

Female Empowerment Maastricht

# YEAR REPORT

December 2024



Maastricht University

## Foreword and reading guide

The **Female Empowerment Maastricht University** network – otherwise known as **FEM** – is a network of academic and administrative staff representing the faculties and offices of 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 from the past year 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. 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 financing these projects.

Kind Regards,  
The FEM Executive Board



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FEM: ABOUT US .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Our Mission	4
The FEM Team	5
How we organise ourselves	5
<b>HIGHLIGHTS OF FEM 2024: ACCOMPLISHMENTS &amp; ACTIVITIES .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Training and mentoring	7
Informing	9
Networking	10
Policy	11
<b>FUTURE FEM PLANS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Current Projects and New Ideas	12
Training	12
Mentoring	12
Informing	12
Networking	12
Policy	13

## 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 within 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, 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 focus on information transfer, for instance by sharing 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 of the UM policy or general academic politics on gender issues, e.g. tenure track policy, family friendly work conditions, 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 12 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 institution, and all 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 our work, 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 and Berta Cillero Pastor (who was also a former FEM ambassador) to further strengthen its activities. Aurélie Carlier also stepped down as FEM chair, and is followed-up by Berta Cillero Pastor.

### The FEM Board

Name	Faculty & unit	Start FEM Board
Aurélie Carlier	FHML   MERLN	2018
Christina Peristeridou	FdR   Criminal Law	2018
Berta Cillero Pastor	FHML   MERLN	2024
Teresa Schuhmann	FPN   Cognitive Neuroscience	2020
Chris Pawley	FSE   Coordinator Academic Advising	2022
Bruna Ferreira da Silva Calado	UB   Staff Career Centre	2024
Kim Smits	FHML   Pathology	2022
Jolien Janssen	UB   Student Service Centrum	2024
Vicky Sterk	UB   Senior Corporate Recruiter	2024
Liliana Bedoya Vargas	MSM-UM   Consultant Expert on Emerging Economies	2024

### The FEM Ambassador Team

Name	Faculty or Unit
Sharon Anyango	FASoS
Lisa Bruggen	SBE
Marlies Gijs	FHML

Former members of the FEM Executive Board are listed in the Table below.

Name	Faculty or Unit	Start FEM Board	End FEM Board
Jessica Alleva	FPN	2018	2019
Aida Abiad Monge	SBE	2018	2019
Alie de Boer	FSE (UCV)	2018	2019
Christel van Gool	FHML	2018	2019
Sophie Kells	MUO	2019	2019
Rianne Fijten	FHML	2019	2021
Danai Petropoulou Ionescu	FdR	2018	2023
Danai Papathanasiou	FASoS	2023	2023
Anna Zseleva	SBE	2023	2024
Julie Goodfellow	SBE	2022	2024
Constance Sommerey	D&I Office	2018	2024
Alexx Allen-de Rijk	SBE	2020	2024
Katrien Bernaerts	FSE	2021	2024
Tara de Koster	FHML (CARIM)	2022	2024
Luana Russo	FASoS	2018	2024

## Highlights of FEM 2024: accomplishments & activities

Since the launch of FEM in 2018, we have worked hard to provide interesting and engaging activities for the UM community. On the basis of the five thematic pillars of FEM, here we present the highlights of our accomplishments and activities of the past year.

### Training and mentoring

In response to requests from the UM community to introduce professional trainings focusing on FEM topics, FEM has organised a number of training sessions. Specifically, in collaboration with the UM Staff Career Centre, we currently offer the following trainings to UM staff (both academic as well as admin). To further support the UM community, FEM covers for most of the courses 50% of the participation fees for each participant, while staff career center pays the other 50%.

**UPCOMING Events**

**15:00-17:00**  
**Active Listening Workshop** **May 29 2024**  
Active Listening helps in recognizing other people's perspectives, feelings, and experiences. It empowers our community to foster a culture of respect and compassion, and being an active listener equips you to support others who are dealing with various difficulties. This workshop will analyse participants' different communication styles and develop their active listening skills.

**9:30 - 16:00**  
**Bridging the communication gap** **Jun 13 2024**  
This 1 day workshop highlights the dynamics of cultural and gendered differences in communication and offers tools to bridge gaps in your interactions. Alongside theory and video fragments there will be plenty of time to exchange experiences and practice your specific situation.

**9:30 - 16:30**  
**Personal Branding & Presentation** **June 17 2024**  
This workshop is designed to help individuals improve their networking skills, providing insights into networking dynamics, enhancing self-confidence, clarifying goals and networks, identifying key contacts, and equipping participants with practical networking skills.

