

## PB26 – Gender equality in science: How to achieve successful implementation and combat resistance

March 2017

### *Introduction:*

A central cross-cutting theme related to all previous GenPORT policy briefs on gender equality measures in science is the process of implementation of the different strategies and actions – and how to overcome the resistance to change.

The efforts to implement gender equality measures in research process and to integrate gender dimension into research content have been an important part of the EU gender mainstreaming strategy since 2001, at national, regional and institutional levels. To advance this cause, the European Commission funded numerous projects through FP7 and Horizon 2020 (e.g. [EGERA](#), [FESTA](#), [GARCIA](#), [GENDERTIME](#), [GENERA](#), [GENIS LAB](#), [GENOVATE](#), [INTEGER](#), [LIBRA](#), [PLOTINA](#), [STAGES](#), [TRIGGER](#)).

The focus of these efforts has been to design, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate institutional change processes across institutions throughout Europe through the use of various tools and strategies with the additional remit of documenting the implementation experiences.

The [GENDER-NET](#) initiative aims to map and compare the structural changes implemented in EU Members States to advance gender equality within research funding organisations as part of the commitment to European Research Area.

### *Why is this important?*

The persistence of gender inequality in science in Europe and beyond is well evidenced – women account for only 30% of researchers, whilst 60% of all PhD graduates are women, and only 20% of top-level posts in research are occupied by women (European Commission, 2015). Since 2001, following the ETAN report, the European Commission recognised the detrimental effects of this loss of talent and launched its structural change strategy in 2010, to be followed by the ERA gender equality and mainstreaming priorities (more women in RTDI, gender balance in decision-making and integrating the gender dimension). Structural change – later morphed into ‘institutional change’ to be effected by the development of gender equality action plans. But what have been the effects of these plans? Impact assessments and evaluations of these plans have tended to be ad hoc. Real change is slow and conditions for success difficult to unpick. However, explicit and implicit resistance to the adoption of gender equality plans is common and one of the main challenges to achieving long-lasting institutional change.

### *What is the extent of the problem?*

Gender equality is seldom defined as a priority in organizational processes and practices – which can be compounded by a lack of support from management and a general lack of commitment to change. In times of economic crisis the arguments often used are that there are other ‘more important’ issues on the agenda (STAGES, 2016:80).

Achieving the successful implementation of gender equality policies in research and overcoming resistances to these policies – can be located within broader discussions about gender mainstreaming. The different types and forms of resistance (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013) include: denial of the need for change; trivializing gender equality; and/or refusing to accept responsibility; disbelief about gender data; perceiving traditional gender roles as ‘natural’; appealing to more pressing priorities; disputing relevance of gender equality. These behaviours can be institutional, individual, implicit, or explicit.

The process of transforming policy objectives into concrete practice (Callerstig 2014:72) or desired outcomes is not straightforward. Intervention activities are often contingent on complex interactions between key stakeholders and how each conceptualises the implementation process; including effects of actions and non-actions, decisions and non-decisions, that influence ‘why’ the intervention has (not) been effective.

For example, Lombardo & Mergaert (2013: 301) argue that “*Civil servants can express resistance to gender initiatives both by acting and non-acting. In either case, resistance is a manifestation of power... not only when policy-makers make decisions, but also when they make non-decisions, or in this case take non-action, on issues that would not benefit them. The individual and the institutional-organisational levels are interconnected in this kind of ineffective gender mainstreaming implementation because the negative power of inertia on the part of individuals in an organisation can have effects at the institutional level, so that, “collective non-action translates into an effective form of resistance” (Mergaert 2012:57).*”

Implicit resistance on an individual level, which can be demonstrated by lack of action or non-events (Husu 2001) blamed on insufficient resources (e.g. time, knowledge), must be distinguished from implicit institutional resistance. The latter occurs at the ‘collective’ level, which affects policy decision-making regarding human and other resource allocation and management support for gender equality actions (Stratigaki 2005). Both individual and institutional resistance can be by distance or by persistence (Collinson 1994).

### *What can be done?*

The Handbook on Resistance to Gender Equality in Academia developed by the FESTA project outlines different forms of resistance towards institutional change [1]. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has developed the GEAR (Gender Equality in Academia and Research) action toolbox for institutions – to provide a step-by-step guide on how to set-up, implement, monitor and evaluate (amongst other actions to be taken) a gender equality plan. As part of this work they have developed a ‘Roadmap to Gender Equality Plans in Research and Higher Education Institutions’ [2] – which identifies success factors and common obstacles for implementing gender equality through institutional change. They also provide suggestions on how to overcome obstacles. Please see the table below for a summary:

<i>Type of obstacle/resistance</i>	<i>How to effectively overcome obstacle/ resistance to effect change</i>
Resistance to gender equality initiatives	<p>Bespoke awareness raising training for different staff</p> <p>Explicit and visible commitment from leadership and senior management</p> <p>Identify problems and co-design solutions in participatory process with key stakeholders –to encourage institutional ownership of solutions</p>
Lack of Resources (human and financial) for gender equality work	<p>Present the benefits and concrete results of gender equality (e.g. staff retention, more diverse staff etc.)</p> <p>Identify potential funding sources and extra human resource capacity for gender equality work at institutional/ regional/ national / international levels</p>
Lack of power at the institutional/ organisational level	<p>Involve and make visible institutional leaders at the very beginning of process</p> <p>Identify in GEP stakeholders with key decision-making roles and liaise closely with these actors</p>
Myth that academic excellence and merit is at odds with gender equality initiatives	<p>Unconscious bias training</p> <p>Showcase research that demonstrates how diversity positively impacts on excellence</p>
Lack of autonomy at institutional level to effect change	<p>Verify lack of compliance with Directive 2006/54/EC – equal opportunities and treatment of men and women in employment</p> <p>Research European, national or regional (non-)binding regulations to promote gender equality in research and/ Or higher education to advocate for change.</p> <p>Co-design solutions with senior management and leadership</p>

<p>Lack of understanding of importance of gender equality</p>	<p>Need to show how gender equality – is not just a ‘women’s issue’ but effects everyone</p> <p>Frame gender equality as key to creating a successful, open, attractive research and higher education institution</p> <p>Develop a very visible gender equality plan supported by senior management</p> <p>Set up training on gender equality for all staff to create a shared understanding and vision</p> <p>Regularly publish sex-disaggregated data to demonstrate imbalances as well as advances in gender equality</p>
<p>Lack of available data or access to sex-disaggregated human resource data</p>	<p>Update existing human resource data collection and management systems to enable statistics to be broken down by sex, age, and other intersectional variables</p> <p>Allocate resources to facilitate this work</p> <p>Ensure data is stored in compliance with data protection regulations</p>
<p>Bypassing potential allies/ key actors early on in the process</p>	<p>Early recruitment of gender equality allies and enablers of change</p> <p>Ensure staff not directly involved in gender equality measures are involved in training, workshops, seminars etc to get them on board with the change process</p> <p>Frame the gender equality plan as an institutional effort to ensure cross-departmental and faculty support is harnessed</p>
<p>Lack of institutional experience of engaging with gender studies</p>	<p>Tap into existing gender equality networks for support</p> <p>Search for gender expertise for increased institutional competence and knowledge</p> <p><a href="#">Eurogender’s stakeholder directory</a> or <a href="#">GenPORT’s people</a> to find networks,</p>

	practitioners and experts
Lack of sustainability of effort	<p>Institutionally embed the gender equality plan and commitment into various organisational structures</p> <p>Allocate gender equality work to a specific multi-annual budget.</p> <p>Design and create structures to enable regular monitoring and evaluation – and indicate action to be taken before crisis is reached</p>

Table developed from: EIGE Roadmap to Gender Equality Plans in research and higher education institutions: Success Factors and Common Obstacles.

### Useful Resources

Callerstig, A. C. (2014) [Making Equality Work: Ambiguities, conflicts and change agents in the implementation of equality policies in public sector organisations, Linköping University.](#)

Collinson, D. L. (1994) Strategies of Resistance: power, knowledge and subjectivity in the workplace, in J. Jermier, D. Knights and W. Nord (eds.) Resistance and Power in Organizations, Chapter: Routledge, 25-68.

European Commission (2015) She Figures 2015. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), '[Roadmap to Gender Equality Plans in research and higher education institutions: Success Factors and Common Obstacles](#)'.

Husu, L. (2001) Sexism, support and survival in academia. Academic women and hidden discrimination in Finland. University of Helsinki.

Lombardo, E. and Mergaert, L. (2013) '[Gender Mainstreaming and Resistance to Gender Training: A Framework for Studying Implementation](#)', *NORA, Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 21:4, 296-311.

Stratigaki, M. (2005) Gender Mainstreaming vs. positive Action: An Ongoing Conflict in EU Gender Equality Policy, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 12, 2, 165-86.

Verloo, M. (2001) [Another Velvet Revolution? Gender Mainstreaming and the Politics of Implementation](#), IWM Working Paper, 5/2001, Vienna.

*European Projects on structural change in research and higher education institutions through the implementation of gender equality plans:*

[EGERA](#) - Effective Gender Equality in Research and the Academia

[FESTA](#) - Female Empowerment in Science and Technology Academia

[GARCIA](#) - Gendering the Academy and Research: combating Career Instability and Asymmetries

[GENDERTIME](#) - Transferring Implementing Monitoring Equality

[GENERA](#) - Gender Equality Network in the European Research Area

[GENIS LAB](#) - Gender in Science and Technology Lab

[GENOVATE](#) - Transforming Organisational Culture for Gender Equality in Research and Innovation

[INTEGER](#) - Institutional Transformation for Effecting Gender Equality in Research

[LIBRA](#) - Leading Innovative measures to reach gender Balance in Research Activities

[PLOTINA](#) - Promoting gender balance and inclusion in research, innovation and training

[STAGES](#) - Structural Change Toward Gender Equality in Science

[TRIGGER](#) - Transforming Institutions by Gendering contents and Gaining Equality in Research

[1] Please see: <http://resge.eu/>

[2] Please see: [http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/gear\\_roadmap\\_02\\_successfactors\\_obstacles.pdf](http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/gear_roadmap_02_successfactors_obstacles.pdf)