UNIVERSITY OF TARTU



University of Tartu Gender Equality Plan for 2026–2030

Rector’s foreword

Recent years’ changes in the world have put democratic values and fundamental human rights to the test more than before. Gender equality and equal treatment are also not self evident but require conscious protection and continuous improvement. In this situation, universities have a particular responsibility. The impact of our decisions and attitudes extends far beyond the university, shaping not only the wellbeing of staff and students but also wider societal understandings.

Equal treatment and the good working culture that stems from it are central topics of leadership. A safe, respectful, and inclusive learning and working environment is a prerequisite for academic freedom as well as for the university’s scientific and societal impact. Without trust, neither world class research nor inspiring teaching is possible.

One objective of the University of Tartu Strategic Plan for 2026–2035 is to increase the university’s international competitiveness and social impact, and the strategic plan also emphasises the importance of an inclusive and caring learning and working environment. To attract and retain talented and dedicated students and staff, we must consciously support equal treatment, promote work-life balance, and foster a values based organisational culture. The gender equality plan for 2026–2030 is an integral part of this strategic direction.

I consider it important that we speak openly about challenges as well. Breaches related to equal treatment, including sexual harassment, are unacceptable and call for clear and professional intervention. At the same time, the fact that such cases are increasingly being reported shows increased awareness: problems are noticed, people dare to speak up, and action is taken. This is not a reason for complacency but rather a sign of a more mature organisational culture – one where we do not look away but act. Our aim is to ensure that inappropriate situations become ever rarer and that every member of the university can feel confident that, should they need help, they will be heard and their experience will be taken seriously.

The gender equality plan focuses on both prevention and systematic support: training for managers and staff, clear guidelines and procedures, a research based overview of the situation, and support measures for colleagues starting their academic careers. The objective of the plan is to create a working and learning environment at the University of Tartu that values diversity and treats all people fairly and with respect.

Implementing the plan requires action from the entire university community. The university management can create the framework and set an example, but the university’s working atmosphere is shaped by the everyday actions of each of us. I encourage all staff and students to be attentive, considerate and responsible – towards themselves and towards others. In this way, we uphold and strengthen a university that stands firmly for democratic values, even in a changing world.



Toomas Asser
Rector



1. INTRODUCTION

All members of society must have the opportunity to develop and use their abilities to the fullest. The competitiveness and sustainability of society depend primarily on the inclusion of different talents. This is particularly important in research, where international competition is strong and where an inclusive and supportive organisational culture is a key factor when choosing a workplace.

The university's core values – research-based activities, academic freedom and autonomy, openness, cooperation, a human-centred approach, individual development, and responsibility – must ensure an environment in which everyone has an equal opportunity to learn, work and grow. Unfortunately, in comparison with other European countries, Estonia stands out for gender inequality, particularly in higher education. Christian Veske, Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner of Estonia, has said, "Young people's future careers, income and opportunities are directly affected by their sense of which specialisations they are welcome in, and whether their choices are shaped mainly by their own wishes and interests or by societal expectations. A conscious effort by higher education institutions to promote gender equality helps us create an environment in which everyone has equal opportunities, and move together towards a more balanced and stronger society."

Among Estonia's public universities, the University of Tartu has been one of the leading institutions in advancing gender equality and, more generally, equal treatment. The ambitious objectives set in the first gender equality plan (2022–2025) were mostly achieved. To develop organisational culture, various training sessions were organised, and efforts were made to raise awareness, including updating the equal treatment webpage and guidelines for equal treatment, introducing the tradition of celebrating Diversity Week, and starting cooperation with the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner. The university also signed the Diversity Charter and received the "Respecting differences" label. One of the most significant initiatives was establishing a network of equal treatment support persons. In March 2025, the senate formed an equal treatment strategy committee, tasked with helping shape an inclusive academic culture that values diversity and differences, and ensures equal treatment and equal opportunities at the university. Furthermore, in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, a working group on equal treatment was formed, which could serve as an example for similar bottom-up initiatives in other faculties. Two voluminous analyses were completed: an analysis of the gender pay gap and an analysis of the use of working time, both available on the intranet (in Estonian). In addition, data on the age and gender distribution of academic staff and on the gender pay gap are accessible to all on the statistics dashboard.

During the period of the previous gender equality plan, shortcomings emerged in the resolution of disputes and the handling of students' appeals. The managers' need for more knowledge and support in solving problems of unequal treatment, including sexual harassment[1], was revealed as a practical shortcoming. In light of some cases of the past few years, it is clear that gender discrimination and sexual

[1] *Sexual harassment occurs where any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct or activity of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity, creating a disturbing, intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive atmosphere.*

harassment remain serious problems at the university. It is necessary to proactively prevent sexual harassment and handle cases more professionally to increase employees' and students' sense of safety and the university's credibility.

Several objectives set in the previous gender equality plan remain relevant. The new plan continues the same direction, but with a greater focus on developing more specific practical solutions. The thematic areas in the plan follow the European Commission's recommendations for gender equality plans.

The new plan also includes topics that concern equal treatment more generally and benefit the entire university community. Among other things, attention is focused on supporting work-life balance at different stages of life, developing gender-sensitive human resource practices, and integrating the gender dimension into teaching and research.

