

PB5 - Implementing gender equality plans in research performing organisations: Where to start?

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For those countries identified as having no measures and below EU average levels of implementation.¹

This policy brief provides evidence-based, concrete recommendations for national level policy makers on how to encourage the development and implementation of effective gender equality plans in research performing organisations (RPOs).²

Why is this important?

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming is a key priority in the European Research Area.³ The European Commission's approach has shifted from providing direct support to women to a focus on institutional transformation. Despite various policy interventions – targeting female scientists – the proportions of women in science have not sufficiently increased.

Research evidence shows that for real change towards gender equality to occur the focus must be placed on transforming institutional structures, practices and cultures towards more gender awareness, equal treatment and gender balance. This includes the appreciation of gender-sensitive career structures and the concept of lifelong learning beyond a traditional academic career model of uninterrupted employment and continuous career advancement. Sources of implicit gender bias need to be tackled (e.g. in recruitment and promotion of researchers) and need to be accompanied with efforts to integrate the gender dimension into science knowledge and practice as well as into curricular and research content.

Gender equality plans (GEPs) are the main tool promoted by the Commission to effect systematic institutional change through targeting human resource development strategies, institutional governance, research funding allocation, institutional leadership and decision-making and research programmes.

What is the extent of the problem?

This policy brief addresses specifically those countries that have no national measures (i.e. supporting provisions) for gender equality in public research.⁴ In addition less than 64% (EU average)⁵ of their research performing organisations self-report implementing a gender equality plan. In concrete terms, this “Where to Start” - brief targets specifically Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia.⁶

Gender equality plans are one of the most effective and common tools to effect change at the institutional level. There is however a wide variety in their uptake, and how the plans are legislated and regulated by different Member States.

What are the options?

Member States are encouraged to foster partnerships with research performing and funding organisations to push for lasting institutional action on gender equality. Member states can play a key role in the push for institutional change in RPOs and RFOs in a variety of different ways – by fostering a favourable legal and political context for institutional change (through enacting legal provisions and developing policies or strategies) or by providing incentives for its' uptake.⁷

Research performing organisations are asked to develop and implement Gender Equality Plans containing specific actions and targets for institutional change to improve: leadership and governance; data collection, analysis and reporting; recruitment practices; career progression; work environment; salary structures; awareness of gender equality issues among staff and students; compliance with regulations, legislation and guidelines. Examples of actions include:

- carrying out audits of procedures and practices – to detect gender bias,
- implementing strategies to combat bias and
- setting targets and monitoring progress with indicators.⁸

The ERA progress report 2014 highlights the “significant correlations between measures taken at RPO level including GEPs and the existence of national laws, strategies and/ or incentives to foster institutional change”.⁹ Gender equality plans are mandatory in law in universities in Austria, Spain and Norway – whilst in Denmark, Sweden Iceland and Finland the law requires that all workplaces over a certain size develop gender action plans.¹⁰ In Germany gender equality in universities and research organisations is regulated by state law, not federal law and whilst most states require universities and research institutions to adopt “women support plans” - “gender equality plans” are only required in some states.

The Spanish 2011 Law on Science, Technology and Innovation is a positive example of how legislative bodies can effect real change in this area.¹¹ Within two years of the passage of this law all universities and other research organisations were required to have Equity Plans that include incentives for improvement. Compliance with the plan however needs to be monitored.

Another effective approach to steering institutional change has been to use the implementation of a gender equality plan as eligibility criteria so RPOs can access incentives for recruiting/ promoting female academics to middle and senior positions (Programme for Senior Professors in Germany, ASPASIA in the

Netherlands, BALANSE Norway).¹²

One example of a national ministry acting in this area is the Czech Republic Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports – they have adopted a mid-term Strategic Plan for Gender Equality in Academia.¹³ This includes strengthening equal opportunities for women and men and incorporating the gender dimension in curricula, textbooks and methodology materials for each school grade.¹⁴

