

Chapter 4

EU Policy and Gender Mainstreaming in Research and Higher Education: How Well Does it Travel from North to South?

Dia Anagnostou

Abstract

Over the past 20 years, the European Union has developed a comprehensive policy on gender equality (GE) in the fields of research, innovation and higher education. While North European countries have actively implemented policies in this direction, South and East European countries have been far less active and made limited progress, resulting in widening policy gaps across countries. Drawing from the experience of a capacity-building project (TARGET), this chapter explores the factors that impede the implementation of gender equality plans (GEPs) in research and higher education institutions across five countries – Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Italy and Serbia. It argues that the lack of a coherent GE discourse in research and innovation policies that sheds light on structural barriers and implicit bias is a central impediment: it severely limits the potential of GEPs and the power of change agents in research and higher education organisations in Southeast Europe to stimulate institutional change.

Keywords: Gender mainstreaming; policy discourse; institutional transformation; Central-East Europe; Southeast Europe; gender equality plan

Overcoming the Challenge of Structural Change in Research Organisations: A Reflexive Approach to Gender Equality, 73–89



Copyright © 2022 by Dia Anagnostou.

Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence.

Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this book (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> 26th April 2021, signed by Angela Wroblewski and Rachel Palmén.

doi:[10.1108/978-1-80262-119-820221005](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80262-119-820221005)

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the European Union (EU) has developed a comprehensive and cross-sectoral policy on gender equality (GE) that extends to the fields of science, research and higher education. Despite being inherently rooted in principles of meritocracy, objectivity and the pursuit of excellence, scientific research is far from being a field that is neutral with regard to social distinctions. In fact, it continues to be permeated by substantial and persistent gender disparities as a voluminous body of evidence and scholarship demonstrates. These disparities distort scientific outcomes and the potential for innovation while undermining social justice. In the light of these facts, the EU incorporated GE as one of the key priorities in the European Research Area (ERA) Roadmap for 2015-2020 ([European Research Area and Innovation Committee \(ERAC\), 2015](#), pp. 13–14).

The ERA Roadmap encourages Member States and associated countries to adopt domestic policies that promote gender-related organisational change in research, innovation and higher education institutions. West and North European countries have actively implemented policies and programmes in this direction for at least the last decade. They have been proactive, with a few countries standing out as global GE leaders in this domain. Southeast European and Mediterranean countries, on the other hand, are for most part relatively inactive countries; with the exception of Spain, they have only relatively recently begun to integrate a gender and equality aspect into their research and innovation (R&I) policies ([Lipinski, 2014](#), p. 17).

In recent years, scholars have tapped into the knowledge and experience generated in EU-funded projects to explore the factors that facilitate or impede efforts to develop and implement gender equality plans (GEPs) and other related interventions and to assess their effects in promoting structural transformation towards GE ([Bencivenga & Drew, 2021](#), pp. 27–42; [Clavero & Galligan, 2021](#), pp. 1115–1132; [Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019](#), pp. 1–8). Understanding and elaborating on these factors is, however, still in its infancy, particularly in regard to EU and non-EU countries that have only relatively recently started to develop GE measures in scientific research and academia. This chapter contributes to filling this gap by drawing from the experience of a structural change and capacity-building project (TARGET – Taking a Reflexive Approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation) funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme. It explores the factors that apparently impede the implementation of GEPs in research and higher education institutions across five countries – Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Italy and Serbia – all of which can be classified until recently as relatively inactive countries in terms of their policy commitments and initiatives in this area.

A wide policy gap, both at national and at organisational level, has clearly emerged in this area between north and south, within and outside the EU. The ‘older’ EU Member States (EU-15) are for the most part proactive in promoting GE in national R&I policies. They implement actions that cover nearly all the ERA equality objectives, notwithstanding some partial exceptions. Countries

from Central-East and Southeast Europe (CESE) that joined the EU in the 2000s on the other hand (EU-13) are relatively inactive, as the 2018 Report by the EU's Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation shows ([European Research Area and Innovation Committee – Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation \(ERAC-SWG\), 2018](#); see also [Wroblewski, 2020](#)). Such a gap poses a major challenge for the ability of EU R&I policy to inspire and prompt effective national and local responses and to tackle gender inequalities in countries beyond a limited core of strongly motivated and highly committed Member States.

Geographically located in South and East Europe and in the Mediterranean, the TARGET project countries are all among the relatively inactive countries, yet they are far from homogeneous. They comprise countries with very diverse cultures, religions, political systems, levels and modes of economic development, historical and political backgrounds and relations with the EU. Romania and Serbia are two countries that have been profoundly influenced by the legacy of state socialism, its ideology and social-economic development model; the former joined the EU in 2008 and the latter is currently a candidate state (Serbia). In ex-communist countries, the regime prior to 1989 vigorously promoted the entry of women into the labour market and generally sought to increase their participation in social and economic life under the broad rubric of an egalitarian socialist society. In the 1990s and 2000s, these countries sought membership of the EU and incorporated GE goals and policies into their institutional and legal frameworks, in large part in the frame of the EU accession processes.