It is important to emphasise that the plan does not cover all fields of equal treatment (e.g., race, sexual orientation, disability), as these topics are addressed more comprehensively in the university's diversity plan (in Estonian). In future, the university intends to merge the gender equality plan and the diversity plan to take a holistic approach to promoting diversity and equality.

The main topic in the period of the new gender equality plan is the **prevention of sexual harassment and the sensitive, prompt, expert and impartial handling of such cases**. Sexual harassment cases involve a substantial violation of a person's wellbeing and sense of safety, and therefore, when resolving a case, it is necessary to ensure clarity of procedures, support for the victim during the proceedings, a fair resolution, and, more broadly, the safety of the university community. Between 2021 and 2025, the academic secretary and the Human Resources Office examined and resolved a total of eight reports related to sexual harassment, one of which required the establishment of a committee to conduct the investigation. Equal treatment support persons have also provided guidance in two additional harassment cases involving students, but these have not been forwarded to the academic secretary or the Human Resources Office. According to the Guidelines for equal treatment, an employee may also submit a complaint to their manager, and a student may turn to their programme director.
If the investigation and resolution take place at the unit level, the academic secretary and the Human Resources Office may not be informed of these cases; as a result, such incidents are not reflected in the overall statistics.

We aim to carry out systematic prevention work across the university, to establish a consistent practice of intervening in cases of inappropriate behaviour, and to raise awareness among all members of the university community. As harassment cases always affect a large number of people, prevention and the promotion of a supportive culture can secure a safer learning and working environment.

Compared with the previous plan, the plan for the new period places considerable emphasis on the **systematic collection of data** related to gender equality at the university, **active involvement of managers** of all levels, the diversification of training opportunities and an increase in the number of participants, and a university-wide and faculty-level approach from the identification of the situation to resolving the cases and raising awareness. All activities and the schedule are specified each year in an overview submitted to the senate, which summarises the previous year and sets objectives for the next.

2. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

2.1. Promotion of gender equality and, more generally, equal treatment, focusing on the prevention of sexual harassment and other gender-based violence, and resolution of cases

Objective: to implement the principles of equal treatment more widely, strengthen prevention activities, and ensure that when discrimination or harassment cases occur, they are resolved quickly, fairly and in a manner supportive of the victim.

2.1.1. Gaining an overview of the situation and recognising the problems

Activity	Target	Responsible person(s)
In 2026, we will conduct a survey among staff and students, "Sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying at the University of Tartu", to gather information about **experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination, and seeking help**. Based on the survey results, we develop measures to improve the situation.	The survey has been conducted, and based on its results, an action plan has been prepared by the end of 2027.	Equal treatment strategy committee (survey is led by Kai Part) Partners: Human Resources Office, Marketing and Communication Office, Student Union
Every year, we conduct a **workplace wellbeing survey** to collect information on fair and respectful treatment and the working atmosphere (questions "In my unit, people are treated fairly and with respect" and "The working atmosphere is supportive"). Every three years, one of the following topics is included in the survey: • **leadership** ("The actions of the head of my unit support my workplace wellbeing", "The head of my unit addresses mis-understandings that disturb the working atmosphere at the earliest opportunity", etc.) • **psychosocial factors** (incl. questions about workplace bullying, abuse of authority and sexual harassment) • **physical working environment**	The survey has been carried out, the results are discussed in units, and an action plan is drawn up, involving external experts, if necessary.	Human Resources Office
We develop **targets** for key performance indicators and create better access to **data and analyses**, which contribute to the promotion of equal treatment (gender balance in different positions, decision-making and governing bodies, age, gender pay gap, proportional distribution of teaching and research, etc.).	The relevant data and analyses are available on the intranet, the statistics dashboard or in reports intended for managers. Equal treatment targets have been prepared, making it possible to obtain an overview of the situation by subunit.	Human Resources Office Partners: Office of Academic Affairs, Rector's Strategy Office, equal treatment strategy committee, heads of institutes and subunits

2.1.2. Raising awareness

Activity	Target	Responsible person(s)
We develop and implement strategic **communication activities**, among other things, to raise awareness of gender equality and, more generally, equal treatment, among different target groups (staff and students), and disseminate relevant information materials.	Information materials, incl. online resources, are up-to-date, easy to understand, and easy to find. At least one campaign each year draws attention to the topic and increases visits to the equal treatment webpage.	Marketing and Communication Office Partners: equal treatment strategy committee, Human Resources Office, Office of Academic Affairs, Rector's Office, faculties, Student Union
We organise **public discussions** and events on gender equality and, more generally, equal treatment.	At least one thematic public discussion or event is held every year, and is also accessible online, if possible.	Marketing and Communication Office Partners: equal treatment strategy committee, Human Resources Office, Office of Academic Affairs, Rector's Office, faculties, Student Union, student organisations
We develop a **basic course on equal treatment** for students and staff, which must be completed as a compulsory part of the induction programme.	A relevant e-course tailored to the university's needs has been prepared and becomes a part of the induction programme.	Human Resources Office, Office of Academic Affairs Partners: equal treatment strategy committee, Student Union, Centre for Learning and Teaching, faculties
We organise **training** for employees on gender equality and, more generally, equal treatment, incl. face-to-face training for heads of structural units.	During the period of the plan, all heads of structural units have completed at least one equal treatment training course in the first year of their term of office.	Human Resources Office Partners: Rector's Office, faculties