<https://linktr.ee/femmaastricht>

### Negotiation

Negotiation happens every day as soon as two (groups of) individuals have different wishes. At Maastricht University, negotiation is vital to advance in your career, whether it's about authorship, research time, or salary scale. In order to become a good negotiator, you need some theory on the different types of negotiation, each with their own dynamics. Participants practise two types of negotiation, the distributive and the shadow negotiation. We delve into the moves and turns and the persuasion tactics you may be confronted with during a negotiation. Knowing, and dealing with, your sensitivities that may trigger you in ineffective responses is also part of this workshop. This workshop is a mix of theory, negotiation exercises, video fragments and exchanging experiences and strategies.

### Bridging the communication gap

Within Maastricht University you are expected to work with people from all over the globe. In collaboration cultural differences play a considerable role, as does gendered communication. Oftentimes we're hardly aware of our and other people's perspective. This 1 day workshop highlights the dynamics of cultural and gendered differences in communication and offers tools to bridge gaps in your interactions. The training offers an introduction to theory about effective and inclusive communications and invites participants to exchange experiences and practise your specific situation.



**Female Empowerment**

# UPCOMING Events

9:00 - 17:00  
**Work-life balance**  
September 16 2024

During this training, you will develop working-parent skills and strategies to manage both your professional and personal goals. We will work with the concept of equal parenting and find ways to cherry-pick useful tips that work in your specific context.

9:30 - 16:00  
**Workshop Balance & Vitality**  
October 11 2024

Working professionals at universities face continuous decision-making challenges, including balancing energy, knowing when to act or rest, and maintaining resilience physically, mentally, and emotionally. The workshop 'Balance & Vitality' focuses on these work-life themes, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and not letting external factors dictate career progress.

9:30 - 16:00  
**Workshop Negotiation**  
October 28 2024

To become a skilled negotiator, understanding various negotiation types like distributive and shadow negotiation is essential. This workshop covers persuasion tactics, dealing with sensitivities, and includes theory, negotiation exercises, videos, and sharing strategies and experiences.

<https://linktr.ee/femmaastricht>

## Personal Branding & Presentation

Two new trainings were introduced in 2023, namely Personal Branding & Presentation and Influence & Impact.

This in class workshop helps you to find, express and present your uniqueness in the work that you do, whether that be research, education or facilitation.

Every individual has a unique set of experiences, viewpoints, skills and talents which they bring into their workspace. In this workshop we connect these to your WHY: What drives you to do the work you do? Finding your story, your words and inner motivation is one thing. Presenting these in front of a group requires different skills. Dealing with discomfort, taking the stage, physical awareness and practice makes up half of the in class workshop. Your presentations will be recorded on video and sent to you afterwards.

## Active Listening

Active Listening helps in recognizing other people's perspectives, feelings, and experiences. It empowers our community to foster a culture of respect and compassion, and being an active listener equips you to support others who are dealing with various difficulties. This workshop will analyze participants' different communication styles and develop their active listening skills.

## Work-life balance & Workshop balance & vitality

Working as a professional at a university means you have to make choices continuously. How to balance your energy? When to act and when to stop? How do you stay resilient, physically, mentally, and emotionally? These work-life themes are central to the workshop 'Balance & Vitality'. We often try to accomplish everything that is asked of us, and we can lose touch with ourselves. And others drive your career, not yourself.

## Mentoring

The importance of mentoring in academia is currently well established. Therefore, both national and international universities embedded standardized mentor programs in their supportive infrastructure for staff. Within Maastricht University, over the years, several initiatives have been started to provide mentorship programs to staff as well. However, the availability and content of these programs is very diverse and spread out over different faculties and research institutes, but also dependent on career level (postdoc, assistant professor, associate professor). To our knowledge, the number of staff members that have access to such a program is limited and no formal policy is established within UM. In 2019/2020, FEM organized a small mentoring pilot program including 10 mentees and mentors from 8 faculties/service centers (FASoS,



FLaw, SBE, FHML, FPN, SSC, UM Sports and MUO) and in different roles (postdoc, UD1/2, UHD2, administrative staff). Mentees and mentors were matched by FEM, but they were free to plan meetings and discuss issues how they wanted. Afterwards, both mentees and mentors were asked to fill in a questionnaire for evaluation of the program. Most mentors (>75%) felt their role as a mentor was rewarding, and they indicated that they liked using their skills and knowledge to help colleagues. Similarly, the majority of the mentees (75%) appreciated the mentoring, indicating that reflecting on their career path and getting a different perspective was helpful to them. However, matching of the mentor-mentee and mutual expectations were mentioned as points of improvement. In addition, supported by literature, it seems that mentor and mentee expectation management is key to the success of the relationship. Further standardization of the mentoring within UM would also support expectation management. Based on these observations, we are continuing the discussion on a possible mentor program standardized over the different faculties and service centers.

