

# Female Empowerment Maastricht

# Year Report

December 2025



## Foreword and Reading Guide

The **Female Empowerment Maastricht University** network – otherwise known as **FEM** – is a network of academic and administrative staff representing Maastricht University. Our network was established in 2018 through a Diversity and Inclusivity grant, awarded by the UM Diversity and Inclusivity Advisory Council. After a successful pilot year, FEM has since become a key part of UM's Diversity and Inclusivity Office, contributing to the overall efforts of the University to minimise gender disparities and promote a diverse, fair, and equitable work environment for all.

In this report, we provide an overview of our activities and accomplishments in 2025 and lay out some of our plans for the future. The report is structured in **three parts**.

First, we provide a short introduction of FEM, who we are, what we do, and how our work benefits the UM community and beyond. Then, we present some highlights of our accomplishments and activities from the past year. The third part of this report is dedicated to the future plans of the FEM team and on the ways forward for our network within the UM community.

Lastly, FEM would like to express their gratitude and **thank the university and faculties** for helping to finance these projects.

Kind Regards,  
The FEM Executive Board



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# FEM: About Us

## Our Mission

Through our work, we aim to promote equity and equality at Maastricht University and specifically highlight the important role of women in academia. To achieve this goal, we have set **seven goals** that we actively work towards through a number of activities organised in **five thematic pillars**.

Specifically, **FEM's goals** are to:

- Raise awareness on the problems of gender equality and equity within the UM community;
- Encourage an open discussion and welcome all viewpoints on gender equality in terms of career and work-life balance at UM;
- Identify current issues and problematic areas of gender equality and equity requiring attention and contribute to shape policies that tackle them;
- Facilitate collaborative interaction between junior and senior staff members at UM, staff from different faculties, and staff holding different faculty positions (e.g. administrative and academic);
- Increase the visibility of women in academia;
- Highlight and promote female leaders at UM;
- Cooperate with other platforms within and outside the Netherlands (e.g. Landelijk Netwerk Vrouwelijke Hoogleraren, European Women in Mathematics, NWO, Athena's Angels, Mothers in Science) who share a similar vision.

To realise the goals described above, FEM has delineated five thematic pillars which have been the basis of our activities since 2018:

- **Training**  
FEM organises tailored workshops that: (i) build academic skills and leadership qualities; (ii) strengthen communication and promotion (e.g. negotiation skills) and (iii) raise awareness of behaviour-related topics, e.g. implicit bias, bystander intervention techniques.
- **Mentoring**  
Having gained expertise through our FEM Mentorship Pilot programme, held in 2018-2019, FEM aims to set up and streamline mentorship programs across UM.
- **Informing**  
Through different platforms – the UM and D&I websites, our social media platforms, and the UM-wide newsletters – we maintain a steady stream of communication between FEM and the general UM community and beyond. There, we disseminate information on relevant events, grant competitions and other career opportunities, books and other sources relating to gender issues in academia.
- **Networking**  
We provide the floor for various networking events: a yearly symposium, keynote events, and lunches on various topics where participants can discuss and reflect on relevant topics on gender issues, e.g. tenure track policy, family friendly work conditions or book clubs.
- **Policy**  
FEM has been actively engaged in policy shaping, evidenced by the production of influential policy papers. To formalize and further strengthen this commitment, a fifth policy pillar was added to the FEM agenda in 2021. We are also in close contact with funding agencies at national and international levels, aiming to enhance gender equality and equity within the UM community through our policy recommendations.

## The FEM Team

### How we organise ourselves

The FEM board is composed of 14 members of academic and administrative staff of all UM faculties who meet on a monthly basis. The FEM board is further supported by the D&I office as well as a body of **volunteer Ambassadors** which help promote and set-up FEM activities.

FEM is an entirely bottom-up community-based network, and most of the FEM Board members consider their role as service work and part of academic citizenship, and as such contribute on a voluntary basis. Moving forward, we hope that more members of the UM staff community will join us, regardless of their gender, position, or background. In this way, the aim of FEM is to internally reflect the same values of diversity and inclusivity that the organisation actively promotes. Our activities developed organically based on the needs of women staff in academia, and currently we are focusing on consolidating these activities and professionalising our organisational structure.