2.1.3. Central measures

Activity	Target	Responsible person(s)
We recruit an **equality officer**, who will be provided with the conditions necessary for the independent and objective performance of duties.	The equality officer • develops and implements the university's equal treatment strategies • develops the system of proceedings and updates the guidelines for equal treatment • creates a functioning cooperation network and keeps it active • handles complaints of unequal treatment and resolves them fairly and professionally, avoiding re-victimisation • provides support to managers in resolving cases at the unit level • is actively involved in the implementation of activities related to the gender equality plan	Human Resources Office Partners: university members, Student Union; if necessary, external partners
We develop a system for resolving unequal treatment cases: we update the guidelines for equal treatment, incl. addressing sexual harassment as a separate topic, and clarify the process for handling the cases.	The guidelines have been updated, the procedures are clear, and the information is easy to find. The handling of cases is professional, considerate and supportive of the parties.	Human Resources Office, Office of Academic Affairs, Student Union Partners: equal treatment strategy committee, Marketing and Communication Office
We increase the visibility of **equal treatment support persons**, offer them additional training and train new support persons.	Communication activities aim to increase the visibility of support persons. By the end of the period of the plan, we have trained two additional groups of support persons, of whom at least one third actively take up their role.	Human Resources Office, Marketing and Communication Office
We create a **network of partners** and experts whom a manager can involve, if necessary, in addition to the equality officer, in resolving and preventing more complex cases (e.g. supervisors, development partners, certified psychologists, experts in restorative justice practice, lawyers, communications experts, etc.).	A list of partners and experts who can be involved if necessary is available on the intranet.	Human Resources Office, Office of Academic Affairs

2.2. Work-life balance

Objective: to create conditions that support employees' work-life balance, take into account caregiving burden, and develop an organisational culture that values diversity. To develop and uniformly apply flexible working arrangements, family-friendly practices and measures that take into account different stages of employees' lives, to achieve a sustainable and supportive working environment.

Activity	Target	Responsible person(s)
In addition to the employees' annual workplace wellbeing survey, we will conduct a separate survey to **gain an overview of the challenges of balancing work and personal life and of the employees' respective needs**.	The survey has been carried out; the results have been presented.	Human Resources Office Partners: early-career researchers' advisory board, the Estonian Young Academy of Sciences members from the University of Tartu
Based on the survey results, we develop **measures that support work-life balance, take into consideration people's needs at different stages of life** (e.g. pregnancy, breastfeeding, perimenopause, menopause, care responsibilities related to close relatives) **and their physical and mental health status**. Based on the measures, we develop a university-wide strategy and principles for flexible working, incl. ways to take into account part-time working and care responsibilities relating to close relatives.	The strategy and principles of flexible working have been developed and are in effect in all units of the university. Employees' satisfaction with work-life balance increases (the question "I feel my work-life balance is good"; baseline from the 2025 survey; data every three years). Support materials are available on the intranet.	Human Resources Office Partners: equal treatment strategy committee, early-career researchers' advisory board; if necessary, experts from and outside the university
When researchers who are parents attend short-term international academic events, we cover the travel costs of the child and/or carer (transport and accommodation costs, the carer's fee or the fee for on-site childcare services).	In a calendar year, at least 20 researchers have been able to attend an international academic event that supports their career development and research collaboration. Feedback from mobility grant recipients is positive. The university's image as a family-friendly and equality-supporting employer has strengthened.	Human Resources Office Partners: early-career researchers' advisory board, the Estonian Young Academy of Sciences members from the University of Tartu

2.3. Gender-aware human resources management and diversity in decision-making bodies

Objective: to ensure that all university employees have equal opportunities in recruitment, promotion and career development, recognising the barriers involved and reducing gender bias in human resources policy. To enhance diversity in decision-making bodies and leadership positions.

Activity	Target	Responsible person(s)
We develop support **measures to achieve gender balance in various positions**, incl. targeted actions to help early-career researchers with a doctoral degree settle in and promote their careers (career counselling, mentoring, peer group counselling, supervision, etc.).	At least two measures have been developed and implemented.	Human Resources Office, Office of Academic Affairs, Grant Office, Centre for Learning and Teaching, faculties' centres for doctoral studies Partner: early-career researchers' advisory board
We encourage institutes and colleges to enhance **diversity in decision-making bodies**.	Units have conducted discussions and, if necessary, amended their statutes.	Deans, Rector's Office
We follow the principle of diversity in the selection of participants for the managers' development programme.	Groups of the managers' development programme have diverse participants.	Human Resources Office
We provide employees, incl. heads of units and members of decision-making bodies, with **training on unconscious and conscious gender bias**.	The training materials have been prepared; training sessions for heads of units and members of decision-making bodies have taken place.	Human Resources Office, deans
When establishing university bylaws concerning the formation of committees, we ensure, if possible, gender diversity in committees.	The principle of gender diversity is observed in university bylaws concerning the formation of committees. The person forming the committee must be able to justify the choice of committee members, if necessary.	Drafters of bylaws, legal counsel

2.4. Integrating the gender dimension into research and teaching

Objective: to bring teaching and research into even closer alignment with the principles of gender equality and, more generally, equal treatment.

