

APPROVED BY

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GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

Introduction

The main goal of the European Union (EU) Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (Strategy) is “a Union where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and can equally participate in and lead our European society”. Ending gender-based violence, challenging gender stereotypes, closing gender gaps in the labor market, achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy, addressing the gender pay and pension gaps, closing the gender care gap, and achieving gender balance in decision-making and politics are listed as key objectives of the Strategy.¹

In line with the goal and objectives of the Strategy, a gender action plan has been devised by the European Commission to enhance gender equality and women’s empowerment in the EU. This document names gender equality as a core value of the EU, as well as a universally recognized human right that supports well-being, economic growth, prosperity, good governance, peace, and security. It also outlines the main guiding principles and policies to achieve a more inclusive society toward creating a gender-equal world.²

The above-mentioned policies have been adopted by Latvia. The Ministry of Welfare has identified the priority challenges and defined the necessary action steps in its Action Plan for Promoting Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men for 2021-2023. The two main directions include the decrease of gender stereotypes in the job market and education and the reduction of gender-based violence and violence in families. To address work and education-related stereotypes, the Action Plan intends to focus on such activities as improvement of work-life balance, reduction of discrimination risks in the labor market, promotion of equal pay, reduction of stereotypes with regards to male and female professions, improved understanding

¹ European Comission. (2022). Gender Equality Strategy. Retrieved January 18, 2023, from https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

² European Comission. (2021). EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An Ambitious Agenda For Gender Equality And Women’s Empowerment In EU external action. Retrieved January 18, 2023, from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0017&from=EN>

about equal rights and opportunities for men and women, and awards for gender equality achievements.³

The gender equality policy of EKA University of Applied Sciences (EKA) strongly aligns with the general international and local policies and takes into account the priority directions proposed by these policies with a special emphasis on addressing gender stereotypes in education and the job market which is consistent with EKA's role as a private higher education institution. As such, EKA recognizes itself to be a significant contributor to the implementation of a gender balance policy and promotes the understanding of the importance of gender equality among its employees and students.

The main goal of the EKA Gender Equality Plan is to define the guiding principles of the gender equality policy, provide an overview of the current situation in EKA and define actions to be taken to fulfill the goal of providing equal rights and opportunities for students and employees of EKA in a gender-neutral fashion.

Principles of EKA gender equality policy

To ensure equal opportunities for everyone, the following principles have been implemented in EKA.

Work and study environment

EKA has recently moved to a new building, and the premises are newly renovated. Special emphasis has been placed on ensuring a creative and dynamic work and study space to accommodate the needs of both students and staff. Creativity, innovation, and active involvement in the study process are the main principles of education applied by EKA, and the study environment is supportive of diverse groups of students. The needs of disabled persons have also been taken into account by ensuring restroom availability and accessibility of premises by elevators and ramps.

Work culture and work-life balance

The work culture in EKA is based on equality and inclusivity principles. The management of EKA promotes a positive work environment where all staff members are treated with respect regardless of their gender, academic or administrative status, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, political beliefs, ethnic background, or other differences. Similarly, EKA personnel is encouraged to treat their colleagues with equal respect. Acceptance and open-mindedness are important values of the work culture.

EKA aims to provide fair working conditions for all its employees according to the relevant national legislation, including holidays, vacations, and parental and sick leaves. It is ensured that upon returning to work after an absence (e.g. due to child care), employees retain their previous work conditions whenever possible. Salaries are not affected by gender. The remuneration policy of EKA is based on Cabinet Regulation No. 455 "Regulations regarding Remuneration of Teachers" and is thus independent of any personal differences. To ensure optimal work-life balance among its employees, EKA provides a lot of flexibility, especially to the academic staff – most of the teaching positions are part-time and allows staff members to optimize their time, including the needs of their personal life.

³ LR Labklājības ministrija (2021). Plāns sieviešu un vīriešu vienlīdzīgu tiesību un iespēju veicināšanai 2021. - 2023. gadam. Retrieved January 18, 2023, from https://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2021_08/LMpl_090721_Plans%202021-2023.1733.docx

Equal career development opportunities

Career development in EKA is based on the qualification, work experience, and personal intentions of the existing or potential employees – this principle is applied equally to new hires and employees who are looking to advance their careers at EKA. EKA recognizes that all its employees, existing and prospective, have equal rights to be considered for vacant positions or promotions and to demand access to the resources, information, and infrastructure necessary for the successful execution of their duties. All employees have equal rights to make independent decisions within their area of responsibility according to their expertise, as well as decisions about their personal career choices. EKA aims to mitigate any internal pressures or discrimination that could adversely affect independent career decisions based on gender, personal preferences, or any condition other than the professional qualification and achievements of the individual.

Study culture, diversity, and inclusivity

EKA is especially proud of its dynamic and international study culture that welcomes and celebrates diversity. For this reason, an inclusive environment is a prerequisite to successfully carrying out EKA's educational strategy. Various activities have been implemented to address the needs of international students, including support with document preparation, application for residence permits, and language exams. Similarly, care has been taken to make the adjustment to the study process easy for the local students as well.

