

APPROVED BY

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## **GENDER EQUALITY PLAN 2025-2028**

### **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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029 was adopted in 2024. It directly addresses many of the targets of SDG No. 5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”), including human dignity and the fight against gender inequality, the promotion of the full participation of women in society, the need to guarantee access to fair justice systems for all and the need to work in partnerships. SDG No. 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) is also relevant to the Council of Europe’s work on gender equality as it refers to providing “access to justice for all”. Gender equality-related targets under other SDGs are also relevant for the new strategy. The overall goal of the new strategy is to achieve the effective realization of gender equality and to empower women and men in the Council of Europe member States, by supporting the implementation of existing standards and strengthening the Council of

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission. (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](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en)

<sup>2</sup> European Commission. (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>

Europe acquis in the field of gender equality, under the guidance of the Gender Equality Commission. The focus for the period 2024-2029 is on six strategic areas:

- preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism;
- preventing and combating violence against women and girls and domestic violence;
- ensuring equal access to justice for women and girls;
- achieving balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social and economic life;
- ensuring women's empowerment and gender equality in relation to global and geopolitical challenges;
- achieving gender mainstreaming and including an intersectional approach in all policies and measures<sup>3</sup>.

While a separate action plan has not been issued, the strategy document itself details the measures and actions to be undertaken to achieve its six strategic objectives.

Latvia has adopted the aforementioned policy. The Ministry of Welfare plans to implement targeted measures to promote the realization of equal rights and opportunities for women and men. To achieve this goal, three main action directions have been set: equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the labour market and education, reducing negative gender-related stereotypes, and integrating the principle of gender equality into policy planning processes. This is outlined in the “Plan for the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024–2027.” Through this plan, the most pressing challenges are addressed, with a primary focus on reducing stereotypes and prejudices in various fields, particularly in the labour market and education.<sup>4</sup>

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**

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<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe (2024) Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029. Retrieved February 18, 2025, from <https://rm.coe.int/prems-073024-gbr-2573-gender-equality-strategy-2024-29-txt-web-a5-2756/1680afc66a>

<sup>4</sup> Labklājības Ministrija (2024) Valdība apstiprina plānu sievietēm un vīriešiem vienlīdzīgu tiesību un iespēju veicināšanai. Retrieved February 18, 2025, from <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/valdiba-apstiprina-planu-sieviesu-un-viriesu-vienlidzigu-tiesibu-un-iespeju-veicinasanai>

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.

### **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.

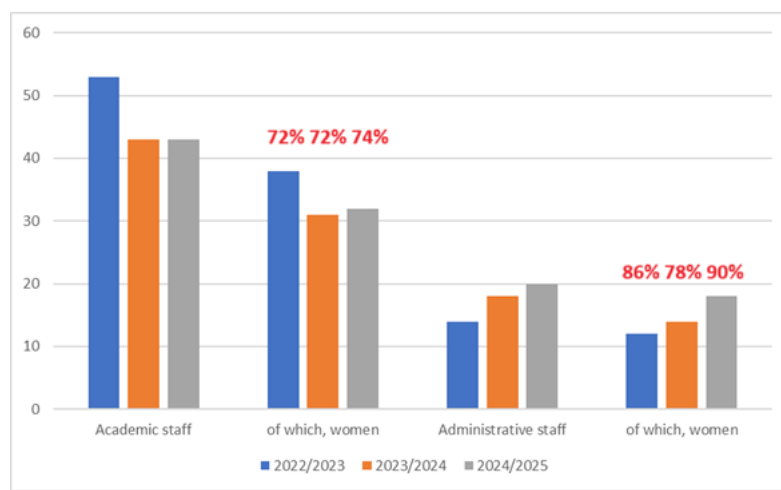
### Gender equality implementation mechanism

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

A statistical data analysis was conducted to assess the gender structure of both EKA employees and students. The study compiled data from the last three academic years for both academic and administrative staff. The results are presented in Figure 1.

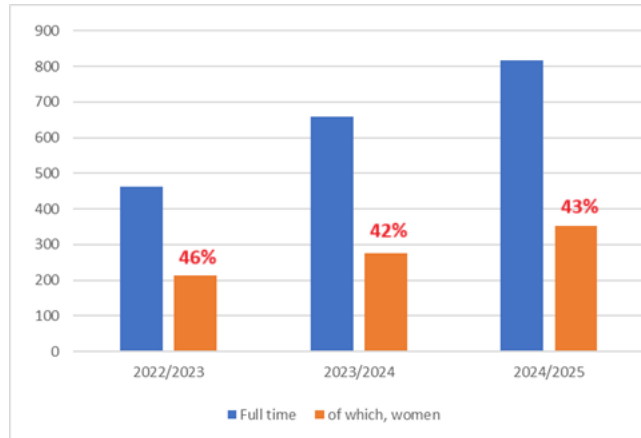


**Figure 1.** Gender distribution of EKA staff in the academic years 2022–2025.

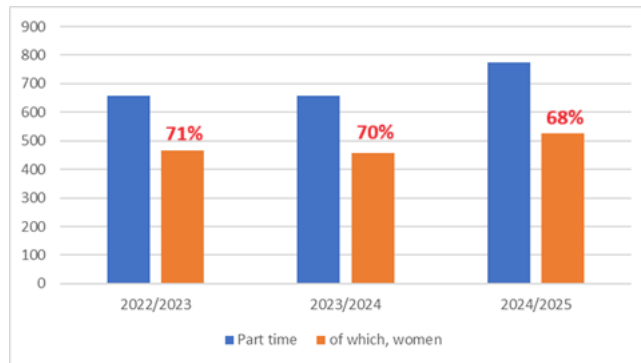
- The number of academic staff decreased by 19% in 2023/2024 but remained stable in 2024/2025. Meanwhile, the number of administrative staff has significantly increased, with an overall growth of 43% from 2022 to 2025.
- The proportion of women in academic staff slightly increased from 72% to 74%.

