

# GEARING-Roles: a project to remember

## Lessons and thoughts from a four-year project

The GEARING-Roles project, which stands for Gender Equality Actions in Research Institutions to traNsform Gender ROLES, is about to end after four years of intense and fruitful work.

GEARING-Roles committed to designing, implementing and evaluating six gender equality plans (GEPs) across six research institutions in Europe, namely:

- Deusto University
- IGOT, University of Lisbon
- Sabanci University
- Oxford Brookes University
- Estonian Research Council
- Faculty of the Arts University of Ljubljana.

Through these and other project activities, the project hopes to have a broader impact on academia in Europe. It wants to challenge and transform gender roles and identities linked to professional careers and achieve real institutional change.

To prepare for their gender equality plan, each implementing institution undertook an institutional analysis to understand their unique environment and cultural contexts. This process also included evaluating how gender roles and identities played out in their institutions in terms of disaggregated data of staff, degrees and professional ranks. Among other results,

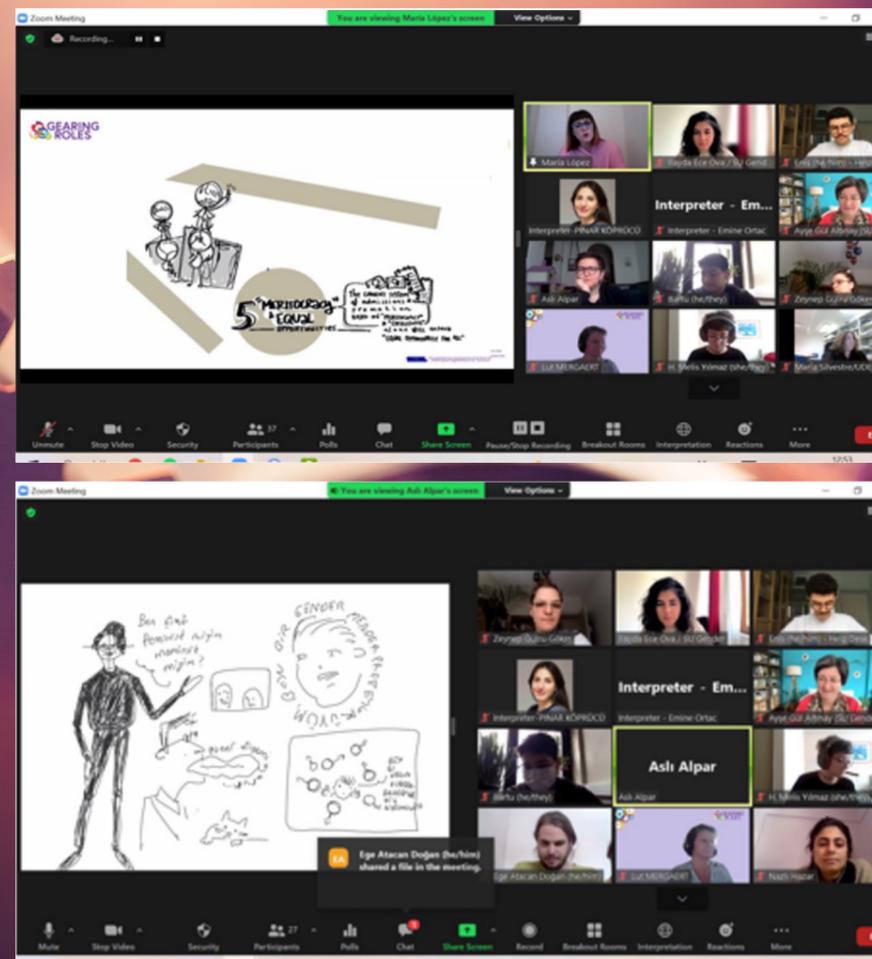
it was clear from this analysis that there was a gender divide in these institutions. This understanding allowed institutions to form a better idea of what needed to be done to achieve gender equality in their organisation, enabling them to design their gender equality plan.

Throughout the four years of the project, partners and implementing institutions have achieved remarkable things. All implementing partners have made huge strides with their GEPs, which have all been approved by their institutions and are being implemented through a range of different actions in dimensions such as diverse recruitment practices, gender in teaching and research, leadership training, mentoring and sexual and gender-based harassment. The project has also worked hard with other projects to get their broader mission out there through online campaigns, joint events and joint blog posts. Indeed, the project dissemination and communication activities have been extensive and have reached wide audiences, particularly the project's Nobel Run game. Nobel Run is a deck-building game in which players, with the help of some world-famous female scientists, must manage a research team, hire pre-docs, post-docs and seniors, publish articles and get funding through international projects, all with the overarching aim to win a Nobel Prize. But beyond its wider impact, the project

has inspired and equipped women in academia across its six implementing institutions. It has managed to bring people together from different units (administrative and academic) to reflect on gender equality and take collective steps towards institutionalisation. GEARING-Roles has also provided individuals with new skills through training sessions and a mentoring programme for young academics. Its campaigns and social media channels have also managed to engage students. For all these achievements and, in particular, for the Nobel Run game, the European Commission named GEARING-Roles Project of the Month in May 2021.

Despite these incredible achievements, not everything has been smooth sailing. The most common challenges the project has faced have been a lack of interest in gender mainstreaming and a lack of will at the upper administration level to implement gender equality plans. The pandemic was also challenging for many partners who relied on social and informal interactions to increase awareness for the project.

However, the consortium banded together to address these issues and indeed took on the position that "resistance is a learning opportunity for gender experts, policymakers, and scholars alike, one that, if embraced with openness and preparation, offers



a chance to engage with entrenched patriarchal (and other) norms, values, and stereotypes and deal with the inevitable problems that any process of changing the gender norms of institutions and individuals is bound to create." GEARING-Roles took this on board and ran with it. It created a resistances campaign, with a competition attached to it to highlight these issues while also highlighting what can be done to respond to them.

Indeed, it is important to take on a strength-based, positive approach that is more productive when facing challenges.<sup>1</sup> GEARING-Roles has done this by creating the Humorarium. This emerged when several partners were discussing ways of studying 'feminist humour' to counter-argue or counteract sexist jokes. These reflections led to the project organising activities directly related to unpacking the potential of humour to encourage



gender equality in a different, innovative way.

This year, GEARING-Roles put this work into practice by organising two workshops on how feminist humour can be used as a tool for advocacy and power.

The project and its consortium are so proud of their work, particularly in ensuring the project's sustainability. We hope its work and activities have inspired others and continue to make an impact in Europe and beyond.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

GEARING-Roles aims to implement six equality plans to pursue the recognition and promotion of the research career of women, their incorporation in decision-making positions, and the promotion of a culture of equality in organisations, deconstructing sexual roles to unveil gender biases that operate in processes of decision-making, selection and promotion of people and in the attribution of value and recognition.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

GEARING-Roles is a multi-stakeholder network of seven academic (six universities and a public research funding body) and three non-academic institutions (a public body and two private companies), supported by 19 stakeholder organisations, built on a solid collaborative track and expertise, and a myriad of regional realities, unique national contexts and diverse organisational cultures.

## PROJECT LEAD PROFILE

DEUSTO was founded in 1886 and has a long and well-established tradition. UDEUSTO's mission and educational goal is firmly grounded in academic excellence and social responsibility, aiming to generate economic sustainable growth and make positive contributions towards the construction of a fairer and more inclusive society.

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1 Emanuela Lombardo & Lut Mergaert (2013) Gender Mainstreaming and Resistance to Gender Training: A Framework for Studying Implementation, NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 21:4, 296-311.