Greece, Italy and Cyprus, on the other hand, were part of the West in the post-World War II capitalist world and are 'old' members of the EU (with the exception of Cyprus, which joined in 2004). These countries have very different legacies and have achieved levels of GE in various domains that diverge from those in North and West European countries. Whether for reasons to do with their political development, the influence of religion and culture or other factors, these countries followed a belated and slower trend in women's large-scale entry into paid employment as well as in the formal recognition of equal rights for women and men in law and policy.

The participating institutions in the TARGET project are also different organisational entities: some engage in research, others fund research, others are higher education institutions, some are small institutes, others are extended higher education structures. Thus, the kinds of goals to be achieved and the challenges each has faced are quite different. In the light of such far-reaching, cross-national and inter-organisational variation, this chapter does not engage in a systematic comparative analysis. Instead, it primarily seeks to reflect on and deduce some key factors that enable or constrain the implementation of the GEPs, based on the experience of different organisations situated in the countries under focus.

As is well known, GE is a core value that is enshrined in the European Treaties, with legislation in place to promote equal pay, work–life balance,

non-discrimination in employment and access to goods and services, among many other areas.¹ In the past decade, GE and gender mainstreaming (GM) have also been defined as one of the six priorities of the ERA with three objectives: gender balance in research teams and in decision-making structures, and the integration of a gender dimension in research content. The concepts of and approach to GE, as well as the related forms of intervention underlying the EU policy in R&I have been significantly reformulated over the past 20 years. They have evolved from a ‘fixing the women’ approach to one emphasising ‘fixing the institutions’, namely to a strategy focusing on structural barriers and institutional transformation (Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019). The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the relevant developments and discusses important shifts in the EU policy approach and discourse around gender and equality in its R&I policy over the past decade.

The existence of a national policy on R&I that gives due weight to gender disparities in line with related EU objectives and approaches provides an indispensable and formative context within which academic and research organisations initiate action to tackle these disparities (or fail to do so). The second part of this chapter thus briefly examines the extent to which related national policies were adopted in the five countries under consideration. The overview and discussion of EU and national policies in the TARGET countries is far from exhaustive and is based primarily on secondary literature and evaluation reports. The third part of this chapter shifts to the organisational level and examines the factors that facilitate or obstruct the development of GEPs in different research and higher education institutions in these countries.

Besides drawing on secondary literature, this chapter relies on data and analyses provided in EU and national legal and policy documents on R&I and GE, comparative assessment reports covering the selected Member States as well as reports evaluating the implementation of GEPs in the research and academic organisations that were partners in the TARGET project. For some of the countries under study, and Greece in particular, it also draws on 10 interviews with staff members at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELI-AMEP) discussing the responses and changes that the GEP stimulated at the organisational level. Based on these materials, the analysis in this chapter seeks to identify and reflect on common trends that hinder gender action in research and higher education organisations in Southeast European countries.

In examining the EU and national policy contexts and the efforts of different organisational entities to tackle gender disparities, this chapter pays particular attention to the framing of GE and the corresponding policy discourse. Policy discourse refers to the conceptual frames that underpin the formulation

¹Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU); Articles 8, 10, 19 and 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Gender equality is further implemented through Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast).

of public policies, the ways they represent a particular issue and social problem, how they understand its causes and how they describe the processes that reproduce it. Public policies are grounded on particular conceptions and framings of issues, which guide decision-makers in determining the areas and forms of intervention. Such conceptions are embedded in policy documents and can reinforce or challenge traditional understandings of an issue (Verloo, Lombardo, & Bustelo 2007, p. 281).

Discourse also refers to the language and arguments that policy makers, social groups and individuals use in social interactions to talk about an issue that is the subject of policy intervention and how it is framed. How they construct particular interpretations of relations between the sexes or how GE is understood directly and profoundly shape efforts to tackle inequalities in social and organisational contexts. As an analytical concept, discourse is premised on the recognition that language and social interaction shape policy. It draws attention to the ways in which ‘social problems’ or policy problems get ‘created’ in social interaction (Bacchi, 2000, p. 48). The gender discourse embedded in different policies may make implicit and informal norms about gender roles more explicit. But it may also disguise and remain blind to these.

While the underlying discourse is undeniably a formative factor in the decision-making phase regarding an issue (i.e. GE), its significance and influence are less apparent at the policy implementation stage. The framing of social problems and discursive dynamics among local level and organisational actors is, however, also an important factor in shaping the implementation of policies (Cavaghan, 2017; Ciccia & Lombardo, 2019, pp. 537–538). How policy measures are applied in different local and organisational contexts is significantly shaped by the ideas (deliberate or unconscious) held by the individuals involved in doing so, which steers attention towards some issues and away from others (Ciccia & Lombardo, 2019, p. 542). The actors involved in policy implementation construct, resist and negotiate different framings of problems and solutions (Cavaghan, 2017, pp. 46–47). Implementation can be seen as a field of contestation and power struggles among stakeholders with different aims over meaning and problem diagnosis: some may wish to implement policy as originally intended and mandated from above; others want to modify its goals, slow down or entirely impede its realisation.

