flexibility in scheduling visits, organising remote preparatory work, and adjusting mobility length to individual needs. This practice has directly contributed to improving the participation of women in international research exchanges.
- **High share of women participating in project mobilities** - During the first implementation period, 6 staff members from TUL participated in international exchanges, of whom four were women. This reflects both the gender composition of the TUL team and the project's inclusive approach to allocating mobility opportunities based on competence, readiness, and development needs rather than gender stereotypes.
- **Female-majority leadership and research teams** - The TUL project team — responsible for coordination and several WPs — is predominantly composed of women. Women lead key areas of the project, including project administration, circular-economy tasks, and design-oriented research elements. This provides strong visibility of women in leadership roles and creates opportunities for early-career female researchers to collaborate with senior female experts.
- **Engagement in equality-focused outreach and professional events** - Project representatives (especially from TUL) participated in professional events addressing equality, gender representation, and empowerment — such as the Soroptimist International conference in Kraków. These activities help disseminate project outcomes while simultaneously promoting gender-equality values in the broader academic and professional environment.
- **Creating an inclusive and supportive work environment** - Across meetings, workshops, and exchanges, partners have ensured respectful communication, accessibility of information, equal speaking time, and sensitivity to diverse cultural backgrounds. The consortium adopted a collaborative approach to

organising work, allowing all team members — including younger women researchers — to take active roles in discussions, presentations, and task design.

5.4. Gender equality in training, mentoring, and capacity building

The project strengthens gender equality in all capacity-building components by:

- including sessions on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, gender dimension in R&I;
- integrating Women in Science / Women in STEM initiatives from TUL, GU and UiS;
- inviting gender-balanced expert speakers and mentors;
- promoting visibility of female role models in textile engineering, AI, and circular economy fields.

5.5. Integrating the gender dimension into research content

In alignment with Horizon Europe requirements, AldesignTEX incorporates gender aspects into scientific methodologies where relevant:

- considering gender differences in user needs, ergonomics, perception of AI-based tools, and consumer behaviour;
- using gender-disaggregated data in surveys, testing, and assessments;
- dressing potential gender bias in AI/ML datasets, algorithms, and model validation.

Although the project focuses on technical and circular textile topics, integrating gender-sensitive elements improves scientific quality and societal relevance.

5.6. Gender-sensitive communication and dissemination

AldesignTEX follows inclusive communication practices:

- using gender-neutral language in all public materials;
- ensuring balanced representation in photos, publications, and success stories;
- showcasing achievements of women researchers and designers;
- monitoring communication outcomes using gender-disaggregated indicators where possible.

5.7. Prevention of gender-based violence and promotion of a safe environment

In line with institutional GEPs (notably TUL 2025–2027), the consortium:

- upholds all partners' anti-harassment and code-of-conduct protocols;
- informs participants about ombudspersons and equality officers;
- includes clear behavioural guidelines in mobility preparation;
- promotes awareness of psychological support structures at hosting institutions.

5.8. Contribution of AldesignTEX to long-term institutional development

AldesignTEX strengthens equality frameworks across all institutions by:

- providing comparative models and recommendations for GEP enhancement;
- supporting partners with emerging equality frameworks (e.g., UCAV) in integrating research-oriented measures;

- enabling peer-learning on monitoring systems, inclusive recruitment, gender-sensitive design, and communication;
- reinforcing TUL's progress from GEP 2022–2024 to GEP 2025–2027 by embedding gender equality into mobility, leadership, and capacity-building activities;
- benefitting GU and UiS through opportunities to share established good practices with widening partners.

6. Recommendations for future advancement

Building upon the comparative analysis of partner institutional GEPs and the gender-equality practices already implemented within AldesignTEX, this section outlines a set of forward-looking recommendations designed to strengthen gender equality across the consortium. These recommendations aim to support continuous progress, enhance alignment with Horizon Europe expectations, and ensure that equality becomes a durable component of institutional excellence beyond the project's lifecycle.

The recommendations are structured around six key dimensions: governance, capacity building, research, mobility, monitoring and data, and cross-institutional learning. They are intentionally designed to be realistic, scalable, and relevant for institutions at different stages of GEP maturity.

6.1. Strengthen project-level governance structures for gender equality

Recommended actions:

- Maintain gender equality as a standing agenda item during Steering Board meetings and annual reviews.
- Formalise the role of GEP Focal Points in each institution to facilitate coordination, reporting, and internal communication.
- Introduce a simple annual consortium-wide GEP review (1–2 pages) summarising progress, challenges, and examples of practice.
- Encourage each WP to identify at least one gender-sensitive area or action relevant to its activities (e.g. training, communication, data collection).

Expected impact: More coherent and transparent governance; improved coordination among partners with varying levels of GEP maturity.

