

Introduction

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Abstract

This chapter provides the background and relevant policy context information necessary to understand the approach to development and implementation of tailored gender equality plans provided by the TARGET project. It describes the development of European gender equality policies in research and innovation (R&I) since the 1980s and experiences with early structural change projects. TARGET refers to these experiences and aims at providing an innovative approach to overcome challenges towards gender equality, especially for research organisations located in countries that have been classified as rather inactive when it comes to gender equality policies in R&I. The chapter closes with an outline of the structure of the book and its individual chapters.

Keywords: Gender equality; gender quality plans; European Research Area; research funding organisations; research performing organisations; higher education; South-East Europe

Background and Policy Context

As stated by Caprile et al. (2012) research approaches and policy debates on gender equality in research have evolved substantially over recent decades. In the 1980s, policy concerns in European and other Western countries were mainly focused on the recruitment of women, while research concentrated on gendered socialisation – how individuals internalise ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ roles that shape their educational and professional choices from an early age. The findings of such research

**Overcoming the Challenge of Structural Change in Research Organisations:
A Reflexive Approach to Gender Equality, 1–11**



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emphasised that young women were discouraged from science by deeply rooted ideas about it being a ‘masculine’ field. Women were likewise said to be less professionally ambitious than men and given to prioritise family over career. Overall, the explanations for the underrepresentation of women in research were sought outside research and research institutions (Stolte-Heiskanen, 1991).

The 1990s witnessed increasing criticism of this approach. While the policy concerns gradually moved from entry and qualification issues to retention and career advancement, research shifted from socialisation to organisational approaches (Cronin & Roger, 1999; Glover, 2001). It began to focus increasingly on research organisations and their implicit norms, standards, institutional practices and power relations. This approach was reinforced in the late 1990s by two major ‘scandals’: an article by Wennerås and Wold (1997), which provided evidence of sexism and nepotism in the peer-review system in Sweden, and a report by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which publicly admitted that they had given lower pay and fewer resources to female scientists than to male scientists of equal seniority (MIT, 1999).

The European Technology Assessment Network (ETAN) report (ETAN, 2000) pleaded for an end to patronage and the ‘old boys’ network’ in European academic institutions, the implementation of greater transparency and fairness in recruitment and assessment procedures, and the modernisation of human resource management. The core message was that the excellence of research in Europe was being compromised by patronage, institutional discrimination and old-fashioned approaches to human resource management. Moreover, evidence from the United States and Europe demonstrated that taken alone, affirmative action measures supporting women to pursue research careers are insufficient to make real change happen. Such measures may be highly beneficial for individual researchers, but institutional constraints and implicit norms and values remain largely unchanged (Caprile et al., 2012).

This led to a shift in focus towards more systematic approaches to addressing the deeply embedded structures of inequality through the promotion of change in research organisations. In the European Union (EU), support for structural change has been progressively embedded in research and innovation (R&I) policies. Since 2007, the successive FP7 ‘Science in Society’ (SiS) calls and projects have evolved from programmes supporting women researchers to programmes aiming at institutional or cultural change in research and higher education organisations. The implementation of the gender mainstreaming approach in science and research initiated another policy shift. Policy debates now emphasised the need to combine organisational measures with efforts to overcome gender bias in knowledge production, that is, to enhance scientific excellence by mainstreaming sex and gender analysis in basic and applied research (EC, 2020b; Schiebinger, 2008). Gender mainstreaming in research should extend not only to the research organisations but also to the content of research: it should include actions that improve the quality of the research process and methods by increasing awareness of the need to consider whether a potential sex and/or gender dimension is relevant and, where relevant, requesting the integration of sex/gender analysis into the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of the research.