This chapter argues that a crucial impediment in the efforts of research and higher education organisations in countries in Southeast Europe and the Mediterranean region to push forward with GEPs is the weakness or lack of a GE discourse to support structural intervention and bottom-up change. Such a drawback is more pronounced in some countries and organisations than in others. A prevalent and strongly entrenched discourse in Southeast Europe is premised on formal equality and highlights women’s numerical presence as yardsticks for egalitarianism in scientific research and higher education. The lack of a coherent GE discourse in R&I policies that sheds light on structural barriers and implicit bias is another central impediment: it severely limits the potential of GEPs and the power of change agents in research and higher education organisations in Southeast Europe to stimulate institutional change.

EU Policy on GE in Research and Academia

The perspectives of decision-makers and experts on how to redress persistent gender disparities in academia and scientific research in the EU and Europe have evolved significantly in the past few decades. In the 1980s, the low levels of female recruitment in scientific research were attributed to socialisation from an early age. The internalisation of distinct ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ roles – including deeply rooted ideas about science as a ‘masculine’ profession – reproduced the idea that women did not belong in a career that pursued science. Measures to redress women’s underrepresentation focused on enabling them to combine family and professional life (Stolte-Heiskanen, 1988). In the 1990s, attention turned from women’s entry and qualifications to their retention and career advancement, and policy began to shift from a socialisation to an organisation-based approach (Cronin & Roger, 1999, pp. 637–661). An important milestone was a 1999 European Technology Assessment Network (ETAN) study commissioned by the European Commission (EC)’s General Directorate of Research. It found that while women’s presence in science and research increased, they remained underrepresented in senior scientific positions. Few enjoyed equal opportunities to pursue a scientific career, and even fewer to assume a decision-making role in the field of science (EC, 2000).

Over the next decade, the EU policy discourse around gender disparity in R&I gradually and substantially evolved. A critical and highly consequential shift in approach took place that laid emphasis less on women and individuals and more on the institutions that employed women as scientists and researchers. Disparities and sex discrimination were increasingly perceived to be not only or even primarily a result of equal access and opportunity but also a result of persistent and often implicit biases and stereotypes permeating the structures, norms and practices of scientific institutions, which systematically disadvantaged women and undermined excellence. Evidence that had come to light in the previous years revealed that seemingly gender-neutral procedures, like the peer-review system in scientific research, were tainted by phenomena of sexism (Wennerås & Wold, 1997, pp. 321–343, see also *Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999*), and fuelled into the EU’s concerns about organisational structures and research institutions. Policy direction shifted away from ‘women-change’ (or ‘fixing the woman’) to structural intervention and institutional transformation. We can see this reorientation in the policy domain as coextensive with the increasing resonance of substantive equality concepts in the legal domain and the need to move beyond the traditional understanding of formal equality among individuals.

This reorientation in the EU’s approach led to the recognition that GE in R&I cannot be achieved without tackling the systemic barriers that impede the professional advancement of women and their participation in decision-making structures (Ferguson, 2021). The focus shifted from individual support measures aimed at enhancing women’s capacity to meet institutional academic requirements to transforming the institutional structures, entrenched practices and cultural norms that prevent women from taking advantage of the equal rights and opportunities guaranteed in law. On this basis, the EU GE policy in R&I drew

from and incorporated different approaches: equal treatment (ensuring men and women are treated the same), positive action (special actions to redress structural disadvantage) and mainstreaming (integrating GE into structures, institutions, policies and programmes) (EC, 2000, p. 2). It identified gender balance in decision-making bodies and institutional practices that reflect and reproduce unconscious bias in assessing merit, suitability for leadership or evaluation performance as key challenges and objectives (Ferguson, 2021). The gender dimension was also to be integrated in the content of scientific inquiry and analysis to tackle bias in knowledge production and improve the quality of the research process and methods.

From 2010 onwards, the EC incorporated GE as a key goal to be mainstreamed as a cross-cutting issue in the ERA – a paramount issue of rights and social justice. It viewed persistent inequalities in research, science and innovation as causing a waste of talent, their overcoming as necessary for opening up to a diversification of ideas and approaches that foster excellence (see EC, 2012, p. 4, pp. 12–13). In 2015–2016, the EU encouraged member states to establish a national policy framework on GE in R&I and to integrate it as a key goal in ERA National Action Plans (NAPs). National authorities were advised to mainstream GE in research and higher education. They were encouraged to do so by creating a legal and policy environment and providing incentives for removing legal and other barriers to the recruitment, retention and career progression of female researchers while fully complying with EU law on GE (i.e. Directive 2006/54/EC); addressing gender imbalances in decision-making processes; strengthening the gender dimension in research programmes; engaging in partnerships with funding agencies, research organisations and universities to foster cultural and institutional change on gender – charters, performance agreements and awards; and ensuring that at least 40% of those from the under-represented sex participate in committees involved in recruitment/ career progression of staff, and in the evaluation and implementation of research programmes (EC, 2012, pp. 12–13).

