Gender Equality Plan 2026–2030

of UniDistance Suisse

Adopted by the UniDistance Executive Board (Rectorate) on 02.06.2026

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1. Introduction

UniDistance Suisse is a federally accredited university institute under the Higher Education Act (HEdA). The institution comprises five faculties offering nine Bachelor's degrees, six Master's degrees, a doctoral program (launched in 2025), and 42 continuing education programs. UniDistance makes a comprehensive and unique contribution to equal opportunities in higher education in Switzerland. Through its study system, it helps to realise educational potential, and through its study programmes, it helps to address the shortage of skilled workers.

As part of its Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA) policy, UniDistance has as vision to be a university institute that provides to every personnel an inclusive and fair treatment, based on transparent and accessible procedures that guarantee equal opportunities. UniDistance is actively committed to promoting diversity and equity, and to embedding inclusion and accessibility throughout its practices and operations where applicable. It offers an open and supportive environment in which everyone feels respected, included and valued, and can thrive in their work[1].

In alignment with its vision to guarantee fair and inclusive treatment, UniDistance Suisse has developed this multi-annual Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in full conformity with the Horizon Europe Programme requirements. This document serves as a roadmap for the institution's formal commitment to advancing gender equity and fostering an inclusive academic community. The GEP aims advancing gender equity at UniDistance and comes with a concrete action plan to be carried out for the period of 2026-2030.

2. Methodology and Institutional Commitment

The creation and adoption of this GEP followed a six-stage process designed to ensure data-driven objectives as well as its institutional support through a defined and structured governance (see also Chapter 6). Thus, the following stepwise approach was taken:

1. Establishment of the EDIA Working Group: To ensure dedicated resources and expertise, the Rectorate established the EDIA Working Group. This cross-functional body brings together diverse perspectives, including senior academic faculty members, PhD students, postdocs, research assistants, faculty managers, administrative personnel, and student representatives. The group is responsible for overseeing the policy framework and ensuring that EDIA initiatives are embedded in all institutional levels.
2. Data Collection: A comprehensive gathering of quantitative and qualitative data, including the Logib salary analysis and internal surveys.
3. Policy Audit: A systematic review of existing guidelines and procedures at UniDistance, including the Administrative Regulations (RA), to identify strengths and gaps in equity.
4. Drafting Phase: The Working Group drafted the GEP, translating data findings into specific, actionable goals.
5. Validation: The presentation of the GEP to the Rectorate for strategic endorsement.
6. Endorsement and Publication: Final approval by top management and public disclosure on the official UniDistance Suisse website.

3. GEP compliance

UniDistance's GEP is compliant with the mandatory process-related (see Chapter 3.1 of this document) as well as the optional content-related (Chapter 3.2) GEP requirements as established in Horizon's Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plan. The objectives and action plan's adopted in this document reflect an analysis carried out across UniDistance to identify areas for improvement in gender equity at the organisation.

[1] EDIA Staff Working Group, proposed EDIA vision for UniDistance.

3.1 Process-related requirements:

UniDistance's GEP is compliant with the 4 process-related GEP requirements as established in Horizon's Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plan, namely: publication; dedicated resources; data collection and monitoring; and training.

3.1.1 Public Document

UniDistance's GEP is a formal document publicly available at UniDistance's website (https://unidistance.ch/en/career) with full endorsement by top management.

3.1.2 Dedicated Resources

UniDistance has invested in resources and expertise to promote gender equity. Firstly, the establishment of the EDIA Working Group, ensures an inclusive and diverse perspective on the development of an EDIA policy framework for the institution.

The EDIA Student Working Group conducted a survey with students to better understand their needs and expectations about EDIA-related questions from UniDistance, and based on these results as well as thorough background research developed a Vision, Strategy, and Action Plan which was approved by the Rectorate of UniDistance.

The same process is currently being carried out with a focus on the needs of academic and administrative staff. At the end of the process, it is expected to develop a Vision, Strategy and Action Plan. In parallel, the GEP is developed at UniDistance Suisse.