The shift from ‘supply side’ to ‘demand side’ approaches, that is, from ‘fixing the numbers of women’ to ‘fixing organisations’, is thus further complemented by approaches aimed at ‘fixing knowledge’. The 2012 report on structural change in research organisations (EC, 2012a) adopts this comprehensive approach and encourages research organisations to modernise their institutional practices and culture to tackle five key problems:

- opaqueness in decision-making processes with the associated phenomenon of ‘old boys’ networks and patronage;
- apparently gender-neutral institutional practices inhibiting women’s career opportunities;
- unconscious gender bias in assessing excellence and particularly in peer-review processes;
- wasted opportunities and cognitive errors in knowledge, technology and innovation stemming from a neglect of sex and gender analysis;
- inadequate implementation of EU directives on gender equality in the labour market.

The European Commission (EC) supported the implementation of comprehensive gender equality policies at the institutional level by funding specific structural change projects and providing guidelines and tools like the Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) tool from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2016; for an overview of projects and tools see Ferguson, 2021). In addition to this concrete support for organisations, the EC pursued the integration of gender equality objectives into European science and research policy. In the last decade, the European Research Area (ERA) has formulated gender equality and gender mainstreaming in R&I as one of its six priorities (Council of the European Union, 2012; EC, 2012b). The objective is to foster scientific excellence and a breadth of research approaches by fully utilising gender diversity and equality and avoiding an indefensible waste of talent. Member States were asked to develop policies that address gender imbalances particularly at senior levels and in decision-making and that strengthen the gender dimension in research. Member States and Associated Countries should likewise initiate gender equality policies in research performing organisations (RPOs) and research funding organisations (RFOs). They should also monitor the effectiveness of such policies on a regular basis and adjust measures as required. In September 2020, the EC released the ‘A New ERA for Research and Innovation’ Communication, which reinforced its commitment to gender equality to strengthen European R&I potential (EC, 2020a). The Council of the European Union also formulated a strong commitment to gender equality in R&I with its conclusions from December 2020 and May 2021. These focus on gender equality in the context of research careers as well as the development of inclusive gender equality plans (GEPs) at RPO level, which also address the gender dimension in R&I. Furthermore, the first strategic plan for Horizon Europe considers gender equality as a crosscutting priority and foresees supporting actions strengthening the ERA through the promotion of inclusive gender equality (EC, 2021).

Although there has been a political commitment to pursue gender equality objectives at European level for more than a decade, comparative studies show differing levels of engagement as well as divergent interpretations of gender equality at national level (Lipinsky, 2014; Wroblewski, 2021). An analysis of the implementation of national gender equality policies in R&I shows the limitations of the existing steering instruments (ERA Roadmap, ERA progress reports), which do not provide incentives to increase engagement in gender equality for countries that are relatively inactive (Wroblewski, 2021). The analysis shows a significant variation of approaches to gender equality in R&I between countries. While gender equality policies in Western and Northern European countries are based on the three-dimensional gender equality objective (fixing the numbers, fixing the institution, fixing the knowledge), former socialist countries interpret gender equality as gender balance in R&I in general and in top positions specifically. The latter implies that institutional change and the integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content are not defined as priorities. This gap in national R&I policies gains additional relevance as the analysis also highlights a strong and positive correlation between gender equality and excellence or innovation indices at national level. This signifies those countries in which a high share of RPOs have a GEP the excellence and innovation scores are higher compared to countries without institutional gender equality policies. This might also affect the future access to European research funding as GEPs are now becoming an eligibility criterion (EC, 2021). Consequently, it seems to be important to avoid a widening gap between experienced and inactive countries with regard to gender equality in R&I and to support less experienced countries in developing gender equality policies (GEECCO & TARGET, 2021). Experiences with the implementation of the ERA Roadmap (2016–2020) also showed that R&I policy at national level might change regarding gender equality. For example, Greece further developed its gender equality policy in R&I in recent years by introducing new policies supporting structural change in universities (see Anagnostou in this volume).