One of the main objectives of the gender equality policy in EKA is to ensure equal treatment and opportunities for all students, regardless of their gender, cultural background, or other differences that could place them in a disadvantageous position. Fair study culture and academic achievements are at the center of ensuring study excellence. Staff and student educational activities are carried out on a regular basis according to this plan to increase awareness about gender equality and inclusivity problems and encourage active participation in improving the current situation.

Gender equality implementation mechanism

The main responsibility for gender equality activities is held by the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs and Development. These activities consist of:

- creation of the gender equality plan,
- resource allocation and supervision of the implementation of the plan,
- promotion of discussion among staff members and students about gender equality and the necessary improvements,
- promotion of awareness around gender equality in EKA, approval, and coordination of the related activities,
- supervision of statistical data collection and monitoring, gender balance-associated trend analysis,
- gender equality-associated risk identification and management,
- regular review and update of the existing gender equality strategy based on the available statistical trends and feedback from students and employees,
- transparency and sharing of the results of gender equality activities,
- promotion of experience exchange and continuous learning and improvement by collaboration with external organizations and other higher education institutions.

Situation analysis

Statistical data have been analyzed to assess the gender structure of both EKA employees and students. Data collected at the beginning of the 2022/2023 study year indicate that 72% of all

academic personnel and 86% of administrative personnel are women (see Fig.1). This gender proportion has been consistent for the past three years (data not shown).

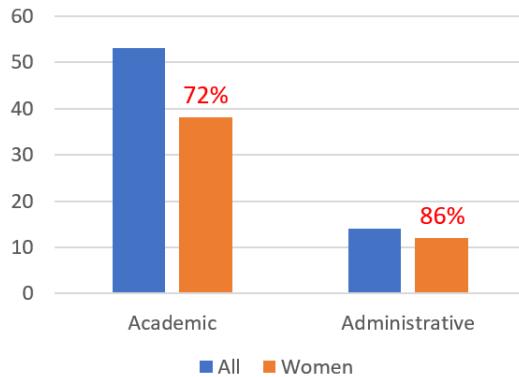


Figure 1. Gender distribution of EKA staff members in the 2022/2023 academic year. Bars represent the numbers of academic and administrative personnel. The percentage of female staff members is shown for each staff category.

For students, according to the statistical data of the three most recent academic years, the total number of students and gender distribution among them have been stable over this period and follow the same trend. Part-time studies are female-dominated (on average 70% of part-time students are female). However, the portion of female students significantly drops in full-time studies (46%) (see Fig.2).

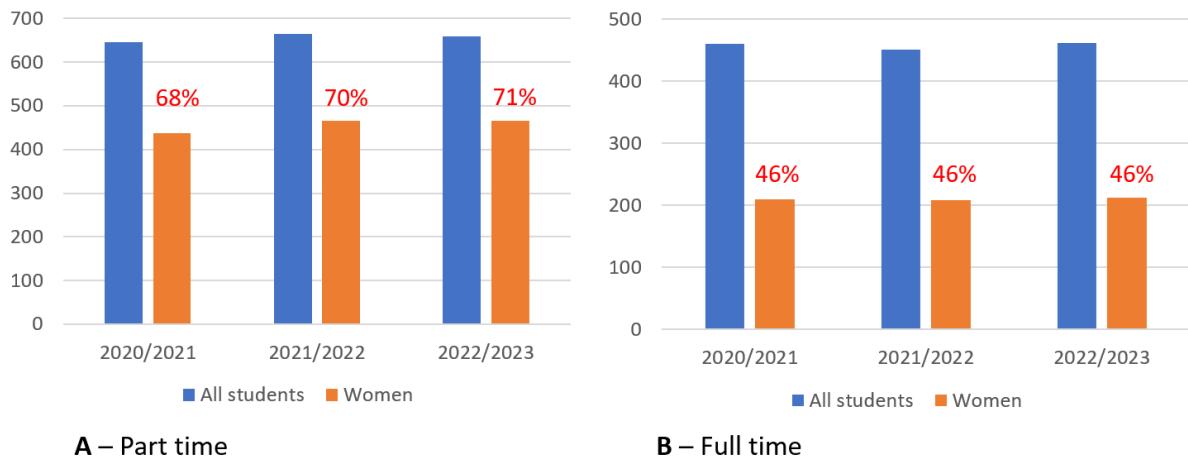


Figure 2. Gender distribution of EKA students over three consecutive academic years. Bars represent the number of students. The percentage of female students is shown.

A more detailed inspection of the gender distribution according to different study programs reveals that most of the programs are preferred by one of the genders and only two programs – International trade and logistics and Computer game design and graphics – are, on average, equally demanded by both male and female students (see Table 1). The majority of EKA study programs attract a predominantly female audience, and the number of male students is very low and even zero in such programs as Events organization, Interior design, and Accounting and audit.