Additionally, UniDistance is committed to placing equity and inclusion at the heart of its institutional strategy by creating the position of "Sustainability Officer" to oversee the implementation of this GEP and other initiatives within the institution. The Rectorate has approved the budget for this position, and the recruitment process will begin Q2 2026. To enhance the promotion of EDIA initiatives at UniDistance, the institution has joined additional knowledge networks with access to experts specialized in EDIA, such as REGARD.

3.1.3 Data collection and monitoring

UniDistance collects and publishes annual sex-disaggregated data on personnel[2]. In addition, as part of its implementation phase of the GEP, relevant data will be published in annual implementation reports.

3.1.4 Training and Capacity Building

UniDistance together with its Sustainability Officer will offer trainings on gender sensitivity and equity to all staff and students to raise awareness and foster an inclusive environment.

Other activities will be promoted by the Sustainability Officer alongside diverse faculties from UniDistance. These activities will include panels, workshops on gender equity (e.g. the webinar on gender bias in science, december 2025), and where applicable, training for researchers and academics on how to include the gender dimension in research design, teaching curricula, and others.

Some of these are already existing at the institution, for example, EDIA sponsored events, such as the conference on "Students with Disabilities at Swiss Universities" promoted by the EDIA working group with the presence of experts in the field[3], and the webinar "Welche Rolle spielen Frauen heute in der Wissenschaft – und wie prägen Gender Biases weiterhin akademische Laufbahnen?" that also counted with the presence of experts[4]. In addition, a training on unconscious bias is offered. The latter is open to all, but mandatory for members of decision committees in order to ensure fairness and equality in decisions.

3.2 Recommended content-related areas

The action plan of UniDistance's GEP is adopted also considering the 5 content-related areas recommended in Horizon's Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plan. These are: work-life balance and organizational culture; gender balance in leadership and decision-making; gender equality in recruitment and career progression; measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment; integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content.

3.2.1 Work-life balance and organisational culture

As the first university institute in Switzerland completely focused on distance learning, UniDistance is in a unique position to allow staff and students to enjoy great flexibility in their working and study hours. Students and staff enjoy great flexibility through the offer of part time programmes that allow to balance professional, educational and personal needs.

Students enjoy flexible study hours. This is particularly important for students with special needs and disabilities as obstacles related to commuting to classrooms or being in crowded places are removed, as well as for students with caregiving responsibilities or work duties. In addition, compensation for disadvantages such as additional time during exams and at times individual arrangements are offered.

Personnel are entitled to flexible working hours and the possibility of working from home. In addition, they enjoy maternity leave of 16 weeks and paternity leave of 10 days[5], which goes beyond what is required by law. To further strengthen the reconciliation of professional and family life, UniDistance guarantees the right to extended unpaid leave following maternity, paternity, or adoption leave, fully subsidizing both employer and employee pension fund contributions for up to three months[6]. Furthermore, parents of children up to 12 years old are entitled to up to 10 days of unpaid parental leave per year with fully protected pension coverage[7]. General unpaid leave may also be granted upon request, provided it does not disrupt operational activities.

Furthermore, UniDistance Suisse has an organisational culture centered on professionalism, mutual support, and equity. It aims to strengthen its "culture of flexibility" by formalising support for employees with caregiving responsibilities. UniDistance Suisse's model is built on flexibility, serving thousands of students who balance work and family; the organisation intends to mirror this for its staff members. While research survey data indicates that some current project budgets do not yet account for "care-related" costs (such as travel support for researchers with dependents), the new Sustainability Officer will collaborate closely with individual faculties to assess where these measures are truly necessary. Because care-related needs vary and not every project requires this type of funding, this collaborative approach will help identify specific, high-impact areas where support is genuinely needed, ensuring resources are allocated meaningfully and sustainably across the organisation.

3.2.2 Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-Making

UniDistance Suisse is committed to sustaining its current standard of providing equal pay for work of equal value by keeping any unexplained wage differences well below the 5% federal threshold[8]. As of the April 2025 analysis, the organisation achieved an unexplained gap of 0.2% in favour of women, which is not statistically significant and indicates that salary differences are based on objective factors like education and experience rather than gender.