This complex situation raises some difficult questions: How can approaches to gender equality in R&I be geographically inclusive yet promote a shared progressive understanding and policy approach? How can policy approaches and concepts developed at the European level – be made relevant and adapted to local contexts? Northern and Western European countries started a discourse on gender mainstreaming more than 20 years ago, and this has also led to a shared understanding of gender equality in R&I, which focuses on three main gender equality objectives – fixing the numbers, fixing the organisation and fixing the knowledge (Schiebinger & Schraudner, 2011). The countries where TARGET implementing organisations are located did not participate in this process and have different political and historical currents that shape interpretations of gender equality and subsequent actions. Consequently, in these countries there is a lack of support structures and resources for organisations that are interested in developing comprehensive gender equality policies. The coincidence of a lack of national gender equality discourse and a lack of political commitment produces a difficult situation for organisations aiming at structural change – whether

out of choice or due to external requirements (e.g. from funding or publishing organisations).

Given this challenging context, TARGET aimed at supporting implementing partners to adopt a context-sensitive three-dimensional objective of gender equality in R&I, to develop a tailored GEP and to contribute to a national discourse on gender equality in R&I.

The TARGET Project

The TARGET project – Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation – was funded under the EU’s Horizon 2020 R&I programme under grant agreement No. 741672. The TARGET approach is based on experiences gained with previous structural change projects and aimed at going beyond the formal adoption of a gender equality policy by emphasising an *iterative and reflexive process* towards equality at the institutional level as well as the establishment of a *community of practice (CoP)* for gender equality within the institution. Actual change is the result of increased institutional willingness and capacity to identify, reflect and address gender bias in a sustained way. The approach is based on a three-dimensional gender equality concept. The GEP aims to achieve a gender balance in all fields and decision-making, the abolishment of structural barriers for women’s careers and the integration of the gender dimension into research content and teaching.

TARGET has been successful because all partners followed a cyclical, evidence-based and reflexive approach when developing their GEPs. The process started with an audit to analyse the status quo regarding gender equality. The audit referred to gender-disaggregated administrative data (e.g., regarding human resources and students as well as research output and teaching) but also considered strategic documents, processes, existing policies and structures. Most implementing partners have been successful in linking the GEP to ongoing institutional reforms or restructuring processes (e.g., digitalisation processes, establishment of a new human resources policy, revision of the mission strategy). In other cases, implementing partners were able to adopt gender equality policies of high relevance for the institution – such as the adoption of an anti-sexual harassment protocol. By doing so, gender equality became mainstreamed within the institution instead of being positioned as a niche and remaining somewhat isolated. This embedding of the GEP has also been supported by the establishment of CoPs, which resulted in the involvement of a broad range of internal and/or external stakeholders – not only gender experts but also key players in the institution (e.g., human resource managers, information systems managers) – and external strategic stakeholders (e.g., policymakers) in the GEP process. Based on the audit, gender equality priorities and objectives have been defined. These priorities and objectives as well as concrete policies have been integrated into the GEPs. In addition, a monitoring process was developed, which contains context indicators as well as information about policy implementation (input and output indicators). Monitoring results served as the starting point for reflection on developments, successes and failures in the context of gender equality.

TARGET provided a specific tool for each of these steps (a Gender Equality Audit Tool, Guidelines for the Development of a Targeted GEP, a Monitoring Tool and Guidelines for Self-Assessment, which are available for download at www.gendertarget.eu). Supporting partners provided assistance in tailoring the tools to the respective institution's needs. This tailored support was essential for two reasons: (1) implementing partners formulated a clear commitment to gender equality but did not have specific experience in the field prior to TARGET, and (2) implementing partners are located in countries that have been classified as rather inactive regarding gender equality in R&I (e.g. [Lipinsky, 2014](#); [Wroblewski, 2021](#)).

