

# SUSTAINABILITY PLAN FOR GENDER EQUALITY: CASE STUDY IN KAUNAS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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**Abstract.** The implementation of Activities of Gender Equality Plans in Kaunas University of Technology has showed that the main priority while planning sustainable Actions should be given to the Activities which strengthen the positive image of women and girls in ICT field and involving women in decision making process. Also, the Activities to strengthening and expanding the mentoring Network, helping Women to create their Roadmaps and involving more men to Gender Equality Activities should be included to the Sustainability Plan. Six actions were developed that are compatible with the declared Strategy of Faculty of Informatics as well as Kaunas University of Technology in order to sustain and increase structural changes in university in the terms of gender equality.

**Key words:** gender equality, high education institution, sustainability plan.

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is very trendy topic nowadays. Today it is possible to encounter opinion that in most European countries gender equality principles are already being followed and implemented – women and men have same legal rights, gender discrimination in work is also illegal. There are a number of international, national and local institutions in Europe working to develop initiatives and measures to bridge the gap between men and women. For more than 15 years, girls and women are encouraged to engage in research and careers in ICT field. However, there is still a significant gap across the world in the number of women scientists and researchers in science. According to the data of the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018), currently there are only about 30% of women in the world (39.5% in Central and Eastern Europe, 32.2% in North America and Western Europe). Girls and women are underrepresented in science, technology, mathematics, engineering (STEM). From 2014 to 2016, UNESCO data (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018) show that only about 30% of girls choose to study in STEM. On a global scale, there are very few girls studying information and communication (3%), science, statistics and mathematics (5%), engineering, manufacturing and construction (8%). Statistical data reveal that rooted stereotypes and established opinion in society still influence girls' career choices, motivation to become scientists. The system of higher education is one of the areas where gender approach becomes more and more important. This field can be undoubtedly named as one of indicators of a country's culture and civilization. Nowadays, despite all the laws and strategic documents adopted in Lithuania which reflect high international standard in gender equality area many economic and social indicators show that the real situation of women and men in Lithuanian higher education system as well as in other areas of social life is very different. Kaunas University of Technology is carrying out various measures in order to equalize gender distribution. One of measures is project EQUAL-IST implemented by Faculty of Informatics at Kaunas University of Technology has come far with the realization of structure and activities for Gender Equality. The change can be measured by the number of implemented Activities and the changed approach to Gender Equality can be identified not just in the Faculty but also in the University level as well. For this reason, the Sustainability for Activities is a must for keeping the chosen direction and pushing forward the Gender Equality.

## 1.2 MEASURES TO MAINTAIN SUSTAINABILITY OF GENDER EQUALITY IN KTU

The implementation of Activities of Gender Equality Plans has showed that the main priority while planning sustainable Actions will be given to the Activities which strengthen the positive image of women and girls in ICT field and involving women in decision making process. Also, the Activities to strengthening and expanding the mentoring Network, helping Women to create their Roadmaps and involving more men to Gender Equality Activities will be included to the Sustainability Plan. These main directions are compatible with the declared Strategy of Faculty of Informatics as well as Kaunas University of Technology.

The Sustainability Actions are foreseen for the timeframe of three years. In this period of time, it is expected to expand the integration of Gender Equality Activities to the Faculty and make it natural. Additionally, the three year period of time will be dedicated to share good practices with other Departments or Institutions to help them to Design and Implement Gender Equality Plans.

The Sustainability Plan of Kaunas University of Technology covers the following Areas of Intervention: (i) Human Resources and Management practices; (ii) Teaching and Students Services; (iii) Other. Each of the Area of Intervention covers at least one Action which contains Activities. The following list presents the Actions and Activities which will be sustained in each Area of Intervention:

### **Human Recourses and Management Practices:**

- Create Mentoring network for Women:
  - A creation of Mentoring network of Research Professionals and PhD students.
- Help Women to create their Roadmaps:
  - Individual Counselling and Monitoring to Women in designing their Career Plans.
- Involve women to organization decision making process by supporting women leadership:
  - Women's involvement into Gender Equality Committee work.

### **Teaching and Students Services:**

- Present more good practices of women working in IT:
  - An organization of special session "Women in ICT" in International Conference ALTA.
  - An Event for girls to present best samples of women in ICT.

