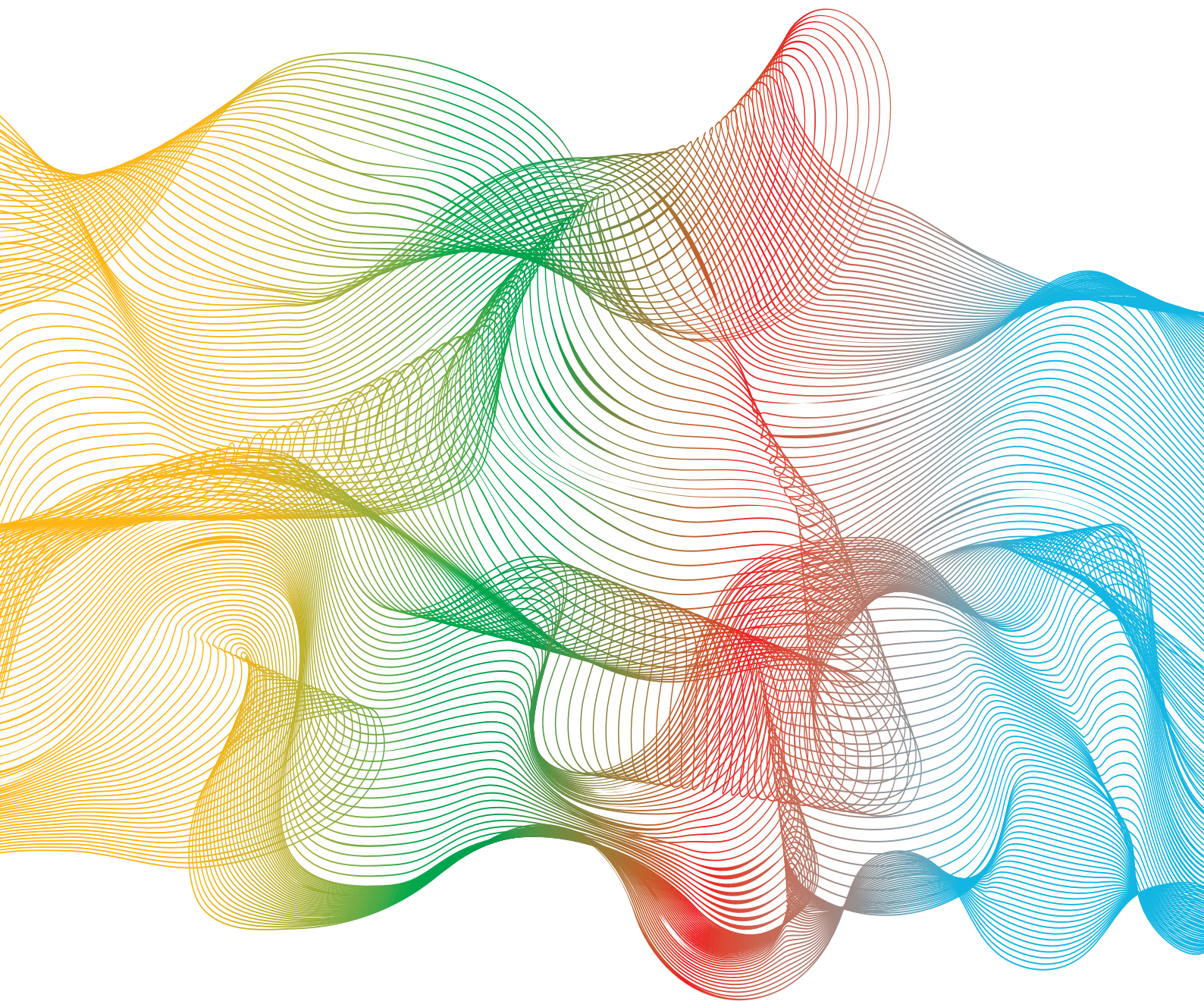


# UNU Gender Equality: Policy & Action Plan 2025–2029

Institution-wide Policy and Action Plan to Advance  
Gender Equality at the United Nations University