In concrete terms, the four-year (2017–2021) TARGET project supported seven organisations in developing and implementing a reflexive gender equality policy. These included two RFOs (Fondazione Regionale per la Ricerca Biomedica (FRRB), Italy; Research Innovation Foundation (RIF), Cyprus), one accreditation agency (National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), Romania), two universities (University of Belgrade (UB), Serbia; Université Hassan II Casablanca (UH2C), Morocco), one non-university research institution (Hellenic Foundation of European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Greece) and a network of engineering schools in the Mediterranean basin (Réseau Méditerranéen des Ecoles d'Ingénieurs et de Management (RMEI)). The non-profit research institute NOTUS (Spain) and the Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini (FGB, Italy) acted as supporting partners, and the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS, Austria) as project coordinator. Due to the multiplier effect related to research funding and accreditation or their roles as think tanks (ELIAMEP) or large state universities which may become pioneering institutions for gender equality in their country, the implementing organisations in the TARGET project all have enormous potential to contribute to the national discourse on gender equality in R&I in countries with limited corresponding gender equality policies.

This volume aims at summarising and reflecting on the experiences of implementing the TARGET approach from different perspectives. It combines the reflections of implementing organisations and supporting partners, institutional and cross-sectional viewpoints as well as theoretical and applied perspectives.

Structure of the Book

The volume comprises three sections. The three chapters in the first section – ‘Theoretical and Conceptual Framework’ describe the theoretical background to the TARGET approach to GEP development and implementation as well as the main conceptual elements used.

Angela Wroblewski and Rachel Palmén outline the TARGET approach to GEP development and implementation for research organisations. They describe research organisations as being characterised by a dual logic – the organisational logic and the academic logic. They see the fact that gender equality policies often refer to the organisational logic but do not challenge academic practices as one of the main barriers to effective GEPs. Referring to the dual logic and to practice theory enables a discussion of the paradoxical phenomenon that the pace of reduction of gender imbalances remains slow despite the successful

implementation of gender equality policies because relevant practices embedded in the academic logic remain unchanged. They present reflexivity as a key concept that enables a linkage of the two often conflicting logics and the CoP as a key tool that supports reflexivity.

Reflexivity is also a topic taken up by Angela Wroblewski and Andrea Leitner, who discuss the relevance of monitoring for a reflexive gender equality policy. They argue that an evidence-based and cyclical approach to GEP development and implementation opens up space for reflexivity. Members of the CoP should reflect on recent developments towards gender equality – including successes as well as failures – based on monitoring results in a moderated process. This contributes to the further development of gender equality policies, the building up of gender competence among relevant stakeholders as well as a gender equality discourse within the organisation.

The third conceptual chapter focuses on the CoP and its relevance for a reflexive gender equality policy. Rachel Palmén and Maria Caprile reflect on the experiences gained with implementing CoPs in TARGET organisation from the perspective of a supporting partner. They examine the literature on CoPs and structural change for gender equality in R&I organisations and make reference to the different experiences of the TARGET CoPs. The authors examine whether and how a CoP approach has been a useful vehicle for GEP development and consider how the different configurations of internal and external stakeholders within the CoPs have impacted GEP implementation. They also discuss the TARGET experiences of CoPs for GEP implementation in relation to the three key CoP concepts – domain, community and practice.

The chapters in the second section – ‘Substantive Issues of a Reflexive Gender Equality Policy’ – each focus on one of the relevant characteristics of the TARGET approach. They thus illustrate these characteristics by referring to experiences gained when implementing the approach. This section demonstrates that despite the fact that the participating organisations come from what have been termed as ‘inactive’ countries at national level policy in gender equality in R&I, TARGET implementers and authors have not only developed cutting edge reflections on policy transfer, sustainability, sexual harassment and the integration of the gender dimension into curricula, they have also implemented these approaches in some cases in unsupportive policy contexts.

Dia Anagnostou discusses aspects of the transferability of gender mainstreaming and gender equality policies in research organisations from the north to the south of Europe and asks: ‘How well does it travel?’ She argues that developed status quo of gender equality policies focusing on three dimensions (fixing the numbers, fixing the institution and fixing the knowledge) has been developed in Northern and Western European countries but has only partly been accepted and adopted in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. This is due to a lack of a policy discourse that leads to divergent understandings of gender equality in R&I as well as low acceptance of gender equality at political and societal levels. She calls for an intensified gender equality discourse involving the EC, the EU Member States and Associated Countries as well as civil society actors and pioneering institutions.

