

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000809/26
to the Commission
Mathilde Androuët (Pfe)
(26 February 2026)**

Subject: Conditionality of Horizon Europe funding, academic freedom and the principle of subsidiarity

The Commission's report 'Promoting Gender Equality and Institutional Changes through EU-Funded Research' states that, under Horizon Europe ⁽¹⁾, gender mainstreaming is assessed by default under the 'excellence award criterion' and that having a gender equality plan is an eligibility criterion for certain beneficiaries (pp. 7-9). It also specifies that approximately 11% of Horizon Europe commitments (EUR 5.056 billion) are directly linked to gender equality-advancing efforts (p. 8).

In the light of Article 13 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (freedom of the arts and sciences) and Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union (principle of subsidiarity):

1. What legal safeguards are in place to ensure that the requirement for gender equality plans and gender mainstreaming does not undermine the academic freedom and scientific neutrality of beneficiary institutions, particularly where making a distinction between men and women is necessary?
2. On what legal basis does the Commission feel that making access to European funding conditional on the adoption of internal institutional governance mechanisms is in line with the principle of subsidiarity?

Submitted: 26.2.2026

**Answer given by Ms Zaharieva on behalf of the European Commission
(29 May 2026)**

The Commission promotes and protects fundamental rights by ensuring that all legislative, policy and administrative measures falling under EU competence comply with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The gender equality provisions of Horizon Europe are anchored in the legal basis of the programme, which commits to ensuring the effective promotion of equal opportunities for all and the implementation of gender mainstreaming, including the integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content ⁽¹⁾, ⁽²⁾.

The Gender Equality Plan eligibility criterion is set out in the General Annexes to the Work Programmes of Horizon Europe ⁽³⁾, established through governance and programme design mechanisms that balance EU-level coordination with national and regional autonomy, ensuring the upholding of the principle of subsidiarity.

The gender equality plans are expected to be adapted to the unique institutional contexts of organisations. The mandatory provisions are designed to accommodate the internal governance structures of diverse institutions. By enabling organisations to tailor these plans, they support inclusivity without compromising organisational autonomy.

Integrating the gender dimension in research refers to the systematic incorporation of sex and/or gender differentiated analysis into the design, methodology and implementation of a research project ⁽⁴⁾.

This practice ensures outcomes that benefit the society as a whole, enhancing the relevance and excellence of research. This requirement aims to enrich scientific inquiry without imposing constraints on intellectual creativity and expression, thereby fully respecting and enhancing academic freedom and integrity of scientific inquiry.

¹ Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, November 2025, ISBN 978-92-68-33291-7.

⁽¹⁾ Article 7(6) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 establishing Horizon Europe, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/695/oj/eng>.

⁽²⁾ They are direct applications of the Treaty-based principle of equality mainstreaming, Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states: In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2016:202:FULL>.

⁽³⁾ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/horizon-europe-work-programmes_en.

⁽⁴⁾ These principles are also reiterated and strengthened in the Roadmap for Women's Rights, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025DC0097> and the EU Gender Equality Strategy, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/1f5fa936-9fba-4435-93f5-32fa220bac82_en?filename=gender-equality-strategy-2026-2030.pdf.