In the past year, the FEM board reorganized itself. In particular, the following board members ended their term at FEM: Alexx Allen-de Rijk, Katrien Bernaerts, Constance Sommerey, Julie Goodfellow and Anna Zseleva. We would like to thank them very much for their contributions in the past years! The FEM board welcomed Bruna Ferreira da Silva Calado, Jolien Janssen, Vicky Sterk, Liliana Bedoya Vargas, Ann Vanderhaeghe, Emma de Brabander, Romy Khan, Albertine Zanting and Berta Cillero Pastor (who was also a former FEM ambassador) to further strengthen its activities. Aurélie Carlier stepped down as FEM chair and is followed up by Berta Cillero Pastor.

## The FEM board

Name	Faculty & unit	Start FEM Board
Berta Cillero Pastor (chair)	FHML   MERLN	2024
Aur�lie Carlier	FHML   MERLN	2018
Christina Peristeridou	FdR   Criminal Law	2018
Teresa Schuhmann	FPN   Cognitive Neuroscience	2020
Chris Pawley	FSE   Coordinator Academic Advising	2022
Kim Smits	FHML   Pathology	2022
Bruna Ferreira da Silva Calado	UB   Talent development	2024
Jolien Janssen	UB   Student Service Centrum	2024
Vicky Sterk	UB   Senior Corporate Recruiter	2024
Emma de Brabander	FHML   MHeNs	2024
Ann Vanderhaeghe	UB   Leadership Academy (Talent Development)	2025
Liliana Bedoya Vargas	MSM-UM   Consultant at the Expert Centre on Emerging Economies	2025
Romy Khan	FHML   MERLN	2025
Albertine Zanting	FHML   HES	2025

# FEM activities 2025

## Trainings and Mentoring

### Trainings

In 2025, FEM continued its collaboration with Talent Development to offer a series of professional training sessions open to all UM staff (details about participation in Table 1). The workshops were highly valued by participants and received positive evaluations across all key criteria, highlighting their relevance and direct applicability to daily work and personal development. Due to strong interest, the trainings in the second semester were offered in double groups to accommodate the high number of registrations. We are grateful for the engagement and insights of our participants and look forward to continuing to provide meaningful learning opportunities in 2026.

Table 1: Training, date, number of participants and average score satisfaction.

Name training	Date	Number Participants	Average score satisfaction (out of 10)
Personal Branding and Presentation I	May 22	7	9.7
The Power of Full Engagement	May 28	6	9.0
Negotiation Skills I	October 6	17	9.1
Personal Branding and Presentation II	September 18	18	8.7
Negotiation Skills II	June 12	9	8.7
<b>Total/average</b>		<b>57</b>	<b>9.04</b>

#### Key Highlights:

- All participants indicated they would recommend the training to their colleagues.
- All participants expressed interest in attending similar professional development sessions in the future.

In the evaluation, our colleagues noted that the workshop was "well structured, well balanced" and praised the trainers for being "knowledgeable and approachable." Some participants specifically mentioned that the skills learned are necessary and applicable, noting that "everything is a negotiation" and that the skills "can be applied in many aspects of the day-to-day life". Participants valued the "practical tips that can be used in every presentation". Several comments highlighted that the skills learned, including "Grounding, focus, my why, learning to slow down" and how it can be immediately used in upcoming presentations or difficult talks.

The high engagement in these modules has generated strong interest in continuing professional development. Based on feedback received in the workshops, the most consistently requested areas for future training include:

- Conflict Management / Conflict Resolution
- Self-Advocacy / Assertiveness
- Career Development / Personal Coaching
- Difficult Conversations (e.g., negative feedback)

FEM will continue the collaboration with Talent Development and it's planning to make an effort to connect all the training activities at the different faculties at the UM to maximize the opportunities and access for all staff. The training activities have been an excellent way for the Board to gain visibility among staff and to communicate the mission as relevant and meaningful.