### **Other:**

- Encourage men to stand for Gender Equality:
  - An event of Summer Camp: Gender Equality of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Area.
- Maintain and disseminate Gender Equality Plans in a wider range:
  - A Creation of Special Interest Group (SIG)

The implementation and sustainability of the Activities presented before will ensure the structural changes in Kaunas University of Technology. These Activities not just ensure the maintain of structural changes which were initiated during the implementation process of Gender Equality Plans but also will not require much of human, financial and knowledge recourses distribution. Almost all initiated, implemented and now sustained Activities are incorporated to other existing Activities at Kaunas University of Technology that will be maintained after the project life-cycle. Additionally, some of the Activities are implemented in the level of University (e.g. Gender Equality Committee) which will be supported with the resources of University. Other Activities, such like mentoring Network or Career Plans will be involved in the Action Plan of the Faculty of Informatics and promoted locally. All the described Activities will be sustained at least a year after project end.

### 1.3 SUSTAINABILITY PLAN OF KAUNAS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Clear steps for reducing gender distribution inequalities are very important in order to maintain reached results and move forward. One of the suggested measures is the development of the support system for women (Bohnet, 2016). Creating the mentoring network can be very helpful in supporting women in men dominant fields. The Action *"Create mentoring Network for Women"* will be implemented in Kaunas University of Technology to help Women who study in the field of ICT. Especially, junior researchers, PhD students as mentees and associated professors as mentors. This Action aims to connect people (student and a professor) for further collaboration and mentoring Activities: working on their professional development, development in different area, work (study)-life balance and many other development Areas which are important for PhD student to take into. To cover this Action the Activity "A Creation of mentoring network of Research Professionals and PhD students" is designed in the sustainable manner. This Activity reinforces the maintaining of support for specific female PhD students who study in the field of ICT. This Activity initiates important structural changes in the Faculty of Informatics as female PhD students never before had any kind of support which would include not just their professional but also private life (the work-life balance approach). Additionally, this kind of mentoring helps to guide students through different of life situations which might cause an early drop-out or resignation in further Career in ICT field.

Another action *"Help Women to create their Roadmaps"* is dedicated to help female academic and administrative staff of the Faculty of Informatics to plan their Career and foreseen or initiate some changes due to reach the set goals. This Action is aimed to help to create a more motivated and more self-confident community as well as help female academic and administrative staff to set clear Career Goals and have a long-term Career vision. This Action is very important to the structural change at Kaunas University of Technology because before this Action no Career Planning Template was adapted according to specificity of ICT field. It supports a sustainable implementation of Gender Equality in the Faculty of Informatics as it empower women to pay more attention to their Career and take active Actions towards it. Women who are able to clearly communicate their achievements and aspirations are more likely to reach higher career goals and are more satisfied with their careers. Compensation growth is closely related to the ability to confidently seek for acknowledgement for accomplishments and asking for appreciation when they deserved it (Carte, Silva, 2011). Clear career plan can help develop confidence in acknowledging ones achievements and proving to the manager the level of reached competences.

Further action *"Involve women to organization decision making process by support women leadership"* is aimed to involve women into decision making process. This Action is also aimed to promote the women's leadership through participation in the Gender Equality Committee work. This Action will help to empower women to participate in organization decision making process by taking Action in the Committee for Gender Equality. This Action supports structural changes in the Kaunas University of Technology as the Gender Equality Committee was established together with the EQUAL-IST Working Group members and it was the first entity in the University which is related to Gender Equality Assurance. The involvement of women in the GE Committee work will broaden the understanding of the existing situation in most risky environment for Gender Equality – Information Technology field. Also, the Committee will help to ensure and monitor the level of implementation of Gender Equality by sharing their Gender Knowledge and detecting Gender Sensitive points.