UniDistance Suisse aims to narrow the 15.7% raw average salary difference between men and women. While the unexplained gap is near zero, this raw discrepancy suggests a glass-ceiling effect or a higher concentration of men in senior, higher-paying positions. To address this difference, UniDistance Suisse, through its dedicated

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[2] UniDistance, Rapport Annuel 2025, https://issuu.com/unidistance/docs/rapport_annuel_2025; Rapport Annuel 2024, https://issuu.com/unidistance/docs/rapport_annuel_2024.
[3] https://fernunich.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet/SitePages/fr/Vortrag.aspx
[4] https://fernunich.sharepoint.com/sites/Intranet/SitePages/Rückblick-auf-das-EDIA-Webinar-«Woman-in-Science».aspx?web=1
[5] Règlement administratif (RA) de la fondation Formation universitaire à distance, Suisse (UniDistance) du 1er janvier 2019
[6] Règlement administratif (RA) de la fondation Formation universitaire à distance, Suisse (UniDistance) du 1er janvier 2019.
[7] Règlement administratif (RA) de la fondation Formation universitaire à distance, Suisse (UniDistance) du 1er janvier 2019.
[8] Loi fédérale sur l'égalité entre femmes et hommes (LEg), art. 13a-13i ; Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE), Standard Analysis Tool Logib – Guideline Module 1, pursuant to Art. 13a of the Federal Act on Gender Equality (GEA).

resources, will initiate an internal analysis to investigate the root causes behind this difference and determine what specific support, resources, or structural adjustments are necessary for women to increasingly qualify for and occupy senior roles. Based on these results, initiatives will be taken to effectively address and reduce the gap.

3.2.3 Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

UniDistance Suisse actively works to eliminate unconscious barriers during recruitment using gender-neutral language in all recruitment advertisements. Staff in decision-making positions receive training on how to avoid unconscious bias. Furthermore, the institution's hiring procedures strictly adhere to the principles set forth in the official UniDistance Suisse Personnel Policy[9], which explicitly mandates open, objective, and transparent selection procedures, ensuring that candidates are evaluated strictly on competence and qualifications.

3.2.4 Integration of the Gender Dimension into Research and Teaching Content

UniDistance Suisse is committed to enhancing the quality of its scientific output by systematically integrating sex- and gender-based analysis (GBA+) into all phases of research, where applicable. Survey data reveals that while a majority of projects involving human subjects do disaggregate data by sex, many researchers in applicable areas still do not include gender-sensitive perspectives in their initial grant proposals or literature reviews, often citing a perceived lack of relevance to their specific scientific field. To address this for the relevant research areas, the organisation will provide specialised training and resources to help researchers identify how gender dimensions can improve the excellence and societal impact of their work, ensuring that gender-sensitive dissemination and specific budget lines for gender research become standard practice across those disciplines, where relevant.

In addition, where applicable, UniDistance Suisse will support academic staff in integrating gender-related topics and diverse perspectives into their course syllabi and teaching materials. Internal feedback shows that while some faculty already integrate diverse case studies, others exclusively select teaching materials based on citations or perceived relevance without considering gender representation or author diversity. In response to the high level of interest expressed by staff in receiving pedagogical support, the organisation will develop and distribute toolkits tailored to different disciplines where these could be applied. These resources will assist educators in incorporating gender theories and sex-disaggregated data into their teaching, ensuring that the next generation of students is exposed to a more comprehensive and balanced scientific perspective.