One of the problems that was encountered in the FEM mentor pilot, but that is also mentioned in other mentor initiatives, is the integration of mentoring within the existing infrastructure. Without this integration, the priority of mentoring, both for the mentor as well as the mentee, might diminish over time and might get surpassed by everyday work. In our opinion, a successful mentor program is a program that is embedded within the infrastructure of UM, but it should be up to the mentee whether the program is used. Not all staff members are in need of a mentor. To overcome this problem, we are currently discussing the possibility to add a formal mentor role in the UM Development Boards. The mentor role as we envision it, connects to the current described peer role in the Development Board. Integrating the mentor in the Development Board allows access to mentoring to all UM staff, at the intensity they desire, as they can contact their mentor (peer) as often as they deem needed (more often than the formal meetings if needed). In addition, a formal mentor role matches all goals that were formulated for the Development Boards. Part of this formal role would also be a training for mentors to help mentors manage the sensitive relationship between mentor and mentee, give mentors the support they might need, and help them develop the skills that are needed for this role. Moreover, we believe that this mentor role could also be used in the mentors own portfolio as part of academic citizenship, or to show development within their own career path. We are currently working on the development of this mentor training for UM employees and are exploring the possibilities to start a pilot with this mentoring (as part of the development Board) within FHML.

## Informing

An important pillar of the FEM activities is **providing and summarising information** that can be used by UM community members to educate themselves and their peers about gender disparities in academia and potential solutions to close the gender gap. Thus far, information relating to FEM can be found on our [official website](#) or the new [UMemployee page](#). Other places you can find information are:

- Internal and external FEM & [diversity events](#)
- Information on confidential advisors
- Our own [publications and resources](#)
- External links to [websites of women's societies](#)
- Information on rights and procedures, in particular [maternity leave and parental care](#)
- Inspirational blogs, video's, websites and books
- Resources for self-education and inspiration

We are also active on [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#) and [UMEmployee](#). With these social media accounts and communication platforms, we aim to advertise our events but also to bring more attention to topics of gender equity and lastly to connect with other similar organisations in the Netherlands and the world. As such we facilitate the worldwide image of the UM as a university where initiatives such as FEM are welcomed and supported and where issues of gender equity are taken seriously. It is worth mentioning that

our accounts are followed by several influential individuals and academic organisations and that this can also increase the visibility and good reputation of the UM.

In 2022, Sharon Anyango (FEM ambassador) and FEM were awarded a D&I grant entitled “Mitigating gender citation bias in the classroom” with the goal to create a practical toolkit for course coordinators and tutors to start a classroom discussion on (gender) diversity in general and citation practices specifically. Seven different programs at UM tested the toolkit (including programs at FASOS, UCM and FPN). Both pre- and post-survey questions were given to the students as well as course coordinators to obtain feedback on the toolkit. The educational toolkit is currently being finalized and will be distributed soon.

## Networking

Throughout the academic year, FEM organises frequent thematic events that highlight issues relating to the overall mission of the organisation, and that provide the opportunity for members of the UM community to meet, exchange, and reflect together.

### Women Researchers' Festival 2024

To celebrate **Informed Women's Month 2024**, FEM hosted the **Women Researchers' Festival!** This event was hosted in person on Monday 15 April 2024, between 12.00 and 18.00. The festival aimed to highlight the innovative efforts undertaken by women researchers at UM, encompassing both students and staff. It also sought to promote collaboration and support among UM members. Throughout the day, two insightful sessions featured a total of 9 distinguished speakers. Their discussions shed light on the intriguing research unfolding across UM's diverse faculties. In addition, Dr Judith Kamalski held the keynote titled “Bad advice is good for you”, in which she incentivised the audience to reflect not only on advice that was given to us, but advice we have given to others. By drawing from examples from her own experience with well-meaning advice, as well as insights from experts, she effectively highlighted the complexity of giving – and following – advice. The Women Researchers' Festival served as a platform to recognize the noteworthy contributions of women researchers at UM and provided an opportunity for meaningful connections to flourish. It emphasised the importance of nurturing cooperative efforts and celebrating the remarkable work being done by these researchers.



## FEM Lunch

In addition to the Women Researcher's Festival, FEM also organised a lunch on Embrace your Emotions on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February. The workshop, given by Germano Giansante, a social scientist and mental coach, equipped the 22 participants with practical tools to navigate emotions effectively and build meaningful connections in a gender-inclusive context.



## External Events

FEM supported the very first **Soapbox Science** event taking place in the Netherlands! Soapbox Science is an outreach programme taking place all over the world. The programme aims to promote female and non-binary scientists as well as their research by giving them a public platform. By standing on a soapbox, they transform the public space into an arena for learning and scientific debate. We encourage you to join the next edition!