Activity	Target	Responsible person(s)
We organise **experience seminars** to present how gender topics are integrated into research and teaching in different disciplines.	At least one experience seminar is held each semester.	Equal treatment strategy committee, Centre for Learning and Teaching Partners: Grant Office, Human Resources Office, Student Union
We consolidate information on the courses offered by the university that address gender equality topics. We share information on good practices from universities abroad. We promote cooperation with international networks to offer students opportunities to take courses taught by partner universities.	A webpage consolidating the information is available.	Office of Academic Affairs, Centre for Learning and Teaching Partner: International Cooperation and Protocol Office
We expand the celebration of the Women in Science Day with thematic discussions and events for students.	At least one discussion for students has been held.	Equal treatment strategy committee, Student Union, Marketing and Communication Office



3. GENDER BALANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY

The University of Tartu statistics dashboard includes public data on the salaries, gender-based salary differences, age and gender of academic staff. Gender-based data about students is also available.

Figure 1 shows that between 2021 and 2025, the proportion of women increased across all academic positions. In lower and mid-level academic positions with a heavier teaching load, the share of women is high, but in professor positions, the proportion of men remains significantly larger. Upward career progression among women is improving, but only slowly: over five years, the proportion of women in professor positions has grown by 7%, and in associate professor positions by 4%.

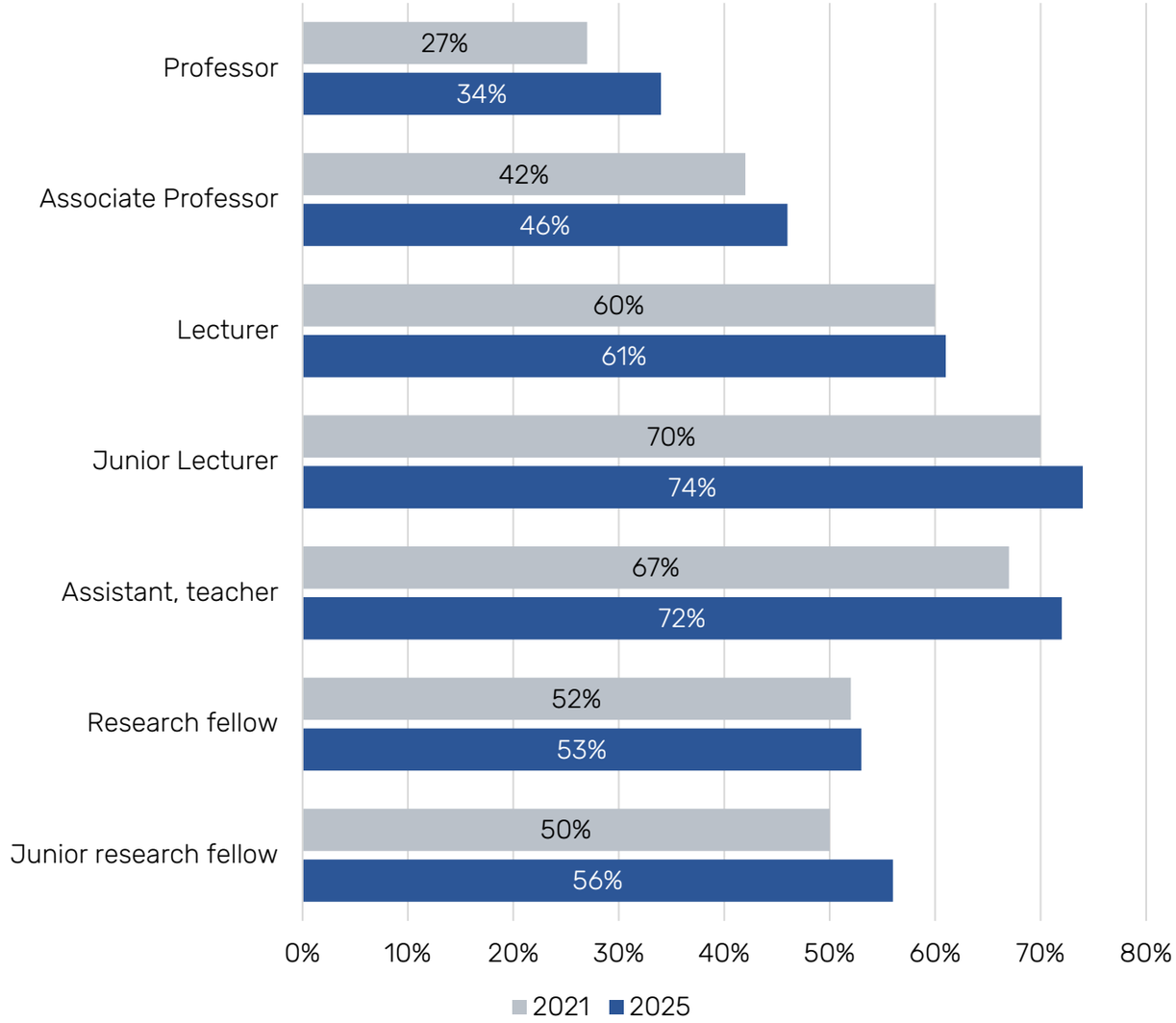


Figure 1. Percentage of women in academic positions in 2021 and 2025

According to Figure 2, the greatest challenge lies in gender disparities across faculties: in the Faculty of Science and Technology, the proportion of female professors remains below 20%, and that of female associate professors is only slightly above 30%.