The EU's broadening of GE policy in R&I, as described above, has led to a deeper framing of GE problems in science, research and academia, rather than to a 'broadening-without-deepening', as Lombardo and Meir (2008) argued about a decade ago. The shift to a focus on gendered organisational processes, structural barriers and the need for structural transformation reflects a deeper understanding of GE from that advanced in the 1990s, which calls into question male standards and norms (Lombardo & Meir, 2009, p. 5). Structural change approaches, adopted by the EU in its GE in R&I policy, go beyond re-balancing opportunities for men and women, and seek equality of outcomes. They shift the emphasis from the individual to cultural and structural causes. They also address the core norms and values (implicit and explicit) prevailing in academia that are thoroughly gendered (Bencivenga & Drew, 2021, p. 29). Formal and informal norms and rules, subtle ones such as shunning, overlooking and social exclusion, act to reinforce and perpetuate gendered structures of privilege and marginalisation at the different levels of the academic hierarchy (Clavero & Galligan, 2021, p. 1118).

In this new policy frame, the EC encourages, and more recently requires, research and higher education institutions to adopt GEPs. GEPs are a key tool

of structural intervention and institutional transformation in R&I. Combating implicit bias and cultural stereotypes cannot be achieved from above but through efforts at the level of each organisation. Research performing, research promoting and higher education institutions must implement sets of actions and measures tailored to the specific problems and structures of an entity. They shall seek to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention and career progression of female researchers, address gender imbalances in decision-making processes and strengthen the gender dimension in research content (EIGE, 2016, pp. 8–9).

As ‘soft’ policy instruments, GEPs are often not made compulsory by law. Their adoption and implementation, and the measures they entail, are not binding in the same way as a law or state regulation (EIGE, 2016, p. 17). In this regard, the importance of discursive dynamics at the local or organisational level is even more pronounced in the implementation of tools like GEPs and GM, in which their application into practice is often ambiguous and less likely to be determined from above. There is substantial uncertainty as to what the threefold set of GE goals defined in the EU’s R&I policy actually entails in practice.

The approach embodied in GEPs calls on academic and research organisations to impart specific content and meaning into the broad objective of GE and to determine concrete and feasible measures to pursue it. As customised instruments, GEPs are attentive to the need to take into account the varying conditions and views in different countries, regions and institutional settings. Their fundamentally tailored quality is clearly designed to foster motivation for and facilitate bottom-up change. It presumably renders the GEP approach most suitable for pursuing broad GE objectives across a wide variety of national, structural and cultural contexts. While herein lies the strength and potential of GEPs, their thorough reliance on bottom-up perceptions and initiatives may simultaneously become a key source of weakness.

National Policies and Discourses in the TARGET Countries

The Southeast European and Mediterranean countries of the TARGET project partners do not define GE as a priority in their national legislation and policy on R&I. Both at the level of national policy and organisation, the goal of GE is apparently not considered an issue important enough to require intervention. In Romania, for instance, national R&I policies do not contain any GE goals and priorities, while the country’s most recent NAP laying out its strategy on research, technology and innovation does not formulate or implement a GE strategy. Equality-related discourse at the national policy level more broadly seems to be defined by non-discrimination. There is substantial opposition to gender-related concepts, as indicated by the legislative initiative to ban ‘activities aimed at spreading gender identity theory or opinion’ in schools and universities (which was struck down by the Romanian constitutional court in December 2020) (Gascón Barberá, 2020). There is also a lack of a GE discourse in R&I and higher education policy in Serbia. The National Strategy on Scientific and Technological

Development for 2016–2020² (the roadmap for integration into the ERA) refers to the improvement of GE at all levels of decision making as a goal, alongside equality for minorities. The National GE Strategy for the same period includes the development of gender studies as a goal to be pursued in Serbian universities (National Gender Equality Strategy 2016–2020, p. 28). However, there is no discussion that elucidates in any way what the goal of GE referred to in these policy documents encompasses.

Cyprus formulated a national strategy on GE in R&I for the first time within its ERA Roadmap 2016–2020. It defined empowering women and encouraging equal representation in decision-making bodies and high-level appointments, improving work–life balance and promoting the integration of the gender dimension in research content as its GE main goals. However, a GE discourse is not (yet) part of the relevant discussions in R&I at the national level in Cyprus.

In light of the above, it should not come as a surprise that – unlike the EU-15 countries – most of the EU-13 countries are far less likely to make institutional change a key element of their national policy framework for GE in R&I (ERAC, 2018, pp. 18–19). Most of the EU-15 countries require the adoption of GEPs at some level (variably in public or private research organisations, universities, public or private sector entities). On the other hand, none of the countries under consideration in this chapter have (at least until 2021) a GEP requirement instituted at the national level through law, policy or strategy that is compliant with the Horizon Europe requirement (ERAC-SWG, 2021).