The two EKA study programs that are heavily preferred by male students are Information technologies and Business administration. In the program “Information technologies”, the proportion of women constitutes 20-26% in part-time studies and drops to 7-14% in full-time

studies, whereas the Business administration Master's degree program is attended by 25-32% of women.

An interesting observation is made in the case of two Bachelor level study programs – Management and Business Economics. There are more female students in part-time programs (67-80%) and more male students in full-time programs (0-50% female).

This observation could be, at least in part, explained by the gender dynamics of mobile students. Foreign students make up 50% of all full-time students (equally divided between bachelor and master's level programs), and the majority of them are males – during the last three academic years the female proportion of mobile students has been 18-20% (data not shown).

Table 1. The total number of students and percentage of female students in different EKA study programs. Colors represent gender distribution proportion: yellow – female-dominated, green – male-dominated, orange – equal (45-55%); n – total number; n/a – not applicable.

	Program	2020/2021				2021/2022				2022/2023			
		Part time		Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time		Full time	
		All, n	Wo me n, %										
College level	International trade and logistics	48	50	13	46	40	48	12	42	29	52	7	57
	Events organization	18	89	3	100	12	92	2	100	5	100	1	100
	Marketing	20	80	0	0	13	92	0	0	6	83	0	0
Professional Bachelor	Interior design	35	94	34	76	37	95	42	86	38	95	51	90
	Accounting and audit	94	95	3	100	72	92	1	100	62	92	2	100
	Culture management	57	79	66	89	66	82	53	89	59	88	41	88
	Information technologies (programming)	92	20	14	7	92	25	17	12	88	26	22	14
	Computer game design and graphics	31	32	54	50	32	47	79	49	44	43	81	47
Bachelor	Management	127	67	131	26	121	73	99	30	110	72	97	25
	Business economics	44	80	8	38	47	77	4	50	49	76	5	0
	Law	80	84	9	89	113	81	9	67	129	81	9	78
	Marketing	n/a	n/a	0	0	19	84	4	75	40	80	8	63
Master's	Business administration	n/a	n/a	125	32	n/a	n/a	122	25	n/a	n/a	108	25
	Circular economy and	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	100	n/a	n/a	10	60

Program	2020/2021				2021/2022				2022/2023			
	Part time		Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time		Full time	
	All, n	Women, %										
social entrepreneurs hip												
Brand design	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	n/a	n/a	4	75
International culture project management	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	60	n/a	n/a	16	69

Taken together, data on EKA staff member and student distribution indicate the presence of the following gender differences:

- 1) the majority of academic and administrative staff members are female,
- 2) EKA's culture and art-based study programs, as well as accounting are more popular among female students;
- 3) IT (full and part-time) and full-time business-related programs are preferred by male students;
- 4) female students prefer part-time studies.

These observations could serve as opportunities for further investigation to plan activities for increasing the proportion of underrepresented gender in specific study programs.

In addition, there could be some risks around cultural differences since half of the full-time students are from other countries. Since the majority of these countries are outside the EU (India, Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka are among the top three home countries of EKA mobile students), these students may not be as familiar with the EU culture and gender equality-related values and may require integration activities.

Gender equality plan

The action plan is created to ensure that the gender equality goals of EKA are successfully met and that both men and women are given equal rights and opportunities as members of the EKA community.

Activity	Frequency/Deadline	Description	Expected result
Informative and educational seminars for EKA staff members (academic and administrative)	Yearly	The aim is to inform about the EKA gender equality policy, plans, and achieved results, and to increase awareness and educate EKA employees about gender stereotypes to help them recognize and manage gender-based discrimination in their work and personal lives. It is equally important to provide action steps for individuals when they are personally targets of discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All employees are informed about EKA gender equality activities and understand the importance of them. - Employees receive a general overview and practical tools to identify

Activity	Frequency/Deadline	Description	Expected result
		<p>and when they observe discrimination from their peers.</p> <p>The seminar format should be interactive to promote the active engagement of participants.</p>	discrimination and act to reduce it.
Informative seminar for first-year students before the start of studies	Yearly	<p>The new students are introduced to the EKA gender equality policy and informed about challenges and solutions regarding gender-based discrimination. The aim of this seminar is to promote acceptance and gender-inclusive behavior of students and to help them recognize their rights and act to reduce inequality if they experience it.</p> <p>The seminar format should be interactive to promote the active engagement of participants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All new students have received the relevant information about the EKA gender equality policy. - All new students are informed about the resources and actions they can take to reduce gender inequality.
Display of gender equality-related information on the EKA website	September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information is provided in a visually attractive and easy-to-understand format that matches the design of the website, EKA visual brand, and marketing message. - Information includes general facts about gender equality problems, EKA policy, and goals, and are actionable, i.e. includes specific steps and calls-to-action to promote the right behavior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easily accessible and up-to-date information about EKA gender equality activities. - Serves as a support material for the educational seminars described before.
Statistical data monitoring and trend analysis	Yearly	The data about gender distribution among staff and students are analyzed on a yearly basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of the report. - Data analysis is performed in line with the approved action plan to ensure the current decisions are effective.