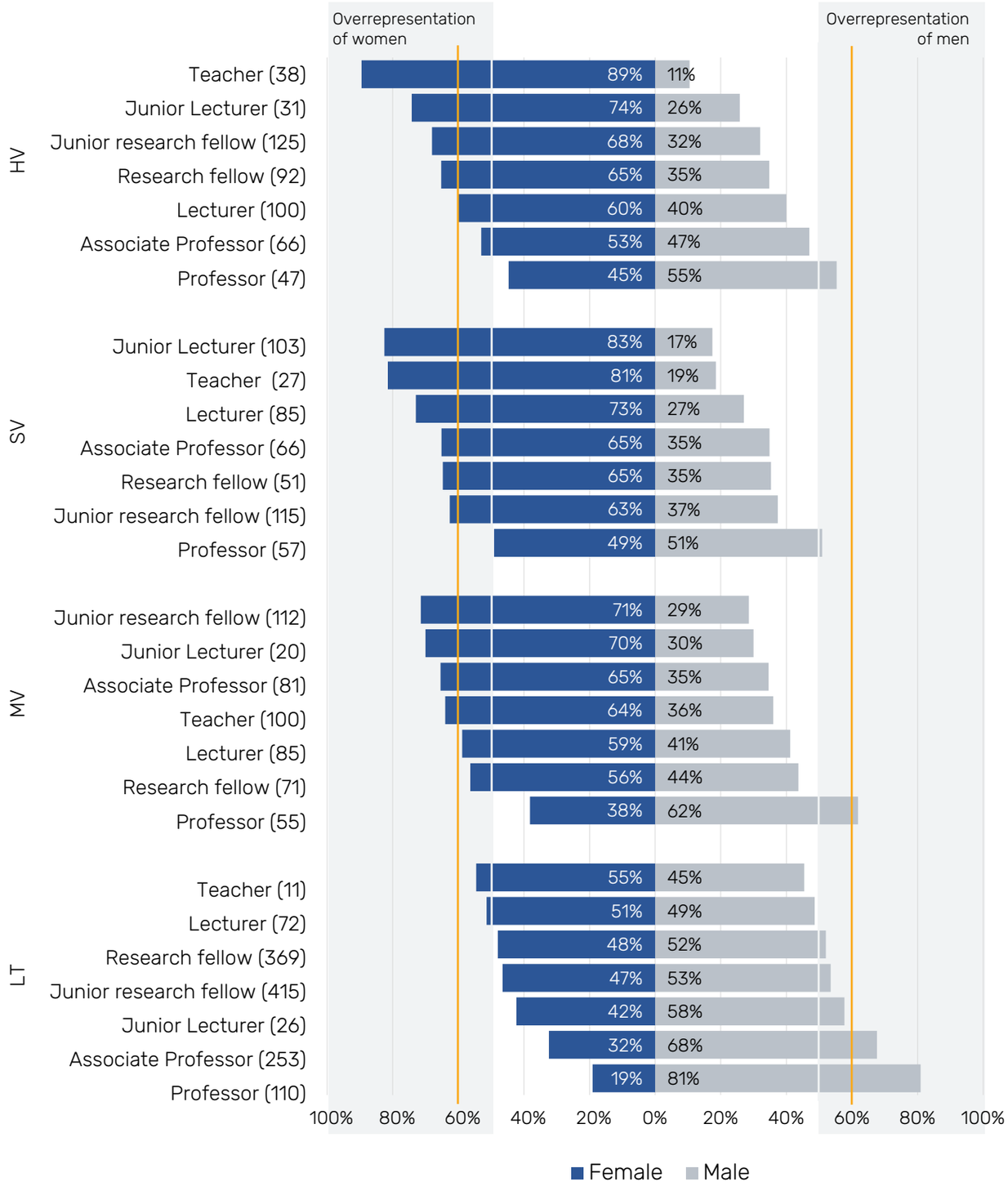


Figure 2. Gender distribution of academic staff by faculty and position as at 31 December 2025

In all faculties except the Faculty of Science and Technology, there are more women than men among early career researchers[2]. The trend of decreasing proportions of women as one moves up the career ladder suggests a possible gender barrier, a glass ceiling, or structural obstacles. It is noteworthy that between 2021 and 2025, among academic staff, only 16 men took parental leave, compared with 151 women. Unsurprisingly, this pattern has a direct impact on career progression, as active research work is inevitably somewhat restricted during parental leave. These circumstances must certainly be taken into account by decision making bodies, for example, when considering staff promotions and evaluations.

Since 2021, it has been possible at the university to progress to a higher career level through promotion, which forms part of the evaluation process. The requirements for promotion are more stringent than those for applying for a position. Between 2021 and 2025, a total of 13 staff members (6 women and 7 men) were promoted to the position of associate professor, and 15 staff members (7 women and 8 men) to the position of professor. Promotions have taken place mainly in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and the Faculty of Science and Technology. In the Faculty of Social Sciences, there was one promotion, and in the Faculty of Medicine, there were no promotions during these years.

[2] The definition of an early career researcher follows the recommendation of the university's early-career researchers' advisory board, which considers a person to be an early career researcher up to 15 years after they defended their doctoral degree.

