

PB8 - Implementing gender equality plans in research performing organisations: How to innovate?

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For those countries identified as having national level measures and above 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 more than 64% (EU average)⁵ of their research performing organisations self-report implementing a gender equality plan. In concrete terms, this “How to Innovate”- brief targets specifically: Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Sweden, the UK.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. In all of these Member States except in the Netherlands, practically all RPOs (90 % or more) have adopted GEPs.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

In some countries, such as Sweden and Finland, the national gender equality legislation has for decades included a broad gender equality planning duty concerning all employers, including RPOs; additionally the legislation has in the recent years specified in more detail the equality planning duties for universities and educational organisations.¹¹ Some countries have legislative demands for universities and research institutions to develop gender equality plans.¹² In other countries- gender equality plans are not mandatory but guidelines, charters/ codes and awards are used to promote their take up.¹³ In some countries gender equality performance [demonstrated by a gender equality plan- and its subsequent monitoring] has been directly linked to research funding.¹⁴

In the UK concrete links between institutional gender equality performance and research funding have been made by linking funding of Biomedical research - to structural change through the Athena SWAN charter scheme. The UK National

Institute of Health (NIHR) is a leading funding body for research in science funded by the Department of Health. Since 2011 all medical schools applying for NIHR Biomedical Research Centres and Units' funding are required to have achieved a silver rating in the Athena Swan Charter. In order to achieve a bronze award the following is required: a gender equality assessment; a four year gender equality plan based on the assessment; and the development of an organisational structure – including a self-assessment team. In order to achieve a silver award institutions also need to demonstrate: “a significant record of activity and achievement” how this is institutionally embedded coupled with leadership commitment.¹⁵

In the USA the ADVANCE programme was established to (1) develop systemic approaches to increase the representation and advancement of women in academic STEM careers; (2) develop innovative and sustainable ways to promote gender equity in the STEM academic workforce; and (3) contribute to the development of a more diverse science and engineering workforce. ADVANCE also has as its goal to contribute to and inform the general knowledge base on gender equity in the academic STEM disciplines.¹⁶ It is a comprehensive programme with three tracks: the Institutional Transformation track to promote institutional change and document it; the Institutional Transformation Catalyst Track – to develop self-assessment, carry out and evaluate a unique change programme; and the Partnerships for Learning and Adaptation Networks (PLAN) track for knowledge exchange either within disciplines or across institutions.¹⁷

The German Research Foundation has developed Research Orientated Standards on Gender Equality. These standards aim to raise awareness of gender equality issues at the level of leadership and increase the number of women at different career levels. To support institutions' efforts to meet these standards DFG has developed an online “Toolbox for DFGs Research-Orientated Standards on Gender Equality”.¹⁸ The toolbox presents quality assured institutional examples of gender equality measures in research and teaching in keeping with the DFG's Research-Oriented Standards on Gender Equality.¹⁹

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) provides the Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) action toolbox with a step-by-step guide to implement gender equality plans in research organisations and higher education institutions.²⁰

Recommendations

- Create online tools for the implementation of gender equality plans in place to make visible a common framework and empirical background on gender equality landscapes.²¹
- Disseminate online tools for the implementation of gender equality plans at RPOs to target groups.²²

- Increase the visibility of gender equality plans for actors outside of RPOs.²³
- 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.
- Adopt regular assessment and monitoring mechanisms in order to efficiently implement cultural and institutional change.
- Develop indicators for the institutional level in order to measure progress and facilitate a comparative analysis- with other institutions nationally. This however should be aligned to developments at the EU level in order to facilitate a comparative analysis of Member States regarding institutional change.²⁴ Any kind of policy monitor developed should also be aligned to existing statistics on and indicators for gender balance.²⁵
- Allocate resources for capacity building activities and training to take place within RPOs and for national level decision-makers in R&I to ensure the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming.²⁶
- Facilitate the knowledge sharing of institutional change experiences between institutions.

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*²⁷ and *Analysis Report: Plans and initiatives in selected research institutions aiming to stimulate gender equality and enact structural change*²⁸.

[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, pp.29 & 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] Sweden: Discrimination Act 2008:567, chapter 3: Active Measures (<http://www.do.se/other-languages/english-engelska/discrimination-act/>); Finland: Act on Equality between Women and Men 609:1986; amendment specifying educational institutions' and organisers' gender equality planning duty: 1329:2014).
- [12] Gender-Net, (2015b). Analysis Report: National plans and initiatives promoting gender equality and structural change, p17. This is the case in Spain, Norway, Germany and France. Finland and Sweden.
- [13] These are used in Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Estonia, Romania, UK, Switzerland and Turkey, EC, 2014.
- [14] European Commission, (2014a). Gender Equality Policies in Public Research, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. This approach is used in Austria, Finland and Luxembourg.
- [15] See: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/athena-swan-resources/> for an Athena Swan action plan based template.
- [16] Please see: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5383
- [17] Ibid.
- [18] Gender-Net, (2015c). Analysis Report: Plans and initiatives in selected research institutions aiming to stimulate gender equality and enact structural change, p30.
- [19] Please see: http://www.instrumentenkasten.dfg.de/index_en.html
- [20] Please see: <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/tools-methods/gear/action-toolbox>
- [21] GenPORT Project E-Discussion. (2016). The Implementation of Gender Equality Plans. Available at: <http://www.genderportal.eu/group/e-discussion-implementation-gender-equality-plans>
- [22] Ibid.
- [23] Ibid.
- [24] European Commission, (2013b). Recommendations on the Implementation of the ERA Communication: Report of the Expert Group 2013, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p43.
- [25] Gender-Net, (2015b). Analysis Report: National plans and initiatives promoting gender equality and structural change, p 59.
- [26] European Commission, (2013b). Recommendations on the Implementation of the ERA Communication: Report of the Expert Group 2013, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, p48.
- [27] Gender-Net, (2015b). Analysis Report: National plans and initiatives promoting gender equality and structural change. Available at: <http://bit.ly/29xvpDr>
- [28] 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>