**UPCOMING EVENTS.**  
Workshops

**Workshops**

Thursday, 22 May 2025 | 7 seats available  
**MAY 22**  
**Personal Branding & Presentation**  
Find your WHY and learn to present it confidently. Step out of your comfort zone with hands-on exercises, including 1-minute pitches, and tools to stay calm and focused while presenting.

Wednesday, 28 May 2025 | 8 seats available  
**MAY 28**  
**The Power of Full Engagement**  
Discover how to balance your energy, stay resilient, and align your actions with your personal values. Learn practical tools to boost resilience and improve your well-being at work and in life.

Monday, 9 June 2025 | 15 seats available  
**JUN 9**  
**Active Listening**  
Empower yourself with active listening skills, build empathy, and prepare for difficult conversations. This workshop will help you foster a culture of respect, compassion, and support.

Thursday, 12 June 2025 | 10 seats available  
**JUN 12**  
**Negotiation Skills**  
Understand different negotiation types, practice persuasion tactics, and gain confidence in handling negotiations. Through theory and interactive exercises, enhance your ability to navigate challenges effectively.

Limited seats available – secure your spot now!

**UPCOMING EVENTS.**  
Back because of high demand

**Workshops**

Thursday, 18 September 2025 | Limited seats available  
**SEP 18**  
**Personal Branding & Presentation Workshop**  
Specially for Postdoctoral stage (priority for participants in PAW). Craft your "WHY" in your own words and feel confident communicating the origin of your passion, while you practice presenting it with confidence. You will gain practical tools to stay present, focused, and calm when speaking in front of a group, essential skills for making your mark and advancing your career.

Monday, 6 October 2025 | Limited seats available  
**OCT 6**  
**Negotiation Skills Workshop**  
Whether you're negotiating for research time, first authorship, or your salary scale, knowing how to negotiate effectively is vital. This hands-on workshop combines theory, exercises, and real examples to help you master different negotiation types, understand your own responses, and handle persuasion tactics with confidence.

Limited seats available – secure your spot now!

## Mentoring

A Canvas course, Coaching Modules, is currently being designed for mentors and employees. The topics of the course include fostering employability and wellbeing, coaching skills (explaining the differences between coaching and mentoring, and different coaching models), advanced coaching skills (e.g. feedback giving, handling emotions, listening and the use of silence), competence development and addressing challenging behavior. This course is meant to make mentoring more accessible and easier through guidelines. Furthermore, resources were added to the Canvas course Introduction "Diversity in Medicine". These resources include gender and sexuality, language and communication, ethnicity and culture, colonialism and eurocentrism and health literacy. These resources include journal articles, videos, podcasts, informative websites, and e-books. In addition, this CANVAS course includes links to official statements and visions of UM and FHML on topics such as diversity and wellbeing. FEM would like to add additional resources such as recent papers more focused on gender inequalities in academia.

## Events

Through events and activities, FEM actively contributes to informing, networking, and policy engagement within the UM community. FEM uses lectures, panels, and outreach initiatives to raise awareness, share knowledge, and stimulate reflection on gender equity and inclusion. At the same time, FEM creates opportunities for networking by bringing together people from different faculties, career stages, and disciplines, as well as external partners, to foster connection and exchange. Insights and experiences gathered during these activities are used to inform broader discussions and contribute to policy-related conversations, allowing FEM to connect lived experiences with institutional learning and long-term change.

## Informing and Networking

### International Women's Day Lumière - 8 March

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women's Day, FEM organised a special pre-release screening of *I'm Still Here* at Lumière. The movie is a poignant drama by Walter Salles that delves into the disappearance of engineer and politician during Brazil's dictatorship, and his wife Eunice Paiva's relentless pursuit of justice and activism to change her society. During the evening, Eunice León, a Global Health master's graduate with extensive experience in women's rights in low- and middle-income countries, gave an insightful introduction. Furthermore, the attendees received a free drink with their ticket to stimulate participants interaction.