Table. Number and average age of early-career researchers (data as at 30 November 2024)

Faculty	Number of early-career researchers	% of men	% of women	Average age of men	Average age of women
HV	172	37	63	46	44
SV	159	35	65	45	46
MV	161	38	62	44	46
LT	484	52	48	40	41
Total	**969**	**44**	**56**	**42**	**43**

When looking at the gender composition of the university management, it is evident that, compared with 2021, when the share of men among the members of the Rector's Office was considerably high (82%) and all heads of faculties, i.e. deans, were men, the gender balance among managers has improved significantly (see Figure 3). There is also gender balance among the heads of institutes and colleges. However, among the heads of support units and institutions, women remain markedly more numerous than men.

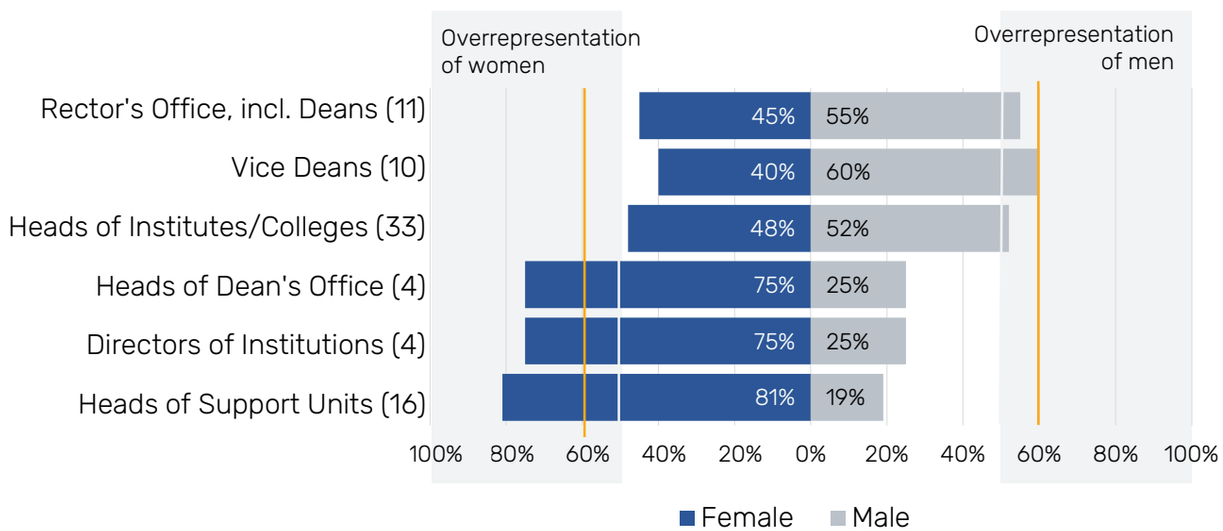


Figure 3. Gender distribution of managers as at 31 December 2025

According to Figure 4, the composition of the university council and senate is more or less gender-balanced, but in other decision making bodies, there is considerable variation: in several councils within the Faculty of Science and Technology, men form the majority, whereas in the councils of the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, women are more prevalent. Among student members, women outnumber men, which helps achieve balance in some councils; however, in the Faculty of Social Sciences and in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, this may even increase uniformity. The influence of student members in councils is important, but it does not resolve the underlying structural gender imbalances.