- In administrative staff, the proportion of women initially decreased to 78% in 2023/2024 but then increased to 90% in 2024/2025.

Thus, while there has been a reduction in academic staff, the proportion of women in this category remains high. At the same time, the number of administrative staff has grown, particularly with a notable increase in the number of women.



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



**Figure 3.** Gender distribution of EKA part time students over three consecutive academic years. Bars represent the number of students. The percentage of female students is shown.

According to statistical data from the last three academic years, the proportion of women in full-time studies was initially 46% (2022/2023), decreased to 42% (2023/2024), and then slightly increased to 43% (2024/2025). Although the absolute number of women has grown, their proportion among full-time students has remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 40–46%.

In part-time studies, the proportion of women was initially 71% (2022/2023), then slightly decreased to 69% (2023/2024) and continued to decline to 68% (2024/2025). This indicates a trend where the proportion of men in part-time studies is gradually increasing.

In conclusion, we can say the following: the absolute number of women in full-time studies is growing at a faster pace, but their percentage fluctuates. Meanwhile, in part-time studies, the proportion of women is gradually decreasing, indicating that this study format is becoming increasingly popular among men.

**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	2022/2023				2023/2024				2024/2025			
		Part time		Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time		Full time	
		All, n	Women, %	All, n	Women, %	All, n	Women, %	All, n	Women, %	All, n	Women, %	All, n	Women, %
College level	International trade and logistics	29	52	7	57	25	56	4	50	27	56	2	50
	Events organization	5	100	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Marketing	6	83	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Professional Bachelor	Interior design	38	95	51	90	44	98	52	94	43	95	54	100
	Accounting and audit	62	92	2	100	54	93	0	0	9	100	0	0
	Culture management	59	88	41	88	57	86	35	91	62	90	37	86
	Information technologies (programming)	88	26	22	14	77	31	39	15	94	28	61	15
	Computer game design and graphics	44	43	81	47	37	41	115	54	0	0	0	0
Bachelor	Management	110	72	97	25	116	67	91	20	136	68	80	24
	Business economics	49	76	5	0	40	60	21	0	51	61	34	9
	Law	129	81	9	78	121	76	0	0	146	73	5	80
	Marketing	40	80	8	63	85	81	38	42	120	78	77	49
	Management									39	92	0	0
	Business economics									47	36	121	54
Master's degree	Business administration	n/a	n/a	108	25	n/a	n/a	203	28	n/a	n/a	262	32
	Circular economy and social entrepreneurship	n/a	n/a	10	60	n/a	n/a	16	31	n/a	n/a	27	44
	Brand design	n/a	n/a	4	75	n/a	n/a	19	79	n/a	n/a	16	94
	International culture project management	n/a	n/a	16	69	n/a	n/a	27	48	n/a	n/a	42	38

Data from Table 1 indicates that in most EKA study programs, one gender tends to dominate. Only a few programs, such as "International Trade and Logistics," maintain a balanced gender distribution, with the proportion of female students ranging from approximately 50% to 57% in both part-time and full-time studies.

The majority of study programs are particularly popular among female students. "Interior Design," "Accounting and Audit," "Cultural Management," and "Law" maintain a high proportion of female students, exceeding 80–95%. A particularly strong female majority is observed in "Interior Design," where the percentage of female students reaches 100% in the 2024/2025 academic year.

On the other hand, "Information Technology (Programming)" and "Game Design and Graphics" are programs dominated by male students. In "Information Technology", the proportion of female students remains very low (26–31% in part-time studies and 14–15% in full-time studies). "Game Design and Graphics" will no longer be available in full-time or part-time studies in the 2024/2025 academic year.

An interesting trend is observed in the "Management Studies" and "Business Economics" programs – in part-time studies, female students make up the majority (60–76% in "Business Economics" and 67–72% in "Management Studies"), while in full-time studies, this proportion decreases to 0–25%.

At the master's level, "Business Management" is the most in-demand program and is dominated by male students, with the percentage of female students in full-time studies reaching only 32% in the 2024/2025 academic year. The proportion of female students in the "Circular Economy" program has decreased, reaching 44% in 2024/2025, while "Brand Design" attracts a significantly higher percentage of female students (94%).

These observations can be explained by the gender dynamics of international students, as the majority of full-time foreign students are male, as well as by industry-specific characteristics that traditionally attract students of a particular gender.

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 2025-2028

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	<p>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 and when they observe discrimination from their peers.</p> <p>The seminar format should be interactive to promote the active engagement of participants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All employees are informed about EKA gender equality activities and understand the importance of them.</li> <li>- Employees receive a general overview and practical tools to identify discrimination and act to reduce it.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>- All new students have received the relevant information about the EKA gender equality policy.</li> <li>- All new students are informed about the resources and actions they can take to reduce gender equality.</li> </ul>
Display of gender equality-related information on the EKA website	February 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 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.</li> <li>- 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.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easily accessible and up-to-date information about EKA gender equality activities.</li> <li>- Serves as a support material for the educational seminars described before.</li> </ul>
Statistical data monitoring and trend analysis	Yearly	<p>The data about gender distribution among staff and students are analyzed on a yearly basis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparation of the report.</li> <li>- Data analysis is performed in line with the approved action plan to ensure the current decisions are effective.</li> </ul>