### Women in STEM Symposium - 12 May

The women in STEM symposium took place on May 12<sup>th</sup> at the Faculty of Health Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML). The symposium was about bringing together current female leaders and aspiring female students pursuing STEM together to create a network of like-minded people and to support and uplift each other. This year FEM organised and sponsored an event featuring four accomplished female leaders from various STEM backgrounds and companies; Giuditta Pereversi, Farrah Saeedi, Sanne Aarts and Bo van Engelen. The women shared their experiences, insights, and advice with students from United World College Maastricht (UWC) and Maastricht University. By creating space for dialogue and visible role models, the symposium contributes to inspiring and empowering the next generation of women to pursue and thrive in STEM fields.



### Soapbox Science Maastricht - 17 May

On Saturday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, the Markt in Maastricht was transformed into a lively open-air stage, where 11 inspiring women scientists took to their soapboxes to share their research with a broad and curious audience. FEM was able to sponsor this event. The event drew enthusiastic crowds of all ages, sparking lively conversations and curiosity. Under a bright and beautiful sunny sky, the atmosphere was vibrant and full of energy, making science feel approachable and fun.



## Pint of Science - 21 May

The international science festival Pint of Science hosted in Maastricht from 19 to 21 May. During this three-day festival, researchers from Maastricht University shared their work not in lecture halls, but in local cafés, where the public was invited to listen, ask questions, and raise a glass to science. This year's edition included six evening events, each centered on a different theme, ranging from healthy ageing and quantum physics to education, diversity, sustainability, and fat metabolism. FEM sponsored the Science Pint, Inclusive Science: Beyond the Bias. This Science Pint was on the lack of diversity and inclusivity in (data) science. The talks were given by Nava Tintarev, Dennis Soemers and Katleen Gabriels on May 21 in Café Rosé.



## Women in Data Science (WiDS) Maastricht Conference - 20 June

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June Maastricht held the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the Women in Data Science (WiDS) conference. The event was organized by the Institute of Data Science (IDS), the Maastricht Centre for Systems Biology and Bioinformatics (MaCSBio) and the Department of Advanced Computing Sciences (DACS). The conference was sponsored by FEM with merchandise. The theme of 2025 was "Data Crossways: Where Disciplines Meet". This conference provided an opportunity to hear about the latest data science-related research and connect with others in the field. It is part of a mission to increase participation of women in data science and to feature outstanding women doing outstanding work. Parallel to the conference, the Amrapali Zaveri Award was presented. This award aims to recognize scholars for their contributions to the field of data science. This year's winner of the Amrapali Zaveri Award for an Early Career Data Scientist was Ping Cao.



## Post-doc Appreciation Week (PAW) - 17/18 September

### PAW I

FEM and Maastricht University collaborated in the Post-Doc Appreciation Week NL, which covered activities in the country. Several lectures were given by the university, and FEM hosted two events. At the PAW I event, four speakers with different academic/industrial were invited to give a talk about their professional journey and the challenges they have faced as a woman. The speakers were Gabriëlle Tuijthof, Adriana Berlanga, Alma Mingels and Vanessa LaPointe. The aim of the event was to give post-docs an idea of the possible carrier paths they can pursue afterwards. From fundamental research to developing new technology and being a medical specialist, different work possibilities were discussed. A panel discussion was held during lunch with the possibility of networking afterwards. The panel discussion covered topics about path and choices, female researcher and general confidence and issues regarding opportunities as women.

### PAW II

The second event took place the next day in the afternoon, and 3 speakers were present. The speakers were Rianne Pellemans-van Rooijen, Adriana Berlanga and Cheryl Roumen. No panel discussion took place, but a networking activity in the end.

The training session "Personal Branding and Presentation II" was offered as a special activity for this week. As mentioned in the previous section, the training was very positively evaluated by the participants.