Recommendations

- Anchor responsibility for gender equality at the highest levels of RPOs to ensure commitment to gender equality from top level.¹⁵
- Involve gender experts in all change processes from the start to ensure gender sensitivity and familiarity with concepts of gender.¹⁶
- Tie gender equality plans to organisational structures and processes to ensure their sustainability.¹⁷
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities of actors responsible for gender equality plans within RPOs.¹⁸
- Build networks between RPOs that implement gender equality plans to foster exchange of information.¹⁹
- Enact legislative provisions for GEPs in RPOs to provide a real stimulus for their uptake. This could occur within a broader legislative framework for gender mainstreaming.
- Provide financial incentives for developing, implementing and monitoring GEPs. This could be carried out by linking gender equality performance or in this case the existence of a GEP to eligibility for funding criteria.
- Make sure any evaluative framework of curricula includes the gender dimension for those national level bodies (for example in Cyprus and Romania) that have responsibility for– curricula development.
- Adopt gender equality strategies targeting human resource management in RPOs and integrate the gender dimension in research and teaching content.

Further Reading

Further, in-depth reading concerning the implementation of gender equality plans in research performing organisations is available through the European Commission's report on *Gender Equality Policies in Public Research* (see footnote 7) and two publications by the Gender-NET project: *Analysis Report: National Plans and Initiatives Promoting Gender Equality and Structural Change*²⁰ and *Analysis Report: Plans and initiatives in selected research institutions aiming to stimulate gender equality and enact structural change*²¹.

[The GenPORT Implementation of Gender Equality Plans Online Discussion](#)

- [1] Please see 'Gender and Science Policy Briefs: From "Where to start" to "How to innovate": An Introduction', for a description of the methodology used. Available at:
http://www.genderportal.eu/sites/default/files/resource_pool/pb_introduction_.pdf
- [2] According to the ERA, a research performing organisation (RPO) encompasses any organisation conducting public research – specifically research with a 'public mission' (DG Research and Innovation, 2013).
- [3] European Commission, (2012a). A Reinforced European Research Area: Partnership for Excellence and Growth, COM (2012) 392.
- [4] No supporting provisions for gender equality in public research as defined and reported in the ERA Facts and Figures 2014 report.
- [5] It should be noted that these figures concern RPOs which answered the ERA survey in 2014, which employ 515 000 researchers (around 20% of total EU researchers).
- [6] European Commission, (2015a). ERA Facts and Figures 2014, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, pp29 & 84. EU directives on gender equality must be taken into account by all employers including universities and RPOs as soon as they hire someone.
- [7] European Commission, (2014a). Gender Equality Policies in Public Research, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p12.
- [8] European Commission, (2012a). A Reinforced European Research Area: Partnership for Excellence and Growth, COM (2012) 392, p13.
- [9] European Commission, (2014c). European Research Area, Progress Report 2014, COM (2014)575, p6.
- [10] Ibid p19.
- [11] Rice, C. (2012) 6 Steps to Gender Equality and more essays about How Every University can get More Women to the Top and Why they Should, p20.
- [12] European Commission, (2014a). Gender Equality Policies in Public Research, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p25.
- [13] Ibid, p20.
- [14] Deloitte, (2014c). Researchers' Report 2014, Country Profile: Czech Republic.
- [15] Gender-Net, (2015b). Analysis Report: National plans and initiatives promoting gender equality and structural change. Available at: <http://bit.ly/29xvpDr>
- [16] Lipinsky, A. & Schäfer, M. (2015). INTEGER Guidelines for the Self-Assessment of Transformational Gender Action Plans set up in Higher Education and Research Institutions. Available at: http://www.integer-tools-for-action.eu/sites/www.integer-tools-for-action.eu/files/file_fields/2015/07/06/integerself-assessmentguidelines.pdf
- [17] GenPORT Project E-Discussion. (2016). The Implementation of Gender Equality Plans. Available at: <http://www.genderportal.eu/group/e-discussion-implementation-gender-equality-plans>
- [18] Ibid.
- [19] Ibid.
- [20] Gender-Net, (2015b). Analysis Report: National plans and initiatives promoting gender equality and structural change. Available at: <http://bit.ly/29xvpDr>
- [21] Gender-Net, (2015c). Analysis Report: Plans and initiatives in selected research institutions aiming to stimulate gender equality and enact structural change. Available at: <http://bit.ly/29scElf>