3.2.5 Measures against Gender-Based Violence, Including Sexual Harassment

UniDistance Suisse has a zero-tolerance policy on harassment, including sexual harassment. It has established a comprehensive framework to ensure a workplace free from harassment, discrimination, and violence. It has also developed Guidelines for Prevention of Mental Health Risks, which address all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment. This commitment is centered on the following pillars:

- Zero Tolerance & Legal Compliance: In accordance with Swiss law (Art. 328 CO), the institution enforces a zero-tolerance policy toward any violations of personal integrity. This framework applies to all professional activities, including events organized outside the primary workplace.
- Neutral & Independent Support (the “Personne de Confiance”): To support victims and witnesses of sensitive situations, the institution provides an independent and confidential external support service, “we-for-you”. This service is available seven days a week in French, German, and English, offering a safe space for listening, advice, and professional guidance.[10]

[9] https://fernunich.sharepoint.com/sites/HR-Intranet/Freigegebene%20Dokumente/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FHR%2DIntranet%2FFreigegebene%20Dokumente%2FPersonalpolitik%5FPolitique%5Fdu%5Fpersonnel%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FHR%2DIntranet%2FFreigegebene%20Dokumente

[10] Directive concernant la Personne de Confiance

- Rapid Intervention Protocol: The support system is designed for high responsiveness, guaranteeing a callback within four hours and the possibility of an in-person meeting within 48 hours.[11]
- Commitment to Transparency: The institution commits to an equitable, transparent, and consistent application of these rules, treating workplace tensions as signals for collective improvement rather than problems to be hidden.

4. Action Plan

4.1 Process-Related Requirements

Strategic Area	Specific Measure	Objective	Target Audience	Responsible Party	Timeline	Deliverables
1. Publication	1.1 Signoff and publication	Formally approve, sign, and publish the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) on the UniDistance Suisse website.	Institutional community, external auditors, and the public.	Drafting: EDIA Working Group, Approval: Rectorate Publication: Communication and Marketing Department.	Year 1 • Approval & Signing: Q2 2026 • Public Upload: Q3 2026	GEP formally signed and endorsed by the Rectorate; dedicated public webpage live and available at the official link (https://unidistance.ch/en/career).
2. Dedicated resources	2.1 Hiring of personnel	Hiring of a Sustainability Officer responsible for the implementation, evaluation, and revision of the GEP.	All academic, research, and administrative staff.	Human Resources	Year 1 • Hiring completion: Q4 2026	Formal recruitment and onboarding of the new Sustainability Officer.
	2.2 Adoption of EDIA vision and EDIA gender policy	Finalize EDIA vision to guide institutional gender policy for all staff members.	All academic, research, and administrative staff.	Sustainability Officer in collaboration with the EDIA Working Group.	Years 1–2 • Policy Production: 2026-2027	Completed production and official adoption of the staff-dedicated EDIA vision and gender policy.
3. Data collection and monitoring	3.1 Collection, analysis, and storage of data	Centralize, audit, and report sex-disaggregated institutional data to track GEP effectiveness.	Institutional leadership, data managers, and Human Resources.	Sustainability Officer in cooperation with HR and Data Protection Office.	Years 1–2 • Matrix Design: Q4 2026 • Annual Audit: Q2 2027 (annually)	Implementation of a centralised dashboard matrix to track personnel indicators (by faculty and contract type) and student demographics; transparent annual publication of GEP implementation reports.
4. Training and capacity-building	4.1 Development of trainings and capacity building initiatives	Develop core competencies and continuous capacity building regarding gender sensitivity, diversity awareness, and the elimination of implicit bias in decision-making.	All university personnel (academic/administrative) and students.	Sustainability Officer in collaboration with diverse departments & external experts.	Years 1–4 • Workshop Launch: Q1 2027 • Continuous Delivery: through 2030	Rollout of workshops on integrating the gender dimension into research design and teaching curricula (GBA+); hosted panel discussions; maintenance and expansion of mandatory Unconscious Bias training for all recruitment and decision committees.

4.2 Content-Related Requirements

Strategic Area	Specific Measure	Objective	Target Audience	Responsible Party	Timeline	Deliverables
1. Work-Life Balance & Culture	1.1 Caregiver flexibility framework	Analyse needs and formalise guidelines regarding caregiving needs and related costs (e.g., travel support for researchers with dependents).	Academic and administrative staff with caregiving roles.	Sustainability Officer in collaboration with Deans.	Years 1–2 Phase 1 (Needs Audit): Q4 2026 Phase 2 (Policy Rollout): Q2 2027	Needs assessment completed across all 5 faculties; flexible caregiver funding criteria formally defined and communicated.