**UNU**

## Background

Since 2016, the United Nations University (UNU) has advanced gender equality through an institution-wide policy and successive action plans. The 2016 UNU Policy on Gender Equality and accompanying Gender Action Plan 2016–2019 operationalized core commitments across nine areas and clarified leadership and staff responsibilities. With its second Gender Action Plan 2020–2024, UNU further embedded gender equality in culture, research, and operations, aligning with the UN system-wide frameworks such as UN-System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) and the [Secretary-General’s Gender Parity Strategy](#). In 2025, UNU consulted its Gender Focal Point network, researchers, senior leadership, and institute directors to update the UNU Policy and Action Plan for the next period.

The revised *UNU Policy on Gender Equality* broadens the scope of UNU’s commitment, moving beyond parity to enhanced gender mainstreaming in both research and institutional activities, and adopting a more inclusive approach in both substance and language. The Policy reaffirms that gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to UNU’s mission and sets the principles, responsibilities, and institutional expectations for achieving equality, parity, and inclusion across all areas of work. It establishes foundational commitments — including gender mainstreaming, non-discrimination, inclusive leadership, and continuous monitoring—that guide decision-making at all levels.

# UNU Policy on Gender Equality

## Purpose

1. Gender equality and women’s empowerment are foundational to the United Nations University’s (UNU) mission to address global challenges related to human survival, development, and welfare. Aligning the institution’s internal commitment to equality and inclusion allows it to amplify its impact in promoting gender equality globally. The purpose of this policy is to advance gender equality at the United Nations University by promoting gender parity at all levels of employment in the University, adopting gender equity measures where appropriate, and enhancing gender mainstreaming in the University’s research, teaching, capacity development, and dissemination activities.

## Applicability

2. This policy applies to all areas of the University’s work, including, but not limited to, research design and outputs; educational content and delivery; institutional governance and decision-making; staff recruitment and advancement; and engagement with external partners.

## Responsibility

3. The Rector and senior colleagues, including directors of UNU Institutes and Programmes have the ultimate responsibility for the implementation of this policy and accompanying action plan at their respective levels.

4. The UNU Gender Focal Point (UNU-GFP) network is the institutional structure that supports and contributes to the University’s work on gender equality. Gender Focal Points at each institute/programme/work unit provide support in the iteration, implementation, and monitoring of this policy, and accompanying action plan.
5. All University personnel as defined in the UNU Personnel Policy, as well as individuals who are affiliated with UNU under contractual or other collaborative arrangements, such as consultants, interns, research fellows, or United Nations Volunteers (UNVs), shall carry out their activities in accordance with the principles and features outlined by this policy.
6. Specific responsibilities will be assigned to selected individuals, offices and units of the UNU.

## Definitions

*Full definitions of terms used in this Policy are contained in the Annex.*

7. As a UN entity, UNU adopts standard UN definitions for the following terms: gender, gender-based discrimination, gender equality, gender equity, gender mainstreaming, gender parity, and intersectionality. These definitions are directly adapted from UN bodies like UN Women, UNICEF, ECOSOC, and UNU’s Policy on Prohibited Conduct.
8. This policy primarily addresses structural inequalities between men and women, while encouraging inclusive,

gender-sensitive approaches that reflect a spectrum of identities and expressions beyond the binary.

## Principles

9. The University shall promote gender mainstreaming in all its activities, including in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of its programmes.
10. The University shall strive to achieve gender equality in its operations and at all levels of employment.
11. The University stands against any form of gender-based discrimination in its operations and at all levels of employment, in accordance with the UNU Policy on Prohibited Conduct. The University may adopt gender equity measures to ensure fair treatment of all individuals, recognizing that different strategies may be required to achieve equal outcomes for all genders.
12. The University shall make efforts to reach gender parity at all levels of employment for staff members and Personnel Service Agreement holders, and, as feasible, aim for gender parity for those under other contractual modalities, or associated with UNU, such as interns and students.
13. The University aims to foster an inclusive and gender-responsive institutional environment by initiating activities such as mentorship programmes, leadership development opportunities and more, with the specifics outlined in its accompanying action plan.
14. The University recognises that women's empowerment is central to achieving gender equality.