Another measure for encouraging gender equality is *"Present more good practices of women working in IT"* aims to improve the existing image of women working in IT field. The existing image of women in IT

is diverse: at one side a woman is seen as a nerd who cares about computers and systems only, at the other side, it is still believed that there is no place for women in IT and the biggest gender discrimination rate is in IT field. The presentation of more good practices of women in IT encourages more girls and women to think about the Career in IT field as well as choose more STEM related studies in future. To support and present more good practices, two Activities are planned to sustain after the project life-time: "An organization of special session "Women in ICT" in International Conference ALTA" and "An Event for girls to present best samples of women in ICT". The first Activity is aimed to encourage young female researchers working in ICT field to share their results of their researches, to share their insights and ideas as well as present good practices of female researchers. The second Activity is aimed to attract more young girls to study ICT related programmes and plan their Careers in IT field. This Action supports structural changes by offering more Gender related topics, be open to female researchers and present them as innovators, entrepreneurs and researchers. Also, it helps to improve the image of Kaunas University of Technology as Gender Welcome Institution. Nevertheless, this Action also encourages to be more Gender-sensitive and gender supportive as well as make to re-think the long-term strategy of the University.

It is very important to inform not only women, but also men working in University about uneven distribution in help position between men and women. It is not only women issue, it also covers human rights. The greater impact can be reached if representatives from both genders collaborate and search for common points (HeForShe, 2018). The Action "*Encourage men to stand for Gender Equality*" is aimed to encourage men to take Actions to support Gender Equality as well as seek for Equal Rights in the IT and other fields. The Action includes a new Activity "An event of Summer Camp: Gender Equality of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Area" which aims to help to better disseminate why men should be active in Gender Equality, why it is useful for both Genders and what is the current situation. The Activity should invite all students studying STEM to get to know Gender Equality Issues and why they are so important in daily life as well as to learn to recognize them and avoid Gender sensitive situations or language. The Action "Encourage men to stand for Gender Equality" supports structural changes in the Kaunas University of Technology as it includes all male staff (academic and administrative) to take an act and get involved with other Actions which are related with Gender Equality. It also helps to better understand why it is important and what to do to avoid it. These reasons help to ease the implementation of Strategic Development of the University.

The Action "Maintain and disseminate Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in a wider range" is aimed to keep implementing the most successful Activities described in GEP as well as seek for new Activities to ensure the Gender Equality in Research Institutions. The Action includes the Activity "A Creation of Special Interest Group (SIG)" which aims at dissemination and implementation of Gender Equality Plans in a wider community. The Group also serves as a counselling Group where more experienced members help to implement GEPs in Institutions with no or very little experience with Gender Equality. Since the SIG involves 10 higher education institutions, it will be implemented in National level. This Group also make some essential changes at Kaunas University of Technology as it is a more experienced institution and sharing the experience in Gender Equality helps to clear the main directions of Actions which would be useful for development of our Institution.

## 1.4 CONCLUSION

Kaunas University of Technology is actively implementing measures in order to address and solve issues of horizontal and vertical segregation in research and administrative careers and promote equality in university. The developed Sustainability plan is compatible with the declared Strategy of Faculty of Informatics as well as Kaunas University of Technology and covers six measures that will be used to keep the changes already made at the university on gender equality. Anticipated actions include: creating mentoring network for women, helping women to create their roadmaps, involving women to organization decision making process by supporting women leadership, present more good practices of women working in IT, encouraging men to stand for gender equality and finally maintaining and disseminating gender equality plans in a wider range.

## 1.5 AFFILIATIONS

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# LYČIŲ LYGYBĖS ĮGYVENDINIMO TVARUMO PLANAS: KAUNO TECHNOLOGIJOS UNIVERSITETO ATVEJIS

**Anotacija.** Lyčių lygybės plano Kauno technologijos universitete įgyvendinimas parodė, kad pagrindinis prioritetas planuojant tvarius veiksmus turėtų būti skiriamas veiklai, kuri stiprina teigiamą moterų ir mergaičių įvaizdį IRT srityje ir įtraukia moteris į sprendimų priėmimo procesą. Be to, į Tvarumo planą turėtų būti įtrauktos mentorystės tinklo stiprinimo ir išplėtimo priemonės, padedančios moterims kurti savo veiksmų planus ir įtraukti daugiau vyrų į lyčių lygybės veiklą. Numatyti šeši veiksmai, suderinti su Informatikos fakulteto ir Kauno technologijos universiteto strategija, siekiant išlaikyti ir didinti struktūrinius pokyčius universitete lyčių lygybės požiūriu.

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** lyčių lygybė, aukštojo mokslo įstaiga, tvarumo planas.