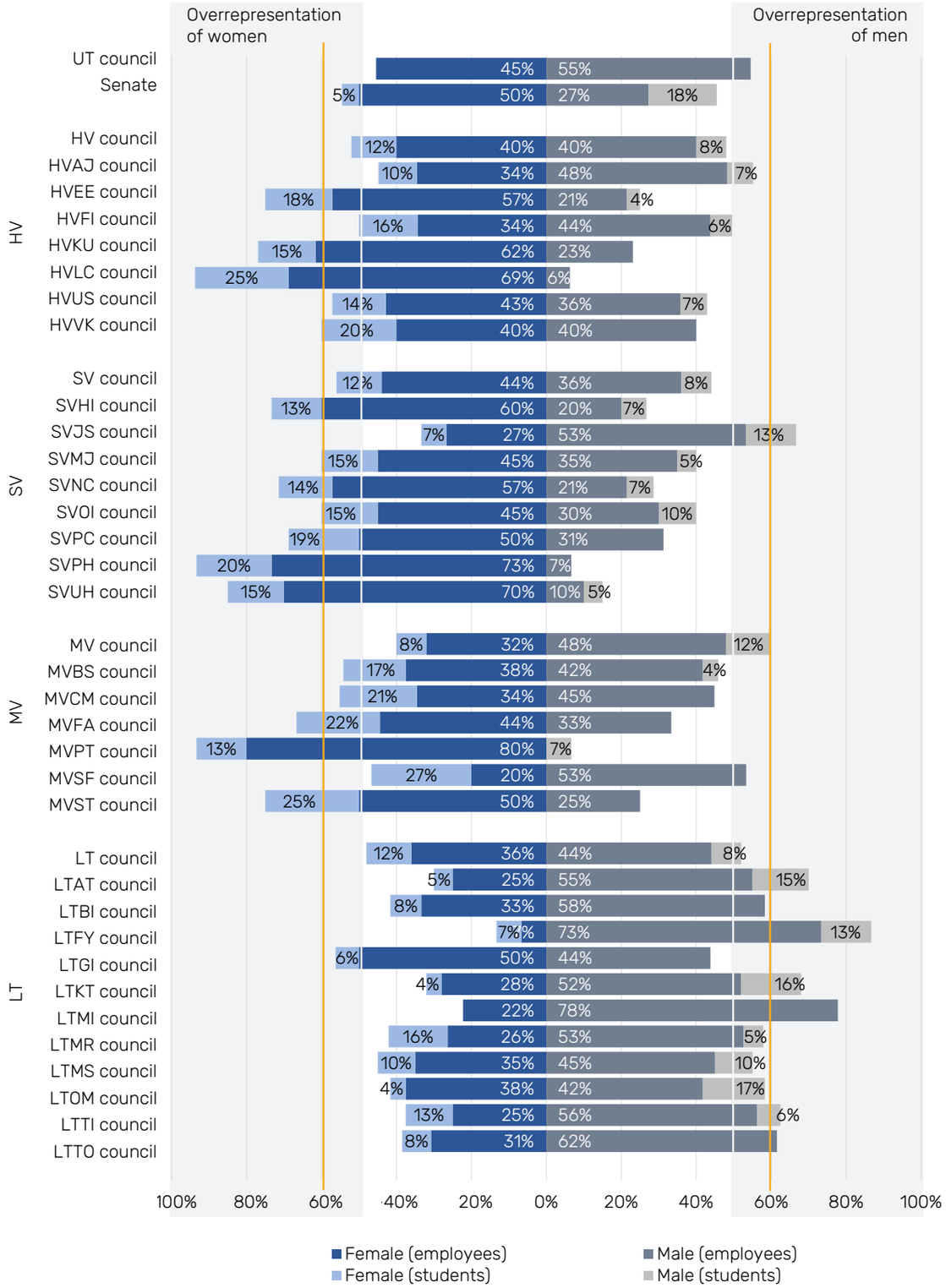


Figure 4. Gender distribution of members of decision-making bodies as at 31 December 2025

Figures 5 and 6 provide an overview of the pay differences between women and men at the university. Between 2021 and 2025, the gender pay gap decreased in academic positions, and across the university as a whole, the difference in salaries at the levels of professor and associate professor is in favour of women.

The gender pay gap in academic positions at the university is smaller than the Estonian average (13.2% according to 2024 data), and faculty-specific differences as at 2025 can be seen in Figure 6. Under the EU Pay Transparency Directive, any gender-based pay difference greater than 5% requires analysis, justification, and, where necessary, correction.