## Leadership

15. In providing strategic direction to, and leadership for, gender mainstreaming across the University, Senior Management, the Directors of institutes and programmes, the Gender Focal Points, will promote a gender-aware culture free from gender biases and stereotypes that perpetuate inequalities.

## Policy formulation and strategic planning

16. Senior Management and the Directors of institutes and programmes shall ensure that the principles and objectives laid out in this policy are reflected in UNU-wide and institute-level policies and strategic and/or implementation plans, to ensure that gender perspectives, and the potential impact of policies or plans on gender equality, are taken into account.

## Organizational structure and framework for action

17. The University shall employ any means it deems appropriate to implement the present policy including, but not limited to, adapting organizational structures, systems, and practices, developing action plans and guidelines, implementing sensitization and/or training programmes, maintaining complaint channels, and maintaining a decentralized network of Gender Focal Points, and through resource mobilization and consideration of gender-related costs in budgeting processes.
18. A Gender Action Plan (GAP) will be developed to accompany this policy and should delineate the concrete actions which the University will take for the Plan's implementation, monitoring, and reporting, and include timeframes for achievement of goals and targets set.
19. The GAP shall be reviewed regularly and updated, as possible, at the same time as each new UNU-wide Strategy. The GAP themes and objectives will align with the UN System-Wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) and other UN-wide mechanisms as relevant to UNU.

## Programmes and projects

20. The University will take measures to mainstream gender in its research and training, including, where feasible, measures such as conducting gender-sensitive curriculum reviews, aiming for gender balance in research teams, panels, and publication boards, and integrating gender perspectives in syllabi and research methodologies, as outlined in the GAP.
21. In designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating its projects and programmes, the University, whenever applicable, shall ensure that consideration is given to, among others: the concerns, capacities, contributions, needs of, and consequences for, women, men, and gender-diverse people, as relevant; the practices intended to facilitate gender mainstreaming through projects; the participation of women, men, and gender-diverse people, as relevant, in projects; the likely and/or intended impact of projects on gender equality; and lessons learned.

## Accountability and monitoring

22. The GAP will include an accountability framework that sets out the specific responsibilities to support policy implementation.

23. The UNU Office of the Rector will report in writing on the progress of implementation of this policy and accompanying GAP to the UNU Council at least once every two years; and report and comply with other reporting requirements of the UN system, including UN-SWAP, as needed.
24. The University is committed to collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data, as possible, across relevant institutional functions, such as, research outputs, student and participant enrolments, promotions, short-listing, and personnel attrition, using such analysis to further improve the objectives of this Policy.

# UNU Gender Action Plan 2025-2029

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## UNU’s new Gender Action Plan 2025-2029

Between 2020 and 2024, UNU advanced gender equality by strengthening parity, expanding gender responsive research, and increasing institutional awareness across programmes and operations. Building on this progress, the Gender Action Plan 2025–2029 (GAP 3.0) and Accountability Framework reflects updated priorities, lessons learned, and sets out how UNU will implement the revised *UNU Policy on Gender Equality* over the next 5 years. Further, it complements the UNU Strategy 2025–2029, the University’s implementation of the Secretary-General’s Gender Parity Strategy, and aligns with the most recent UN-SWAP framework, UN-SWAP 3.0. Together, these elements position GAP 3.0 as a forward looking framework for consistent, coordinated, and measurable progress across UNU.