## Policy

Within UM, FEM is aiming to become more involved in policy shaping and policy implementation. Through our work, which includes writing policy texts with recommendations and participating in several advisory bodies at UM (e.g. Recognition & Rewards), we work to improve the general gender equality and equity within the UM community.

## FEM monitor

This year, the main focus within the Policy and Publications group, in collaboration with the Diversity and Inclusivity Office, was the development of the FEM monitor, a comprehensive tool designed to provide insights into gender and nationality distribution across Maastricht University. The report presents and discusses the level of gender and nationality diversity among academic staff (Assistant, Associate and Full Professor at Maastricht University and represents a key step towards identifying areas where gender imbalances persist and provides evidence-based recommendations to inform future policies and strategic personnel planning at Maastricht University. We plan to publish the monitor on a yearly basis, when necessary adjusting it to needs and concerns of the organization. This data will help ensure transparency and allow for a clear evaluation of career policy, opportunity allocation and workforce composition over time.

## Future FEM Plans

What's in store for FEM in the future? Reflecting the feedback we have gathered from the UM community, we will continue to expand our existing projects and also make room for more FEM activities that aim to further our overall mission of promoting gender equity and equality in the UM community.

### Current Projects and New Ideas

As we saw earlier, the activities of FEM are organised on the basis of five thematic pillars: **training, mentoring, networking, informing** and **policy advising**. Below, we elaborate on the existing activities that we would like to further expand as well as new projects that we believe will benefit the UM community. In addition to activities, at FEM we wish to **establish a closer and more regular communication with all faculty boards**. We strongly believe that both parties can benefit from each other's perspectives, and we are motivated to work together and promote gender equity at UM.

### Training

We want to consolidate the current training offers. FEM aims to cover the costs of the development along with 25%-50 % of the participation fee for each participant. In addition, we will help to professionalise inclusivity competencies in various training settings in cooperation with the D&I Office.

### Mentoring

Together with MYA we will continue the discussion on a possible mentor program standardized over the different faculties and service centers. We will further explore the possibilities to incorporate mentoring within existing UM infrastructure to increase the coverage of the programme, and provide this service to as many UM community members as possible. In relation to this, we will work on the development of a mentor training for UM employees and explore the possibilities to start a pilot with this mentoring (as part of the development Board) within FHML.

We are currently discussing partnerships with Mothers in Science to provide external mentoring programs focused on:

- Returning to career after parental leave or career break
- Motivation and building confidence
- Career planning after motherhood
- Building a professional network
- Overcoming mom guilt
- Solo parenting
- Mothers from underrepresented groups

### Informing

Following the example of the LNVH, who publish a yearly LNVH Monitor to report on the ratio of men to women in academia and an overview of the current percentages of male and female professors and in management positions at Dutch academic organisations, university medical centres and other academic organisations, FEM aims to create a **FEM Monitor** for Maastricht University. The FEM Monitor will be a publication that reports, among others, on the general gender distribution in different UM functions and the pay gap. The FEM Monitor will be created in consultation with the UM Human Resources department and the D&I Office. We believe that the FEM Monitor will be a powerful tool to provide oversight into gender equality at UM. The aim of FEM's policy group - currently working on it - is to improve the transparency of UM within this field.

### Networking

To consolidate and professionalise our activities, FEM wants to **collaborate with other organisations** that share the same vision as FEM. Specifically, we aim to get in touch with all University organisations whose

work is dedicated to promoting gender equality and build a healthy and steady communication with for example the Maastricht Young Academy, the PhD Platform or Studium Generale. At the national level, this would include organisations such as the LNVH or the Athena's Angels at the University of Leiden.

## Policy

In the future, we are open to discuss the possibility of conducting targeted faculty-level or institute-level studies that are meant to take stock of the gender status quo, and provide specific recommendations to promote and support activities that will improve the gender equity and equality efforts at the unit level (such as providing support to women returning to work after maternity leave). In addition, FEM is happy to sit at the table and take part as discussion partner to the dialogue on the concrete implementation and monitoring of policy, such as for example the R&R framework. Finally, FEM is happy to contribute to future policy making regarding the social and workplace safety.

## Beyond UM

FEM will also organize external events and outreach activities to promote gender equality:

- Women in science school week: This week-long initiative will feature a series of activities, including book readings showcasing female scientists, pitch presentations by women researchers and panel discussions on gender equality in STEM fields.
- School books about female scientists: By including diverse representations of scientists in educational materials, this initiative aims to challenge gender stereotypes and inspire young girls to pursue careers in STEM fields from an early age, promoting inclusivity and diversity in science education.
- Lumiere cinema sessions: This initiative would include screenings of films to highlight strong female role models.

## 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.

**X: @FEMMaastricht**

**Facebook: @FEMMaastricht**

**LinkedIn: @FEM Maastricht University**

**Instagram: @fem\_maastricht**