Even Greece and Italy, two longstanding EU-15 Member States, have only incorporated GE objectives in their policies and strategies on science, research and higher education relatively recently (Greece) or in a limited and fragmented manner (Italy). They have done so in direct reference to the ERA without a clear political commitment to support implementation at the national level. Italian law makes it mandatory for public administration entities, including universities, to adopt positive action plans with the aim to remove all obstacles hindering equal opportunities between women and men at work (through positive action to achieve gender balance where women are underrepresented and measures to promote work–family life balance). The 2014–2020 Italian NAP for R&I invites research institutions to promote equal opportunities, include a gender dimension in research and ensure gender-balanced representation in peer-review selection panels.³ The prevailing policy discourse on GE is predominantly shaped by equal opportunities, non-discrimination and positive action, albeit disconnected from any understanding of structural barriers and institutional change goals. Over the

²See National Gender Equality Strategy of Serbia 2016–2020 with Action Plan 2016–2018. Retrieved from <https://www.rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-05/National%20strategy%20for%20gender%20equality%20%282016-2020%29%20with%20Action%20plan.pdf> Accessed on 26 October 2021.

³See EIGE Factsheet “Gender Equality in research and academia”, Italy. Retrieved from <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/legislative-policy-backgrounds/italy>. Accessed on 28 September 2021.

past five years, this gap has partly been addressed through the involvement of several universities and research organisations in EU-funded structural intervention programmes like TARGET.

In Greece, promoting GE in research, science and higher education was until recently also not on the agenda of national governments and was given a low priority in the country's overall GE agenda. The Greek Strategy for the ERA National Roadmap 2016–2020 defined GM as one of the country's priorities for the first time. It also urged public research bodies 'to establish Gender Equality Plans and to include relevant provisions in their internal regulations and strategic plans' (Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2016). The references to GE in the Greek Strategy for the ERA have, however, been nominal, lacking any accompanying discourse or political commitment to actually implement them. In the past few years, legislation related to higher education and GE in the broader sense (i.e. outside the ERA-related policy) has indirectly advanced efforts to establish GEPs. Legislation to promote substantive equality between men and women has encouraged universities and research organisations to integrate gender into their study programmes and research content (Law 4604/2019, 2019).

Equally importantly, the establishment of Gender Equality Committees (GEC) in all Greek universities by law – as consultative bodies to assist the university administration in its efforts to promote GE – included the development of GEPs among their main responsibilities (Law 4589/2019, 2019). In 2021, the new requirement that research and higher education organisations have a GEP in order to be eligible for Horizon Europe funding has broadened and expedited initiatives to establish such action plans. Beyond Greece, this requirement is a turning point that has already imparted strong motivation among research organisations and universities to seek to develop GEPs across most of the TARGET countries.

The incorporation of GE goals in national policy related to the ERA and in national legislation in the countries under focus is largely nominal. It is rarely accompanied by a discourse on GE that expounds on gendered structures, norms and practices and seeks institutional change. There is little evidence that such a discourse has trickled down to research performing, research promoting and higher education organisations. In so far as any related discussion surfaces in policy documents, it is limited to references to non-discrimination and equal opportunities, or tends to reduce GE to an issue that pertains exclusively to the status of women, as, for instance, is reportedly the case in Serbia (Ignjatović & Bošković, 2013, pp. 425–440). As a recent report assessing the implementation of GE in the frame of NAPs in R&I affirms, achieving GE tends to be viewed as increasing the representation of women in academia and science, while an understanding of structural barriers and implicit biases is entirely absent. The dominant discourse reflects a concern about family values and views the reconciliation of work and childcare as the main problem (Wroblewski, 2020, p. 46).

The development of a rich and cogent gender discourse, it could be countered, should not be expected to emanate top down from policy makers alone (or even

primarily). Instead, committed non-governmental and civil society actors are often far more motivated and knowledgeable in developing and diffusing such a discourse. Civil society actors who mobilise around GE issues have, however, been notably absent in the area of scientific R&I, both at the national and EU levels, and certainly in the Southeast European countries under study. This could change as more stakeholders in academia and research begin to engage with GEPs, push forward a corresponding public discussion and organise themselves collectively.

In sum, prevailing gender discourses in Southeast European countries view persistent inequalities in academia as a problem of equal opportunities and women's underrepresentation, rather than gendered structures. The concept of representation 'mainly focuses on the (lack of) presence of women ... [rather than] on gender as an inter-relational category of men and women' (Lombardo & Meir, 2009, p. 13). Women's underrepresentation is not seen to be related to men's positions and roles in academia and scientific research institutions and in the power structures that these relations reflect and reproduce. A discourse that focuses on representation also views women as a homogeneous social group with no reference to how gender intersects with class, ethnicity, race, etc. (Lombardo & Meir, 2009, p. 13). The institutional barriers are rendered invisible when they are perceived as individual in nature. Yet, even if women were finally to break the 'glass ceiling' and reach parity with men in the top structures of academia, it is still doubtful whether those organisations would then operate in a more gender-egalitarian manner (Hamilton, Holmes, & Sowa, 2019, pp. 163–184).

Developing GEPs in Research and Higher Education Organisations in South and East Europe

Prevailing GE discourses that focus on balanced representation and equal opportunities but lack an understanding of structural barriers do not support the implementation of a GEP at the organisational level and may even undermine it (GENDERACTION, 2019, p. 3). This is an overarching and fundamental constraining factor, and the experience of the TARGET organisations in South and East Europe clearly bears this out.

