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INSPIRING PRACTICE

Becoming a Non-Sexist City: A Cross-Cutting Governance Model for Equality

by the City of Nantes

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Inspiring practice: Becoming a Non-Sexist City: A Cross-Cutting Governance Model for Equality

The City of Nantes has positioned itself as Europe's first "Non-Sexist City", signalling a systemic and long-term commitment to preventing discrimination and transforming public action. Building on its earlier gender equality policy (2014–2020), which focused primarily on addressing the consequences of inequality, Nantes adopted a more ambitious approach beginning in 2020. The municipality recognised that gender inequality persists despite legal advances, and that many seemingly neutral decisions may reinforce existing biases.

This shift reflected a broader societal awareness influenced by the #MeToo movement, which revealed the responsibility not only of individuals but also of institutions and public authorities in preventing violence and discrimination. Nantes chose to rethink its structures, tools, and everyday practices through a gender lens, aiming to mainstream equality across all public policies, internal governance and interactions with citizens.

Becoming a "Non-Sexist City" is therefore not a slogan but a structural transformation that reconstructs how a municipality understands and enacts equality. It engages political leadership, administrative coordination, municipal staff, local associations, and residents to collectively reshape the city's culture, services, and spaces.



Objective

The overarching goal is to recognise and address the systemic nature of sexism and ensure that public action no longer reproduces inequalities. Nantes seeks to:

- Integrate gender considerations into all public policies, budgets, standards, and professional practices
- Improve equality within municipal institutions and staff
- Strengthen LGBTQIA+ inclusion, recognising the shared roots of discrimination (sexism and patriarchal norms)
- Engage citizens and local organisations in continuous dialogue and collaborative governance

This approach is articulated around four strategic axes, 15 priorities, and 20 actions, ensuring a coherent and results-oriented policy framework.



Impact

Institutional transformation: Equality is no longer a marginal topic but part of the municipality's core decision-making processes.



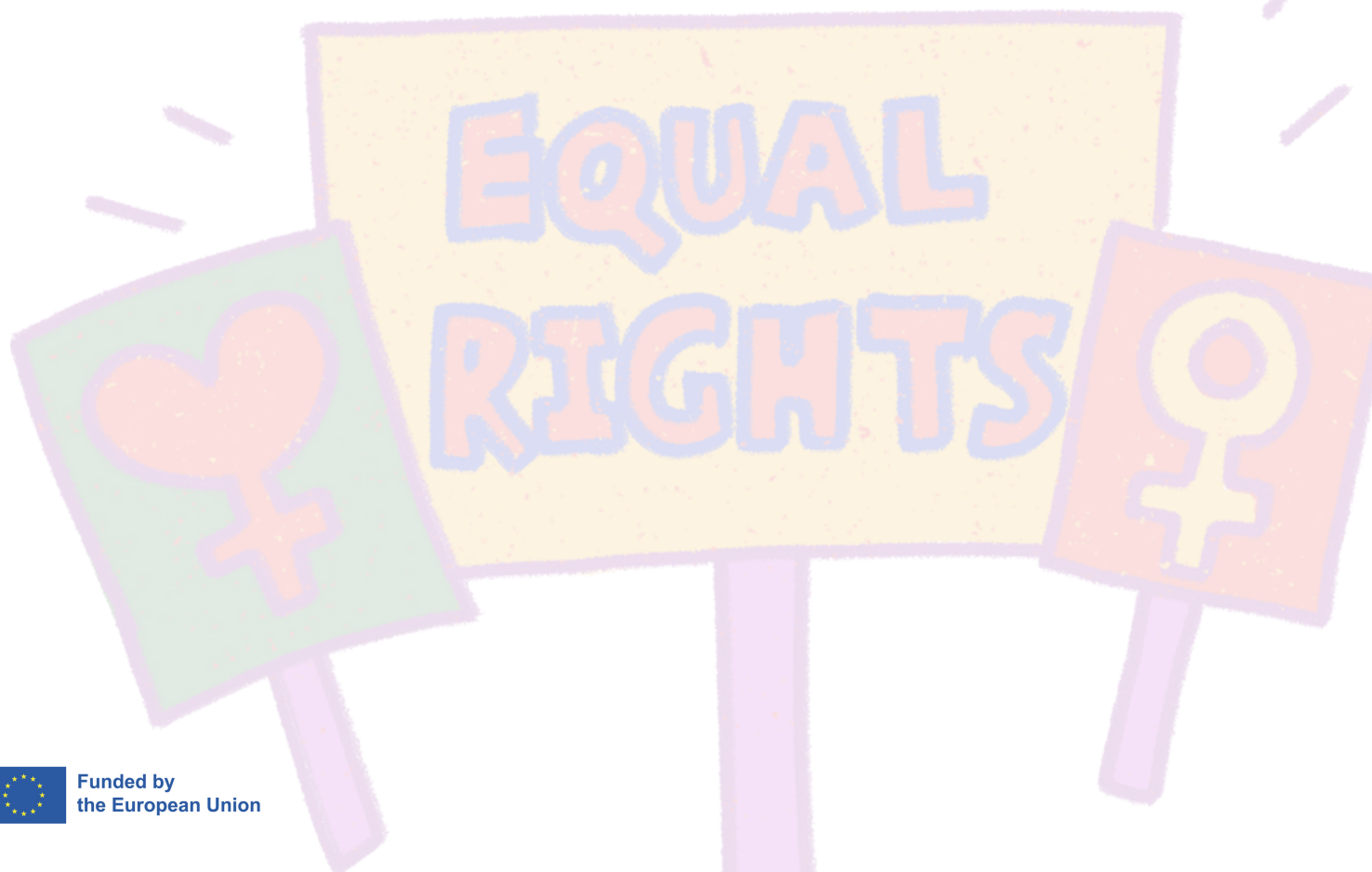
Visibility of systemic sexism: Staff and departments increasingly recognise how policies, spaces, budgets, and everyday practices may reinforce inequalities.