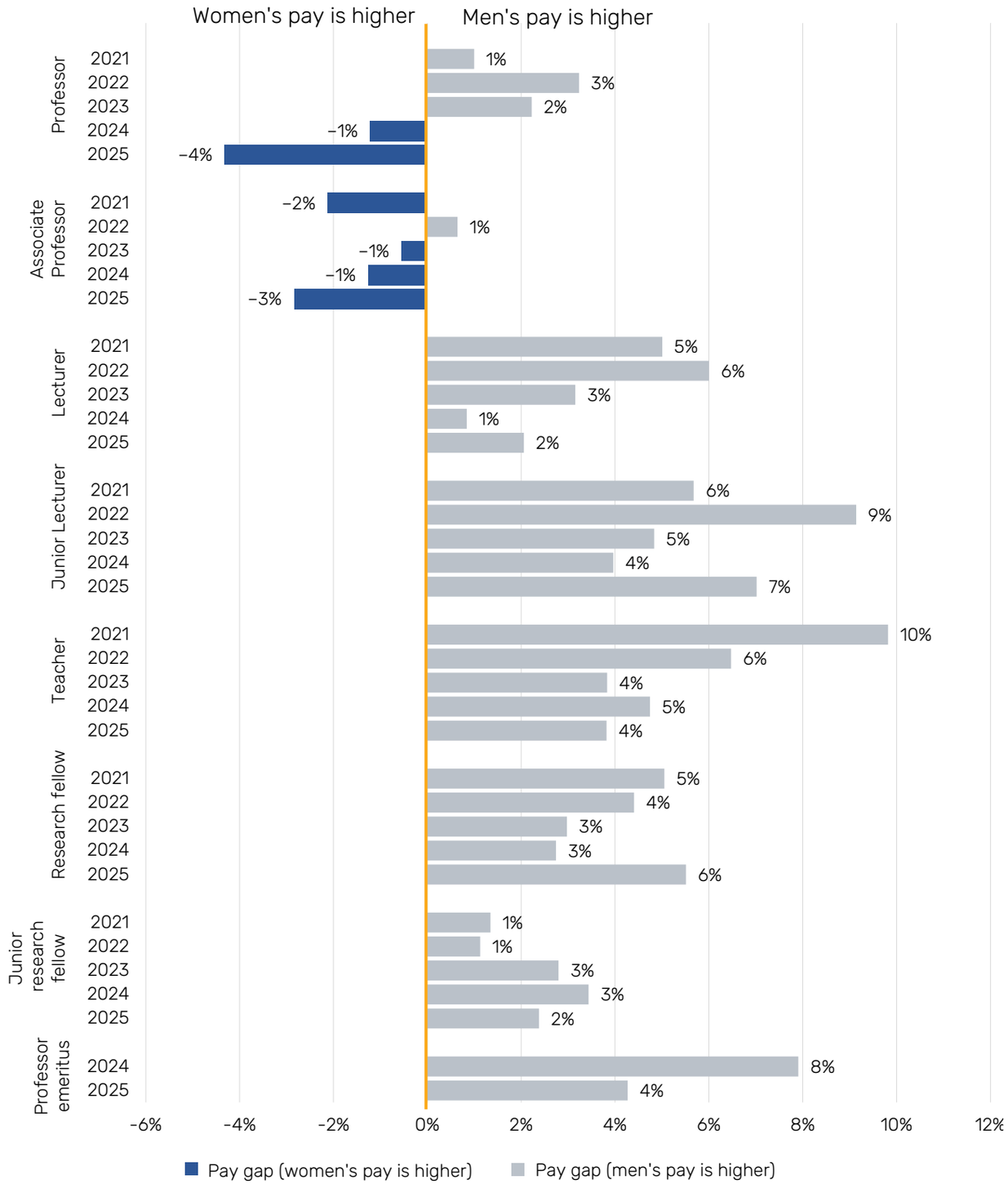


Figure 5. Pay difference between men and women by academic positions in 2021–2025

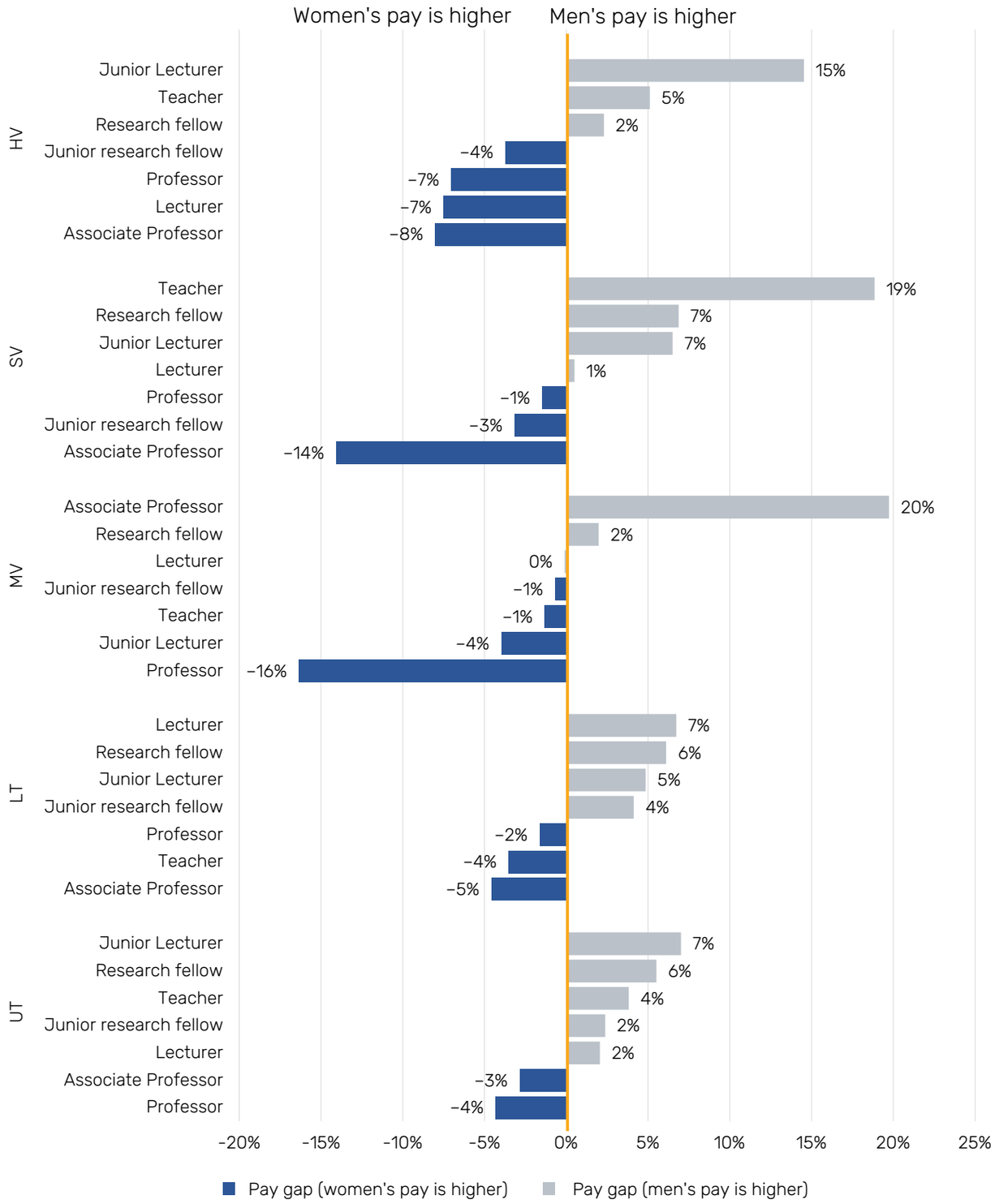


Figure 6. Pay difference between men and women by faculty in 2025

Equal treatment webpage

Photos by Taavi Taivere