Women's presence in academia has steadily and significantly increased over time in all the countries under consideration. It has increased primarily among PhD graduates but also among university staff, including top academic positions, even if the latter continue to be characterised by a persistent gender gap across most scientific disciplines. Nearly all organisations under consideration had a gender balance in their staff overall, and in some cases even a majority of women. At the same time, women dominated mid-level administrative positions, with their presence substantially reduced in decision-making and top management positions. In some of the TARGET countries at least, factors such as care and family responsibilities and the prevalence of networks of male scientists (especially in decision-making and institutional structures) constrain female researchers from reaching high-rank positions (Hatzopoulos, Kambouri, & Kikis-Papadakis, 2016, pp. 13–14). A widely held perception in the organisations under consideration was

that achieving gender balance and establishing a GE office within an organisation solves the problem of inequalities, without further reflection on its sustainability. Responsibility for change tended to be assigned to women, particularly those in top management positions.

A key initial challenge in developing a GEP within an organisation and assigning the required (and always limited) human resources to do so is to convince top management and a critical mass among the staff that this is an absolutely necessary and worthwhile endeavour. The lack of a well-developed GE discourse at the national policy and organisational levels greatly obstructs this first critical phase. In some TARGET partner organisations, there is a generalised perception within the organisation that there are no inequalities, and this is particularly pronounced where a (near) balanced representation between women and men exists. Such an entrenched perception undermines the ability to trigger a discussion on gender in science and higher education at the organisational and national level. It also presents an obstacle to recognising implicit biases, raising awareness and convincing colleagues and top management of the need for further intervention. It is easier to generate support for tackling disparities in women's representation than for combatting structural barriers and unconscious biases – aspects of social stratification that are at the heart of a substantive conception of equality.

Thus, the inroads that women have made in science and research and their increased presence were repeatedly invoked by staff, management and, in some cases, the leadership to justify their inactivity in developing a GEP and support their view that gender inequalities are not a problem in the organisation. The fact that countries in East Europe show above-average proportions of women in research in a European comparison is used to argue that the gender balance in research should not be a policy priority. The institutional change approach, however, goes beyond 'fixing the number of women' among researchers, which addresses only one of the ERA objectives (gender balance in research teams), but does not address gender balance in decision-making and the gender dimension in research (ERAC-SWG, 2018, pp. 18–19).

In the absence of a developed discourse that focuses on the institutional processes, structures and cultural norms that hinder women from having a career and advancing to higher positions in scientific research and academia, what made a difference in the development of a GEP was (a) support from leadership and top management and (b) the existence of gender-related expertise. With the support of the TARGET project, organisations with a leadership that was committed to the goals of the GEP were able to push forward the gender audit process, the creation of a community of practice and the establishment of a system for the systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data. Those organisations (regardless of size) that had active support from top management and a community of practice (internally and externally) were able to promote GEP implementation and stimulate awareness about GE, even when such a discourse was weak or lacking in the broader national context. They were able to push forward with measures on gender in research content, diffuse the principle of gender balance in their strategic documents and all their activities, including in grant-making procedures. On the other hand, in organisations where top management exhibited reluctance

or resistance, the development of the GEP was delayed, resources were restricted and the goals and actions were narrowed. The organisations that had employees with gender expertise among their staff were also more likely to trigger a discussion about gender disparities from within. They were able to proceed with the audit and implementation of activities and exhibited greater potential for sustainable change.

Change agents in the organisations under consideration placed substantial weight (and hope) on data collection as a means of stimulating a GE discourse internally and countering resistance at the start of the GEP development process. The adoption of procedures for the systematic and sex-disaggregated collection of data on staff and human resources, research and funding activities, and other indicators helped generate valuable empirical evidence, stimulate reflection and increase gender awareness. Data can help to dispel the ‘myth of gender-neutral procedures’. Sex-disaggregated data can bring to light disparities that are not easily visible, help identify structural barriers and form the basis for developing compelling arguments on the need for action as well as new kinds of intervention that had not originally been envisaged. The experience of one of the organisations under study showed that sex-disaggregated data can reveal gender disparities that were not previously visible or documented, for example, among speakers and participants who are invited to workshops and conferences as well as in regard to public exposure (i.e. far fewer women researchers who speak to the press and the media). Last but not least, and as was acknowledged, the availability of sex-disaggregated data is critical for addressing and interpreting disparities, such as women’s underrepresentation among principle investigators (PIs), and designing appropriate forms of intervention (is it because fewer women apply or due to an implicit bias in evaluation procedures?).

The size and internal structure of an administrative entity has a profound impact on the operation of an organisation and can facilitate or constrain the development of a GEP. Large research and higher education organisations with entrenched administrative hierarchies or decentralised structures are more difficult and slow moving when it comes to making decisions and achieving a broad consensus among the heads of different departments. Studies show the difficulty in effectively displacing the inertia and non-engagement with gender problems in large administrative and organisational settings, even those that spearheaded GE policy in R&I (Cavaghan, 2017, pp. 42–63). Small organisations have the advantage of flexibility and speed in deciding and implementing actions and initiating and disseminating gender knowledge and awareness internally, provided that top management proactively supports the development of a GEP. At the same time, small organisations will have a limited impact if the GEP is confined to internal structural intervention. However, they can act as drivers and multipliers if they use their strategic position and leverage (publicity, exposure, funding, expertise, etc.) to generate awareness, share knowledge and expertise and inspire or motivate gender-related action and policy.