Anastasia Zabaniotou, Aigli Tsirogianni, Monica Cardarilli and Massimo Guarascio describe the development and outcomes of a network-based CoP linking gender equality to sustainability in Mediterranean countries. A network of engineering schools in the Mediterranean basin (RMEI) developed a CoP involving 12 schools from Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The CoP aimed at establishing a shared understanding of gender equality policy as a continuous and reflexive process towards cultural change as well as equipping its members with the necessary competence to become change agents in their schools. This required dealing with diverging national frameworks as well as societal and cultural backgrounds. A specific characteristic of the RMEI CoP is the involvement of students, which leads to a multinational, multicultural and intergenerational CoP. The reflection on the experiences of this CoP enabled the identification of key success factors and preconditions for a network-based CoP.

Milica Mirazić and Daša Duhaček focus on sexual harassment in the context of gender equality and describe the development of a specific policy at the University of Belgrade. They explain the relevance of the topic in the gender equality context and outline hindering and supporting factors for the development of a sexual harassment protocol in a decentralised university. While individual faculties developed rulebooks for sexual harassment, the University of Belgrade only recently formulated a comprehensive university-wide policy. This process was supported and facilitated by the GEP and the recently established gender equality structures.

Alina Tăriceanu focuses on the relevance of gender studies for gender equality in Romania. She describes the development of gender studies over the last decades as an uneven and sometimes precarious process. Since the notion of gender has not been properly integrated into research, women's or gender studies are seen as an appendix to mainstream research in the humanities and social sciences. Against this backdrop, Tăriceanu discusses the role of ARACIS – the national accreditation agency for higher education in Romania – and the potential of its GEP to support gender curricula in Romanian higher education.

Olivier Boiron, Carole Deumie, Lena Raviol and Margalith Benech-Kopeli-anskis highlight their experience of incorporating the gender perspective into the engineering curricula in the *École Centrale de Marseille (ECM)*. Engineering in tertiary education in France suffers from particularly strong gender imbalances. This chapter describes the approach and pedagogical tools developed and implemented at ECM to challenge traditional gender stereotypes, the representation of the engineering profession and predominantly masculine professional ambit as well as to raise awareness of the glass ceiling effect and the prevention of sexual harassment. The ECM approach is multidisciplinary and aims to give students a solid professional grounding as well to provide effective tools for societal transformation.

The third section – ‘Experiences with implementation of the TARGET approach in RPOs and RFOs’ – comprises two chapters, which reflect on the process and lessons learned in large and small organisations.

Maria Caprile, Mina Bettachy, Daša Duhaček, Milica Mirazić, Rachel Palmén and Angelina Kussy write about the experiences of developing and implementing

GEPs at two universities within the framework of the TARGET project. They reflect on both top-down and bottom-up approaches to GEP development for institutional change, paying particular attention to the characteristics of the implementing organisations, that is, large, complex and highly hierarchical organisations. Both universities operate in difficult national contexts: their host countries – Morocco and Serbia – lack a specific focus on gender equality in higher education and research policy. GEP implementation in both instances has meant engaging different institutional actors as well as fostering reflexive, evidence-based policymaking. The analysis given in this chapter is based on reflections on GEP implementation that combine the perspectives of the implementing organisation and the supporting partner.

Barbara De Micheli and Giovanna Vingelli reflect on experiences with the implementation of the TARGET approach in small organisations – two RFOs and one RPO. These organisations have the potential to influence research policies and institutional activities due to their core roles as RFOs or think tanks. Central elements of GEP development and implementation in all three organisations were internal processes, data collection, competence building and networking. All three organisations based their strategy for institutional change on a consensus within their internal and external CoP. An important aspect when building this consensus was to link gender equality with other institutional priorities and existing processes. The experiences of these three organisations also illustrate the role of targeted dissemination activities that contribute to a national or regional gender equality discourse in R&I.

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