

PB6 - Implementing gender equality plans in research performing organisations: How to consolidate?

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For those countries identified as having national level measures but 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 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 “How to Consolidate” - brief targets specifically Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Lithuania and Slovenia.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. There is a great variation between these Member States from Estonia – where no research performing organisations adopted an equality plan to Spain where just over 60% of research performing organisations have adopted Gender Equality Plans.⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹

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”.¹⁰ National level bodies with policy- making capacities have been instrumental in stimulating RPOs to adopt and implement gender equality plans.

For example in Belgium, the Flemish Interuniversity Council has collaborated with all Flemish universities to draw up action plans on gender equality – which began to be implemented in 2014.¹¹

In Switzerland the Federal Programme for Gender Equality at Swiss Universities provides support to research performing organisations to develop gender equality plans and to integrate actions into university structures including gender in teaching, learning and research as well as establishing gender equality indicators and linking these to quality management of the institution.¹²

An effective approach to promoting the take up of gender equality plans has been linking gender equality performance to research funding as is the case in

Germany. The German Research Foundation (DFG) established its Research Orientated Standards on Gender Equality in 2008. Universities are encouraged to formulate institutionally specific objectives. The DFG standards are a managerial tool to stimulate universities to design gender equality plans.¹³ DFG then grades institutions – this approach places gender equality high on the policy agenda of German universities.¹⁴

In the UK the Athena Swan Charter fosters cultural changes across organisations and encourages academic organisations in the fields of STEMM and arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law to build gender equality policies.¹⁵ An institutional gender equality plan forms an integral part of the process. The charter now includes an emphasis on trans staff and students – and addresses gender equality more broadly -not just focusing on barriers to progression that effect women.¹⁶ The Chief Medical Officer announced that the National Institute for Health Research would only shortlist medical schools for biomedical research centre and unit funding if the school holds a Silver Athena SWAN award.

Recommendations

- Build networks between RPOs that implement gender equality plans to foster exchange of information.¹⁷
- Perform internal audits with staff to collect feedback on effectiveness of gender equality plans and perceptions of work-life balance on individual level.¹⁸
- Ensure implementation and further development of tailor-made gender equality plans for individual organisations based on internal audits and staff feedback.¹⁹
- Re-evaluate and optimize gender equality plans in place on a regular basis.²⁰
- Provide training on gender knowledge for decision-makers to mainstream gender expertise into all levels of the organisation.²¹
- 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.
- Provide support and collaborate with research performing organisations in the development of gender equality plans and the integration of actions into university structures, processes and procedures for long-lasting change.

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 8) and two publications by the Gender-NET project: *Analysis Report: National Plans and Initiatives Promoting Gender Equality and Structural Change*²² and *Analysis Report: Plans and initiatives in selected research institutions aiming to stimulate gender equality and enact structural change*²³.

[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] 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.
- [7] Data from the ERA survey results see:European Commission, (2015a). ERA Facts and Figures 2014, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p 84.
- [8] European Commission, (2014a). Gender Equality Policies in Public Research, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p12.
- [9] European Commission, (2012a). A Reinforced European Research Area: Partnership for Excellence and Growth, COM (2012) 392, p13.
- [10] European Commission, (2014c). European Research Area, Progress Report 2014, COM (2014)575, p6.
- [11] European Commission, (2014b). Researchers' Report 2014, Deloitte.
- [12] European Commission, (2014a). Gender Equality Policies in Public Research, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p20.
- [13] Lipinsky, A., Ahlzweig, G., Steinweg, N., & Getz, L. (2015). GenPORT (D4.1) Analysis of Policy Environments Report, p57.
- [14] Ibid.
- [15] The latter have been included from May 2015.
- [16] <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/>
- [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] 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/integer-self-assessmentguidelines.pdf
- [21] Gender-Net, (2015b). Analysis Report: National plans and initiatives promoting gender equality and structural change. Available at: <http://bit.ly/29xvpDr>
- [22] Ibid.
- [23] 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>