In three of the countries under consideration, the large-scale involvement of many universities and research organisations in EU-funded programmes has prompted them over the past couple of years to increasingly take gender-related

action, including the development of GEPs on their own initiative. Extended and diffused ties and interactions between research and higher education organisations in the frame of the ERA have made them less reliant on national-level legislative and government intervention. The established networks and familiarity with ERA rules and norms have become a source of slowly emerging and diffused GE discourse despite the absence of such a discourse at the national government policy level. As more research and higher education institutions initiate gender action and implement GEPs, this is likely to bolster external (to the organisation) pressure and influence and have a certain ‘snowballing’ effect, as we can already see in some of the South European countries under consideration.

Concluding Remarks

GEPs as practical tools of structural intervention are premised on a fully formed understanding of structural barriers and implicit biases in scientific research and higher education. While academics have developed and elaborated full-fledged theories on structural inequalities, including those based on gender, much less is understood about how these are manifested in concrete organisational settings. There is also limited certainty as to the practical measures that can effect change. In seeking to drive institutional transformation, which simultaneously encompasses change in individuals, cultures and structures, GEPs are radical tools of a long-term perspective, dressed in technocratic garb.

In the South and East European countries under consideration, where a well-developed GE discourse at the organisational and national policy level conducive to this structural approach is lacking, GEPs should perhaps be seen foremost as key stimulants of awareness raising and new knowledge production. They

hold the potential to institutionalise collective awareness of gendered policy problems, displacing and challenging the notion that gender ‘is not relevant here’, with an ongoing process of learning about and engaging with the latest gendered policy problems. (Cavaghan, 2017, p. 59)

As studies show, the prevalence of local representations and discourses on GE and GM may dilute the structural approach that was originally central to GEPs and render the policy less transformative (Cavaghan, 2017, p. 46). The success of GEPs as knowledge-generating processes is perhaps the most important consolidating outcome at this stage in these countries.

Meanwhile, the lack of a shared and coherent GE discourse on gendered structures and practices hinders the ability to pursue common ERA objectives and is particularly burdensome in more inactive countries, like those referred to in this chapter. Governments and involved stakeholders need to initiate such a discourse (Wroblewski, 2020, p. 53). At the EU level, the EC could develop further action in order to facilitate the diffusion of a coherent discourse that elaborates the exigencies of substantive equality and a structural approach to gender change in R&I. The engagement of relevant stakeholders and civil society at the EU and

national levels could critically contribute to and support this task. If GEPs are not supported by such a discourse, there is the risk that they will become mainly bureaucratic tasks.

At the national policy level, any act or signal of official will or incentive to pursue the sustained implementation of a GEP would be crucial to encourage support from top management, broader support among research organisations and universities and willingness to develop effective action plans. Such acts could include making a GEP a precondition in university evaluation and accreditation systems, or more broadly, highlighting GE as a value that the respective education ministry highly regards. At the organisational level, the research organisations and higher education institutions that are participants in the TARGET project – and in many other structural intervention projects – can act as drivers in the development of such a broader discourse.

References

- Bacchi, Carol (2000). Policy as discourse: What does it mean? Where does it get us? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 21(1), 45–57. doi:10.1080/01596300050005493
- Bencivenga, Rita, & Drew, Eileen P. (2021). Promoting gender equality and structural change in academia through gender equality plans: Harmonising EU and national initiatives. *GENDER – Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, 13(1), 27–42. doi:10.3224/gender.v13i1.03
- Cavaghan, Rosalind (2017). Bridging rhetoric and practice: New perspectives on barriers to gendered change. *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*, 38(1), 42–63. doi:10.1080/01554477X.2016.1198209
- Ciccia, Rossella, & Lombardo, Emanuela (2019). Care policies in practice: How discourse matters for policy implementation. *Policy and Society*, 38(4), 537–553. doi:10.1080/14494035.2019.1702278
- Clavero, Sara, & Galligan, Yvonne (2021). Delivering gender justice in academia through gender equality plans? Normative and practical challenges. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28, 1115–32. doi:10.1111/gwao.12658
- Cronin, Catherine, & Roger, Angela (1999). Theorizing progress: Women in science, engineering and technology in higher education. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 36(6), 637–661. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-2736(199908)36:6<637::AID-TEA4>3.0.CO;2-9.
- EC (European Commission). (2000). Science policies in the European Union: Promoting excellence through mainstreaming gender equality: A report from the ETAN expert working group on women and science. *Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, European Commission*. Retrieved from <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4d456ad0-abb8-41a2-9d21-dbd5381f1f4c/language-en>. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- EC (European Commission). (2012). *A reinforced ERA partnership for excellence and growth*. COM (2012)392. Brussels: European Commission. Retrieved from https://wbc-inco.net/object/document/10563/attach/1_era-communication_en.pdf. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality). (2016). Integrating gender equality into academia and research organisations: Analytical Paper. Retrieved from