## Impact Beyond Gender Brightlands - 12 November

FEM was invited by Brightlands Maastricht to collaborate on the first session of “Impact Beyond gender”. With this event, Brightlands wanted to respond to the challenge evidenced by recent research showing that scientific contributions by women and other underrepresented groups remain systematically underutilized.

Through a keynote talk, a panel discussion, interactive workshops, and networking, we will highlight opportunities, showcase role models, and address the facilitators and challenges needed to make innovation truly inclusive.

Dr. Pomme Theunissen opened the event with a lecture on the challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs. She began by asking the audience to define an entrepreneur and highlighted historic women who helped shape business innovation. Entrepreneurs turn ideas into profitable ventures and need resilience, adaptability, and creativity. Although only one-third of entrepreneurs are women, leaving significant potential untapped, women are the fastest-growing entrepreneurial group. Their motivations often differ from men’s: men are typically “pulled” into entrepreneurship by opportunity, whereas women are more often “pushed” by necessity. Despite stereotypes, women do not underperform; they build stable firms with survival rates similar to men.

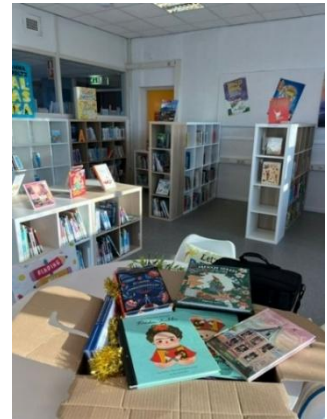
Women benefit from entrepreneurship through financial independence, flexibility, and their strong understanding of consumer markets. However, barriers remain, especially in accessing finance, networks, and information. Banks are less likely to lend to women, making crowdfunding an important alternative where women often perform better. Theunissen also stressed that female-specific life events, such as the menstrual cycle and motherhood, influence entrepreneurial performance and deserve greater policy support.

The panel discussion consisted of four panellists: Pomme Theunissen, Christianne Rijcken, Timi Csontos and Jessie van Bruggenum. The questions had a focus on inclusivity at the workplace. Panelists highlighted that diverse mindsets, creativity, persistence, and inclusion itself are key drivers of innovation. They discussed common barriers to sustaining inclusive practices, including fear, lack of psychological safety, limited support systems, and unconscious bias, while emphasising the importance of open dialogue and self-reflection in leadership.



## Children's books donation - 5 December

Children's books with women as role models were gifted to three primary schools in the Maastricht region for the first time by FEM. A list with fiction and non-fiction books were provided from which the schools could choose. Two copies of each book chosen from the list were gifted. The primary schools will keep track of how often the books are being read by the children and FEM would receive this data after the first six months and yearly thereafter. By receiving this data, we can track the interest in female role models and with this indication, we hope to expend this initiative to other primary schools in the area. Because empowerment is for every age.



## Social Media Presence

FEM's social media presence continues to grow as an important channel for outreach, engagement, and community building. Through regular posts on platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn, FEM shares updates on its initiatives, highlights upcoming activities and celebrates international days. On international days we like to pay extra attention to the inequalities and inequities that women face on specific topics. We celebrate what we have reached while we raise awareness about what still can be done. FEM had a wide outreach on LinkedIn with 15,797 impressions between February 2025 and January 2026. On Instagram, recent analytics show 1,192 views between November 2025 and January 2026, with most of the views coming from non-followers, indicating that FEM's content is successfully reaching audiences beyond its immediate network. Social media continues to play a key role in broadening FEM's outreach and strengthening community engagement.

## Policy

### Mothers in Science; Fathers Who Care - June

FEM took part in the Fathers Who Care campaign by Mothers in Science. As part of the campaign, a Toolkit for Allies was launched. This toolkit isn't just for men. It's for everyone who is ready to lead with empathy, speak up against bias, and use their voices to create more equitable spaces for their partners, colleagues, and future generations. The toolkit can be found at the website: <https://www.mothersinscience.com/dads>



### Post- Maternity Research Booster Grant - 16 December

The Post-Maternity Research Booster Grant, jointly offered by Female Empowerment Maastricht University (FEM) and the Maastricht Young Academy (MYA), supports academic women returning from maternity leave in rebuilding their research trajectory and academic visibility. Recognizing that parenthood (though profoundly enriching) often coincides with pivotal career stages where research productivity is essential, FEM took the initiative to fill a gap in the funding schemes of external and internal funding policies. In collaboration with MYA we designed this grant to address the structural barriers that continue to disproportionately affect mothers in academia. This grant offers targeted support to promote continuity in research and career advancement.