[11] Directive concernant la Personne de Confiance

	1.2 Leave rights and pension awareness	Ensure all personnel are fully aware of progressive rights regarding parental leave and 3-month pension fund coverage.	All UniDistance Suisse personnel.	Sustainability Officer in collaboration with HR representatives.	Years 1–4• Launch: Q4 2026• Continuous updates through 2030	HR portal updated with plain-language leave summaries; 100% of staff taking leave briefed on pension protections.
2. Leadership and career progres-sion	2.1 Unadjusted salary gap analysis	Investigate root causes behind the 15.7% unadjusted average salary difference to discover specific advancement barriers.	Mid-level and senior academic/administrative staff.	Sustainability Officer.	Year 2• Detailed Analysis: Q2 2027• Diagnostic Review: Q4 2027	Publication of an internal report detailing pipeline blockages, application rates, and promotions by gender.
	2.2 Professional progression initiatives	Execute targeted leadership modules (workshops/courses) particulary for the less represented gender to equip them with strategic career advancement tools based on the gap analysis.	Researchers, academics, and administrative staff.	Sustainability Officer, in collaboration with Continuing Education, and Faculty Managers.	Years 3–4• Programme Design: Q2 2028• Active Modules: 2028–2030	Number of tailored courses offered; positive participant feedback scores; tracked increase in female applicants for senior roles.
3. Recruitment practices	3.1 Standardisation of inclusive hiring	Reinforce the Personnel Policy by embedding gender-neutral language and diverse evaluation criteria into all recruitment stages.	Hiring managers, selection panels, and HR specialists.	Sustainability Officer and HR Department.	Years 1–2• Full Implementation: By Q2 2027• Monitored through Year 4	100% of external job advertisements audited for neutral phrasing; “unconscious bias checklist”. systematically distributed to all selection panels.
4. Research and teaching content	4.1 GBA+ research and pedagogical toolkits	Develop discipline-specific toolkits and conduct training to help faculties include gender analysis in research design and diversify course syllabi.	Teaching and research staff.	Sustainability Officer and Faculty Deans.	Years 2–3• Toolkit Release: Q3 2027• Faculty Workshops: 2028–2029	Toolkits finalised and published; training sessions conducted; gender-sensitive metrics visible in internal grant proposals.
5. Gender-based violence	5.1 External support system maintenance	Maintain zero-tolerance compliance by continuously promoting the independent external “we-for-you” counselling service.	All staff and students.	Rectorate and HR.	Years 1–4• Active Oversight• formal evaluation every 12 months	Anonymous tracking of service utilisation; 100% compliance with 4h-callback / 48h-meeting protocol; annual campus-wide awareness reminders.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Data Collection: UniDistance Suisse will systematically collect and analyse data on gender representation, pay gaps, and career progression. This data will be disaggregated by gender, professional category (academic/administrative), and age to identify and address specific challenges faced by different groups.

Annual reports: Within its institutional annual reporting, UniDistance Suisse will publish an assessment of gender equity progress. These reports will include success stories and areas needing improvement and will be made available to the entire community to inform future strategies.

Feedback mechanisms: Feedback mechanisms will be implemented to allow staff and students to suggest improvements. These will include anonymous surveys, focus groups, and a dedicated internal channel for gender equity concerns.

6. Governance

The EDIA working group was established by the Rectorate in 2024 and began its activities in 2025. It has the necessary competences and responsibilities for overseeing the institutional policy framework, and for framing

an EDIA Vision, Strategy, and Action Plan, as well as a GEP. These are approved by the Rectorate for subsequent implementation.

The EDIA Working Group consists of members representing different functions such as academic faculty members, PhD students, postdocs, research assistants, faculty managers, administrative personnel, and student representatives (for Organigramm see Figure 1). Its cross-functional nature ensures representation of diverse perspectives, and its members participate on a voluntary basis.