- <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0d995e01-25d4-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee). (2015). *European research area (ERA) roadmap 2015-2020*, ERAC 1208/15. Brussels: ERAC. Retrieved from <https://era.gv.at/era/era-roadmap/european-era-roadmap-2015-2020/>. Accessed on October 24, 2021.
- ERAC-SWG (European Research Area and Innovation Committee – Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation). (2018). *Report on the implementation of council conclusions of 1 December 2015 on advancing gender equality in the European Research Area*. ERAC 1213/18. Brussels: ERAC. Retrieved from https://community.era.gv.at/public/documents/3699/Report_Implementation_CC_of_1_Dec_2015.pdf. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- ERAC-SWG (European Research Area and Innovation Committee – Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation). (2021). *Report by the ERAC SWG on gender in research and innovation on gender equality plans as a catalyst for change*. ERAC 1202/21. Brussels: ERAC. Retrieved from <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1202-2021-INIT/en/pdf>. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- Ferguson, Lucy (2021). *Analytical review: Structural change for gender equality in research and innovation*. Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture. Retrieved from https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162958/OKM_2021_4.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- Gascón Barberá, Marcel (2020, December 16). Romanian court scraps law banning gender studies. *Balkaninsight*. Retrieved from <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/16/romanian-court-scraps-law-banning-gender-studies/>. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- GENDERACTION. (2019, October 1). Taking structural change into the future. *Policy Brief No. 13*. Retrieved from https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GENDERACTION_Policy-Brief_13.pdf
- Hamilton, Lauren E., Holmes, Maja H., & Sowa, Jessica E. (2019). Including women in public affairs departments: Diversity is not enough. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 25(1), 1–22. doi:10.1080/15236803.2018.1565051
- Hatzopoulos, Pavlos, Kambouri, Nelli, & Kikis-Papadakis, Kathy (2016). Integrating gender in research institutions in Greece. *ERCIM News*, 104, 13–14. Retrieved from <https://ercim-news.ercim.eu/en/104/r-s/integrating-gender-in-research-institutions-in-greece>. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- Ignjatović, Suzana, & Bošković, Aleksandar (2013). 'Are we there yet?' Citizens of Serbia and public policy on gender equality within the EU accession context. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 20(4), 425–440. doi:10.1177/1350506813478409
- Lombardo, Emanuela, & Meier, Petra (2008). Framing Gender Equality in the European Union Political Discourse. *Social Politics*, 15(1), 101–129.
- Law 4589/2019. (2019). *Synergies of National Kapodistrian University of Athens, Agricultural University of Athens and other universities and technological institutes, and other provisions*. Government Gazette, No. 13, 29 January.
- Law 4604/2019. (2019). *Promoting substantive equality between the sexes and combatting gender-based violence*. Government Gazette, No. 50/1, 26 March.
- Lipinski, Anke (2014). *Gender equality policies in public research*. Brussels: European Commission. Retrieved from <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/39136151-cb1f-417c-89fb-a9a5f3b95e87/language-en>. Accessed on October 24, 2021.
- Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. (2016). *Elliniki Stratighiki gia ton Evropaiiko Choro Erevnas (ERA) – Ethnikos Odikos Chartis 2015-2020 [Greek strategy for the European research area (ERA) – National roadmap, 2015-2020]*. Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. Athens.

- MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). (1999). *A study on the status of women faculty in science at MIT: How a committee on women faculty came to be established by the Dean of the School of Science, what the Committee and the Dean learned and accomplished, and recommendations for the future*. Retrieved from <http://web.mit.edu/fnl/women/women.pdf>. Accessed on September 28, 2021.
- Palmén, Rachel, & Kalpazidou Schmidt, Evanthia (2019). Analysing facilitating and hindering factors for implementing gender equality interventions in R&I: Structures and processes. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 77, 1–8. doi:10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2019.101726
- Stolte-Heiskanen, Veronica (1988). *Women's participation in positions of responsibility in careers of science and technology: Obstacles and opportunities*. Tampereen yliopiston sosiologian ja sosiaalipsykologian laitoksen työraportteja [Department of Sociology and Social Psychology, University of Tampere, work reports], 26.
- Verloo, Mieke, Lombardo, Emanuela, & Bustelo, Maria (2007). Conclusions on framing gender inequality as a policy problem in Europe. In M. Verloo (Ed.), *Multiple meanings of gender equality a critical frame analysis of gender policies in Europe* (pp. 281–301). Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Wennerås, Christine, & Wold, Agnes (1997). Sexism and nepotism in peer review. *Nature*, 287, 341–343. doi:10.1038/387341a0
- Wroblewski, Angela (2020). *Report on monitoring of ERA: Priority 4 implementation*. GENDERACTION Project. Prague: Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Retrieved from https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GENDERACTION_D06_Monitoring-ERA-priority-4-implementation.pdf. Accessed on September 28, 2021.