#### Purpose of Grant

- This grant is designed to support academic researchers who have recently returned from maternity leave, helping them strengthen and advance their research trajectory.

- Its primary aim is to offer flexible support for activities that foster the re-establishment of research momentum, visibility, and career progression following maternity leave. FEM and MYA emphasize the importance of ensuring a sustainable and equitable return to academic life, recognizing that meaningful support may take different forms depending on individual circumstances and disciplinary contexts.
- Accordingly, applications are welcome for well-defined research projects, as well as for focused research activities or professional initiatives that enhance the applicant's research profile. Eligible uses of the funding include (but are not limited to) completing a publication, hiring (student) assistants, organizing or attending a symposium, initiating collaborations, preparing a grant proposal, field research, conducting preliminary research to develop a new line of inquiry, collecting pilot data for future projects, undertaking training, or buying out teaching time.
- There were 2 grants offered of 7500 Euros each.

The initiative was very positively received on social media, generating substantial engagement and supportive feedback advocating for making such funding possibilities a structural reality. At the same time, several women researchers contacted FEM to express their strong support for expanding this type of funding scheme financially, so that it can benefit a larger group of academics.

## Future FEM Plans

Building on the strong engagement and positive impact of its 2025 activities, FEM aims to further strengthen and expand its role within the UM community and beyond in the coming year. A key priority will be the continuation of FEM trainings and mentoring, in close collaboration with Talent Development. Based on participant feedback, future sessions will focus on topics such as conflict management, self-advocacy, career development, and navigating difficult conversations, while also finding a centralised way to collect feedback.

FEM will also continue to organise events, including the International Women's Day Lumière screening, which has proven to be a meaningful platform for reflection, dialogue, and visibility of women's experiences. In addition, FEM plans to further invest in collaborative events with internal and external partners, strengthening networks across faculties, institutions, and regions. Events such as the collaboration Maastricht/Hasselt MOSA conference, with the theme "Women's Health" in 2026, and FEM festival, can increase our visibility across UM and outside of UM.

The Post-Maternity Research Booster Grant, jointly offered with the Maastricht Young Academy, will potentially remain an initiative to support academic women returning from maternity leave (depending on available budget). We also seek to actively engage in dialogue with the NWO to advocate for making this type of funding support a national reality. FEM also intends to continue and expand the children's books donation project, promoting female role models from an early age.

FEM seeks to increase its impact on the policy and guidelines domain, contributing to discussions on gender equity, career progression, and family-friendly academic practices. Based on the FEM Monitor 2025 and Landelijk Netwerk Vrouwelijk Hoogleraren (LNVH) Monitor 2025, FEM supports the recommendation of 40% female professors as a provisional goal. Policy recommendations are made at UM wide level and faculty specific level. The goal is to make guidelines based on the recommendations for heads of departments, to navigate diversity and inclusivity, and for people who are starting professorship, to navigate the career environment. It is furthermore our aim to explicitly situate these recommendations and guidelines within the context of Recognition & Rewards (R&R), to ensure that gender equity and inclusive career progression are structurally embedded in evaluation, promotion, and leadership practices. In this context, FEM also aims to establish closer cooperation directly with the bodies responsible for promotion and appointment policies across UM (such as BAC-type institutions), in order to align guidelines, policy implementation, and decision-making practices.

## Contact

FEM would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised in our report in more detail. Any questions or suggestions for any of our activities should be directed to [fem@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:fem@maastrichtuniversity.nl). For more information regarding our activities please visit the FEM website and the FEM social media accounts.

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