Key features of GAP 3.0 include:

- A more policy-oriented structure with six strategic priority areas;
- Clearly defined objectives and activities;
- Gender-relevant performance indicators to track progress; and
- Strengthened accountability mechanisms and institutional coherence.

The GAP 3.0 has six priority areas:

1. **Strategic Management:** to integrate gender equality into UNU’s governance and strategic planning, ensuring visibility, coherence, and accountability across institutional structures.
2. **Gender Mainstreaming in Research, Capacity Development, Knowledge Sharing, and Communication:** to strengthen gender-responsive research and training, promote inclusive representation in events, and embed gender perspectives in knowledge sharing and communications.

3. **Human and Financial Resources:** to advance gender equity in recruitment, career progression, and performance systems, while securing adequate resources for gender equality initiatives.
4. **Organizational Culture:** to foster a respectful, inclusive, and gender-sensitive work environment that supports staff well-being, career development, and institutional accountability.
5. **Coherence and Partnerships:** to align with UN system-wide gender mechanisms and build strategic partnerships to promote gender equality and empower women and girls.
6. **Monitoring, Reporting and Accountability:** to implement transparent, learning-oriented systems to track progress on gender commitments and align with UN-wide frameworks such as UN-SWAP and the Secretary-General’s Gender Parity Strategy.

A condensed version of the Accountability Framework setting out the roles and responsibilities of UNU senior management and other personnel related to GAP 3.0 is contained in Annex II.

## Priority Area 1: Strategic Management

**Goal:** Embed gender equality as a core dimension of UNU’s institutional governance and long-term planning. This seeks to ensure that gender considerations are systematically integrated into strategic frameworks, aligning with the UNU Policy on Gender Equality and the UNU Strategy 2025–2029, while maintaining responsiveness to evolving internal and external requirements. By positioning the Gender Action Plan (GAP) as a central mechanism and ensuring equitable gender representation across governance bodies, this priority area aims to strengthen coherence, accountability, and visibility of gender equality outcomes at both institutional and institute levels.

**Objectives:**

- 1.1 Position the UNU Policy on Gender Equality and Gender Action Plan (GAP) as a core strategic and operational mechanism for advancing gender equality across all UNU entities.
- 1.2 Encourage institute-level monitoring and reporting on gender-related issues.
- 1.3 Ensure that UNU Advisory Boards and Committees strive for gender parity (50/50 representation), while allowing a 40–60% range where exact parity is not feasible.

**Priority Area 2: Gender Mainstreaming in Research, Capacity Development, Knowledge Sharing, and Communication**

**Goal:** Strengthen institutional and researcher capacity to mainstream gender in research design, implementation, and dissemination, while enhancing policy relevance and visibility of gendered research outcomes. UNU seeks to build skills and foster inter-institute knowledge exchange through measurable and impactful contributions. At the same time, UNU supports gender parity and inclusive representation in events and promotes education, training, and communications to be designed and delivered through a gender lens. The overall objective is to build institutional and individual capacity, improve knowledge management and communication systems, and embed gender-responsive practices across UNU’s research, training, events, and leadership initiatives.

**Objectives:**

- 2.1 Strengthen institutional and individual capacity through gender sensitivity training for all UNU personnel.
- 2.2 Enhance the policy relevance and impact of gender-mainstreamed research, particularly in areas disproportionately affecting the Global South, ensuring contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5 on gender equality.
- 2.3 Promote gender parity and inclusive representation in UNU-organized or co-organized events, by encouraging balanced participation among panellists, speakers, and moderators, and supporting gender-diverse composition in graduate programmes.
- 2.4 Encourage education and capacity development activities — including courses, workshops, and training — to be designed, delivered, and reviewed through a gender lens, where feasible, and contribute to building gender expertise across UNU.
- 2.5 Strengthen knowledge management systems and internal and external communications and outreach to promote gender equality.
- 2.6 Promote gender-responsive leadership and unconscious bias awareness among senior leaders and hiring managers.