6.2. Enhance gender-sensitive mobility and participation policies

Building on positive practices already demonstrated (e.g. support for women with small children, high female participation in exchanges):

Recommended actions:

- Develop a mobility participation guideline ensuring fair access, consideration of caring responsibilities, and transparent selection.
- Encourage partners to maintain flexible mobility arrangements (hybrid, part-time, reorganised schedules) for researchers with family obligations.
- Promote equitable participation of women in AI/ML-focused activities, where gender gaps are historically larger.
- Track gender-disaggregated participation systematically across all project events.

Expected impact: More inclusive mobility opportunities and better retention of female researchers in technical fields.

6.3. Expand gender equality in training, mentoring, and skills development

Recommended actions:

- Integrate modules on:
 - unconscious bias,
 - inclusive leadership,
 - gender dimension in research design,
 - gender-balanced recruitment,
 - responsible AI and algorithmic bias.
- Invite more female experts and role models from partner institutions to participate in scientific workshops.
- Develop a shared pool of resources (slides, videos, guidelines) for equality-related training accessible to all consortium members.

Expected impact: Strengthening equality-oriented research culture and empowering early-career researchers, especially women.

6.4. Deepen the integration of the gender dimension in research content

Even though AldesignTEX focuses primarily on textiles, ageing, AI-based design tools, and circularity, several research areas allow meaningful gender integration.

Recommended actions:

- Assess the relevance of gender aspects in:
 - textile comfort and ergonomics,
 - AI-assisted clothing design preferences,
 - user needs in circular textile systems,
 - perception and usability of digital tools.
- Ensure algorithmic models are checked for potential gender biases in datasets.
- Use gender-disaggregated approaches in user testing, surveys, and Living Lab activities.
- Share examples of good practice among partners (UiS ethics units, GU inclusive design approaches, TUL circularity teaching).

Expected impact: Greater scientific robustness and improved societal relevance of research outputs.

6.5. Improve monitoring, reporting, and data consistency across the consortium

Given that partner institutions vary significantly in their internal monitoring capacity:

Recommended actions:

- Harmonise basic gender-disaggregated indicators across the project (e.g., participation in training, mobility, leadership, publications).
- Encourage partners to collect data aligned with Horizon Europe GEP criteria, even at minimum level.

- Develop a simple internal dashboard or table for annual reporting.
- Share templates used by TUL (e.g., from the 2025–2027 GEP) with UCAV and others.

Expected impact: Better comparability of practices, more coherent reporting, and stronger evidence for long-term improvement.

6.6. Strengthen cross-institutional learning and peer support

AldesignTEX's Twinning structure creates an ideal setting for mutual support and transfer of practices.

Recommended actions:

- Organise an annual Equality Exchange Session during consortium meetings where partners present:
 - one good practice,
 - one challenge,
 - one implemented action.
- Facilitate short-term peer shadowing between equality officers or administrators (e.g., UCAV ↔ TUL, UiS ↔ GU).
- Develop a mini-knowledge base compiling:
 - templates,
 - policies,
 - checklists,
 - examples from partners' GEPs.

Expected impact: Acceleration of institutional learning; reduction of gaps between widening and non-widening partners; sustained equality capacity after the project ends.

6.7. Ensure long-term sustainability and institutional adoption

To ensure that improvements extend beyond AldesignTEX:

Recommended actions:

- Encourage partners to embed selected AldesignTEX practices (mobility policies, training modules, monitoring tools) into their institutional GEP updates.
- Support partners with less mature frameworks (e.g., UCAV) in developing research-oriented GEP components, going beyond national templates.
- Promote publication of project achievements (mobility statistics, examples of practice) as part of institutional GEP monitoring.
- Prepare a short final equality roadmap at project end summarising achievements and future priorities.

Expected impact: Long-lasting reinforcement of equality practices at all institutions.

7. Conclusion

The Gender Equality Plan Advancement, vol. 2 demonstrates that all AldesignTEX partner institutions are committed to strengthening gender equality, while operating within different organisational structures, levels of maturity, and national frameworks. The comparative analysis confirms significant institutional progress at TUL, marked by the transition from its foundational GEP (2022–2024) to the more advanced and comprehensive GEP (2025–2027). At the same time, the review of partner universities shows that gender-equality work is an ongoing and evolving process, in which all institutions — TUL, GU, UiS, and UCAV — benefit from shared practices, mutual learning, and collaborative development.

AldesignTEX actively integrates gender equality into project governance, mobility, training, research methodologies, and dissemination activities, ensuring balanced participation, transparency, inclusiveness, and a safe environment for all project contributors. This deliverable therefore not only fulfils the Horizon Europe requirement to document GEP progress, but also reinforces the long-term foundations for responsible, equitable, and excellence-driven cooperation within the consortium.

The consortium will continue to build on the actions and recommendations presented in this document, ensuring that gender equality remains a strategic priority throughout the duration of AldesignTEX and beyond. In doing so, the project contributes to sustainable institutional transformation across all partner universities and to the broader objectives of the European Research Area.