To ensure long-term and sustainable development of processes related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, Year 1 of this GEP foresees the recruitment of a Sustainability Officer. This role will oversee, amongst other responsibilities, the implementation of this GEP. This role therefore entails regular monitoring and evaluation of the GEP-derived Action Plan, as well as the regular revision of the multiannual GEP.

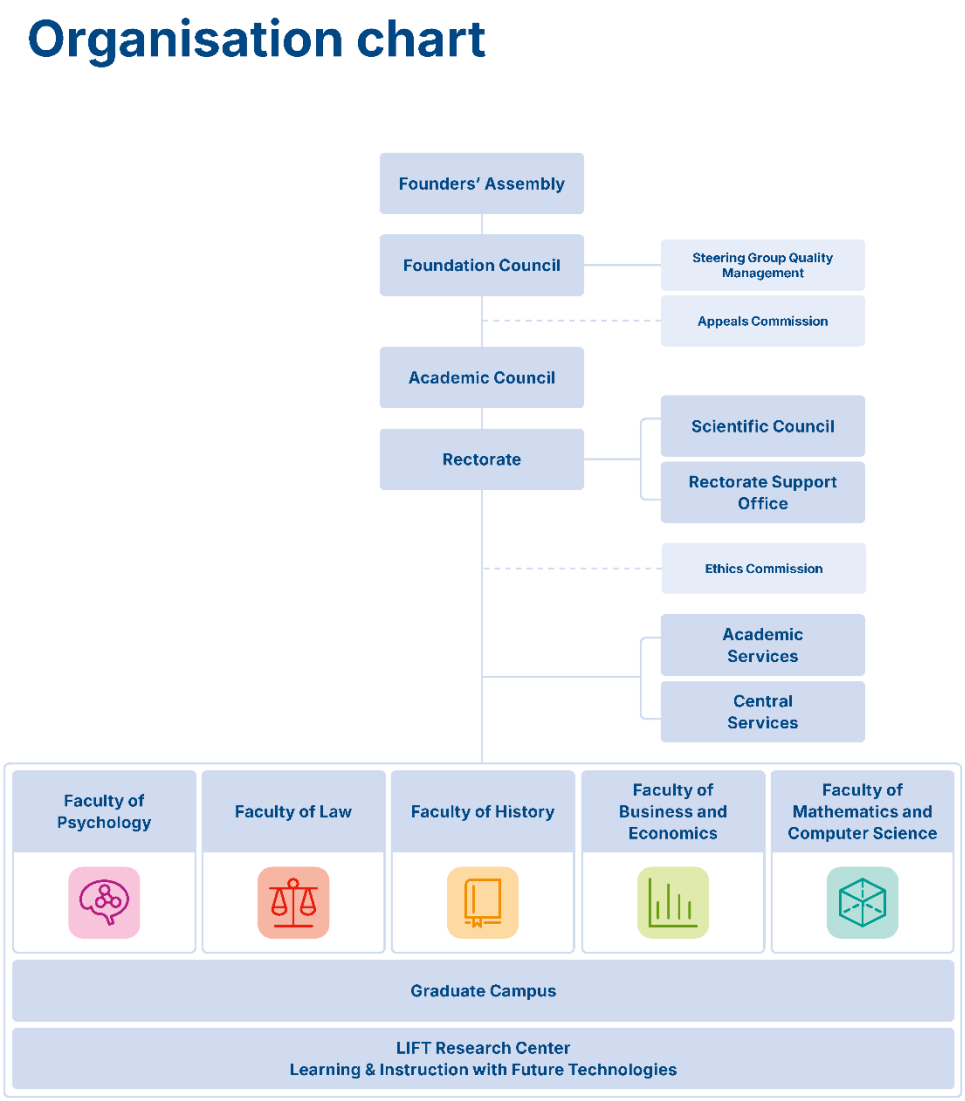


Figure 1. Governance of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP).
The EDIA Working Group is a cross-functional working group comprising academic faculty members, PhD students, postdocs, research assistants, faculty managers, administrative personnel, and student representatives. The Sustainability Officer will be part of the Rectorate Support Office and is responsible for the GEP implementation, as well as its regular monitoring and revision.

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