**Priority Area 3: Human and Financial Resources**

**Goal:** Achieve and sustain gender equality across UNU by embedding equity, transparency, and inclusivity into recruitment, retention, promotion, and performance monitoring systems. UNU seeks to ensure adequate human and financial resources are allocated to support gender equality initiatives, capacity development, and institutional accountability.

**Objectives:**

- 3.1 Promote inclusive and equitable recruitment, career progression, and promotion opportunities across all staff categories.
- 3.2 Achieve, monitor, and sustain gender parity across all staff categories and levels, in alignment with the UN Secretary-General’s Gender Parity Strategy, and with targeted intervention in areas of persistent disparity.
- 3.3 Establish a financial resource tracking mechanism to quantify and monitor disbursements for gender equality and mainstreaming across UNU.
- 3.4 Set a financial target for gender equality for UNU, ensuring sufficient and predictable resources at headquarters and institute levels for gender equality initiatives including the cost of implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting for the GAP.

**Priority Area 4: Organizational Culture**

**Goal:** Cultivate a respectful, inclusive, and gender-sensitive institutional culture that supports career development, well-being, and accountability, and reflects UNU’s commitment to gender equality across all levels.

**Objectives:**

- 4.1 Strengthen internal career guidance and development.
- 4.2 Promote awareness and engagement with gender policies and inclusive practices.
- 4.3 Foster a safe, inclusive, and family-friendly work environment.
- 4.4 Identify and address formal and informal barriers to gender equality within UNU’s organizational culture.
- 4.5 Establish clear performance goals for Gender Focal Points and integrate GFP leads’ input into their appraisal process.

### Priority Area 5: Coherence and Partnerships

**Goal:** Enhance UNU coherence with UN system-wide gender equality mechanisms and strengthen partnerships and stakeholder engagement that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

**Objectives:**

- 5.1 Strengthen engagement in UN inter-agency gender equality mechanisms.
- 5.2 Maximize the impact of gender-related work through strategic partnerships and joint initiatives.
- 5.3 Engage meaningfully with organizations that promote gender equality and the rights of women and girls.

### Priority Area 6: Monitoring, Reporting, and Accountability

**Goal:** Establish transparent, learning-oriented mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on UNU gender equality commitments, including the UNU Policy on Gender Equality and GAP, and relevant UN system-wide frameworks—such as UN-SWAP 3.0, the Secretary-General’s Gender Parity Strategy, and future such mechanisms introduced during the GAP cycle.

**Objectives:**

- 6.1 Strengthen UNU’s gender equality reporting across UNU and UN system-wide frameworks.
- 6.2 Strengthen institutional accountability and oversight mechanisms to ensure gender equality goals are integrated, monitored, and evaluated throughout the research project lifecycle.
- 6.3 Strengthen leadership accountability and institutional transparency.

## Summary

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The UNU Policy on Gender Equality and the UNU Gender Action Plan 2025–2029 together set out UNU’s commitments and the practical steps for their implementation across research, operations, governance, and institutional culture. Aligned with UN SWAP 3.0

and the UN System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, their combined implementation advances a more inclusive, equitable, and impactful UNU — where personnel, researchers, and partners contribute to and benefit from sustained progress on gender equality.