Enhanced cross-departmental cooperation: Culture, sport, education, public spaces, HR, and technical services jointly contribute to the Non-Sexist City agenda.

Inclusive governance: Through the Non-Sexist City Network, 90 local organisations participate directly in shaping public policy

Strengthened internal equality: The advisory council (CCIÉDM) provides an institutional space to confront discrimination and propose improvements.

Together, these impacts demonstrate how a municipality can structurally embed gender equality and actively work to dismantle sexism across all dimensions of public life.



Implementation steps

Phase 1: Establishing a renewed political ambition

Nantes shifted from a compensatory approach to a structural transformation model. Political leadership endorsed the vision of becoming a Non-Sexist City, recognising sexism as systemic and deeply rooted. This shift led to the adoption of a cross-cutting approach and a comprehensive framework covering four strategic axes.

Phase 2: Reorganising municipal structures

To operationalise this ambition, the municipality redesigned its internal organisation:

- Creation of a Non-Sexist City Division within the Equality Department
- Establishment of contact persons in each municipal department responsible for sectoral action plans
- Integration of gender considerations into all public policy areas (culture, sport, public spaces, etc.) and internal governance

This structural redesign ensures that equality is shared across the administration rather than centralised in one unit.

Phase 3: Embedding equality in everyday practices

Departments began revising their tools, decisions, and processes. Examples include:

- Applying a gender lens to policy development and budgeting
- Rethinking standards, professional practices, and service delivery
- Developing equality-focused training and awareness sessions for frontline staff

This mainstreaming process shifts equality from an isolated project to a routine part of municipal work.

Phase 4: Strengthening internal governance: the CCIÉDM

Nantes created the Internal Advisory Council on Equality, Diversity and Gender Balance (CCIÉDM), composed of around 50 volunteer staff, management representatives and staff delegates.

Its missions are to:

- Promote equal treatment and opportunities
- Raise awareness of equality and diversity

- Bring forward the lived realities of staff experiencing discrimination
This internal structure reinforces transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility.

Phase 5: Building open governance with associations

Recognising that the city cannot achieve these goals alone, Nantes established the Non-Sexist City Network, an open governance platform of 90 associations. This network:

- Provides expertise and guidance on public policies
- Facilitates dialogue between the municipality and civil society
- Creates space for exchange between feminist and LGBTQIA+ organisations
- Strengthens resilience in a context where many associations face hostility

This collaborative model anchors the Non-Sexist City agenda in community realities.

Phase 6: Implementing flagship projects

To materialise the strategy, Nantes launched high-impact initiatives such as:

- Citad'Elles, a multidisciplinary support centre for women survivors of violence (6,500 women supported so far)
- A comprehensive menstrual equality plan, including 83 free sanitary product dispensers across the city
- The gender-sensitive redesign of school playgrounds
- Public campaigns on everyday sexism

These interventions translate structural ambition into tangible change in citizens' daily lives.

Phase 7: Monitoring, evaluation and external validation

Nantes uses:

- Certification schemes such as the Diversity Label and Professional Equality Label
- Periodic reviews
- Consultations with citizens on gender-sensitive public spaces

These mechanisms ensure accountability and continuous improvement



Lessons learned & challenges

DOs

Adopt a systemic lens

Recognise that sexism is embedded in institutions, policies, and social norms—not only in individual behaviour.

Invest in cross-departmental structures

Dedicated staff, contact points, and interdepartmental coordination are essential to sustain long-term transformation.

Engage civil society as equal partners

The Non-Sexist City Network strengthens legitimacy, brings expertise and supports shared ownership of public action.

Showcase tangible commitments

Flagship projects (e.g., Citad'Elles, menstrual equity, playground redesign) increase visibility and public support.

Plan for long-term cultural change

Transforming mindsets takes time; sustained political leadership is crucial.

DON'Ts

Don't isolate equality work in a single department

Mainstreaming requires shared responsibility across all services.

Don't underestimate the resistance that accompanies cultural change

Backlash, misogyny, homophobic attacks and populist narratives require preparedness and strong political backing.

Don't expect quick wins on deep cultural issues

Structural transformation must be anchored in patience, persistence and continuous adaptation.



How can this practice be replicated by others?

Municipalities wishing to replicate Nantes' approach should begin by building clear political commitment to a systemic equality strategy and creating or strengthening internal structures that coordinate this work across departments. They should map local partners and establish open governance mechanisms, while starting with one or two flagship projects to build visibility and momentum. At the same time, it is essential to invest in staff training and sector-specific action plans that translate this commitment into everyday practice. Above all, cities must **recognise that becoming a Non-Sexist City is a collective and long-term endeavour, requiring both institutional reform and deep cultural transformation.**

Further resources

The City of Nantes shared several documents that were essential in developing this Inspiring Practice. Alongside the interview with Deputy Mayor Mahaut Bertu, these materials provide a clearer picture of how the city translates its political ambition into operational tools, institutional structures and measurable outcomes. Read the interview, [here](#).

Municipalities wishing to explore Nantes' approach in more depth may consult the following:

- [Becoming a Non-Sexist City by 2030](#) – strategic framework, axes and priority actions.
- [Citad'elles – History – background on the development of the centre for women victims of violence](#).
- [Citad'elles](#) – Overview – services, operational model and impact.
- [Communication Campaigns of the Non-Sexist City](#) – examples of public-facing campaigns addressing sexism.
- [Evaluation Report: Gender-Sensitive Public Spaces \(2025\)](#) – findings from Nantes' participatory evaluation and ten priorities for future action.

For more information, contact

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