# Annex

## Annex I: Definitions referenced in the UNU Policy on Gender Equality

Term	UNU Definition	Source
Gender	<p>Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with an individual's physiology or assigned sex of at birth, such as being male or female, or that diverge from these expectations. It also involves the relationships between women, men, and people of diverse identities and expressions across all ages, as well as the relations between these groups. These attributes, opportunities, and relationships are socially constructed, learned through socialization processes, context/time- specific, and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed, and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. The University recognizes that gender is not limited to a binary framework and respects individuals of all identities and expressions.</p> <p>The present policy, however, focuses primarily on addressing the inequalities between men and women, and therefore, predominantly uses these terms. Wherever possible, the policy encourages the application of gender-sensitive approaches that reflect the full spectrum of identities and expressions beyond the binary.</p>	Adapted from <a href="#">UN Women's definition</a> , originally created by the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).
Intersectionality	Intersectionality refers to the recognition that people's lives are influenced by their identities, relationships, and social factors. The combination of these factors creates intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on an individual's context and existing power structures, such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism. At its core, intersectionality is a framework for understanding identity and its relationship to power. Adopting an intersectional lens in gender equality efforts is essential to achieve substantive equality that leaves no one behind.	Adapted from <a href="#">UN Women's Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit</a> .
Gender mainstreaming	Gender mainstreaming refers to the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action through an intersectional lens, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.	Adapted from the definition in the <a href="#">ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2</a> .
Gender parity	Gender parity refers to the equal representation of men and women at the University, or at a particular level of employment. It involves ensuring equal opportunities of men and women, including pay parity and career advancement, and serves as a crucial step toward achieving gender equality.	
Gender equality	Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the intersectional and diverse experiences of different groups of women and men, and how these shape their opportunities, challenges, and outcomes. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.	Adapted from <a href="#">UN Women's definition</a> , originally created by the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).
Gender equity	Gender equity refers to the fair and just treatment of individuals based on their gender and recognizes that achieving equality in outcomes may require temporary special measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination. Equity ensures that women and men, and girls and boys have an equal chance, not only at the starting point, but also when reaching the finishing line. It aims for equal access and equitable outcomes by considering the specific needs, experiences and barriers faced by different groups.	Adapted from <a href="#">UNICEF Glossary of Terms and Concepts (2017)</a> .
Gender-based discrimination	Gender-based discrimination refers to the unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on gender. Gender-based discrimination may be an isolated event affecting one person or a group of persons similarly situated, or it may manifest itself through harassment or abuse of authority.	Adapted from <a href="#">UNU Policy on Prohibited Conduct (2019)</a> .

**Annex II: Accountability Framework – UNU Gender Action Plan 2025–2029**

**Institutional Leadership**

Actor	Responsibilities
Rector	Provides overall leadership on gender equality, ensures the Policy and Action Plan are implemented across UNU, and reports progress to the UNU Council.
UNU Council	Oversees institutional progress on gender equality and reviews reports on the implementation of the Policy and Action Plan.
Institute Directors	Lead implementation of the Policy and Action Plan within their institutes, integrate gender equality into planning and reporting, and support their Gender Focal Points with adequate resources.
UNU Advisory Boards/Committees	Monitor gender-related indicators and support efforts to strengthen gender balance in staffing, governance, and advisory structures.

**Operational Leads**

Actor	Responsibilities
Main Gender Focal Point/s	Coordinate institution wide implementation of the Policy and Gender Action Plan, provide guidance and tools to Gender Focal Points, and lead UNU's gender-related reporting, including UN SWAP requirements.
Designated Institute/Unit Gender Focal Points (GFPs)	Support colleagues and institute leadership by raising awareness, promoting application of the Policy and Gender Action Plan, and contributing to the wider Gender Focal Point network.
Human Resources (HR)	Supports gender responsive organizational policies and practices, including recruitment, performance management, flexibility, and staff development, and maintains gender disaggregated institutional data.
Office of Communications (OC)	Ensures public-facing materials reflect gender inclusive language and imagery, and promotes gender mainstreamed research, events, and campaigns.
Finance and Administration	Supports financial planning and tracking related to gender equality initiatives and assists institutes in budgeting for gender related work where applicable.
Project Managers	Integrate gender considerations into project design, planning, and reporting, and apply UNU gender markers and requirements throughout the project cycle.

**All Personnel**

Actor	Responsibilities
Managers	Promote inclusive work environments, consider gender balance in recruitment and staffing, and support gender-responsive practices within their teams.
All Staff	Contribute to an inclusive and gender sensitive institutional culture, complete required gender-related training, and integrate gender considerations into their work where applicable.