

# Planning Institutional Change for Gender Equality in Research

## Reflections from a Study on GEPs Implementation in Europe

Maria Sangiuliano

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia  
[marisangiuliano@gmail.com](mailto:marisangiuliano@gmail.com)

**Abstract** This chapter relies on and summarizes research and content delivered for the initial State of Art Analysis carried out within the EQUAL-IST project with the goal of providing an updated and comprehensive picture of the knowledge and practice on Gender Equality plans as tools for institutional change. Dimensions and criteria which allow GEPs adoption to be defined as good practice in terms of both methodological approach and impact have been elaborated. Based on the above mentioned criteria over 70 potential RPOs to be invited to in depth interviews were selected and finally 19 of them interviewed. Interviews's shortcomings are summarized and analyzed based. The study provides answers grounded to literature and empirical data such as experts feedback to 2 main research questions: which are the main dimensions to define a Gender Equality Plan implementation process as a good practice? To what extent and under which conditions Gender Equality Plans can prove to have an added value as systematic and comprehensive policies in promoting structural change if compared with specific interventions or actions addressing particular inequality areas? This study has fed into the knowledge base of each RPOs EQUAL-IST Team member as a learning resource and how-to-do guide based on experiences from research institutions which have already initiated such a policy.

**Keywords** Gender equality in research. Institutional change. Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). Resistances.

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## **1 Institutional Change for Gender Equality in Research. Overview on EU Policies**

Gender equality in research has been addressed by European Commission's policies since 1999 and the establishment of the Helsinki Group as well as the first Communication on 'Women and Science' (1) whose approach was mainly oriented towards giving women tools and support to meet requisites of academic and research employment. Integrating gender in research was already present as a policy goal across FP6 and FP7 with a gradual shift to measures designed for 'fixing the institutions' instead of making women more apt to be integrated into existing and male dominated higher education and research environments. As it happened more in general for gender equality policies worldwide, the following decades marked also a stronger orientation towards gender mainstreaming as a policy approach starting to complement equal treatment policies and positive actions and the affirmation of a double track strategy: on one side continuing to take initiatives targeting women and offering them tailored provisions to compensate gender inequalities and on the other approaching gender as a crosscutting issue, relevant for both men and women and in need of being incorporated across all sectors and stages of knowledge production and transmission (Stratigaki 2005).

A first EU wide investment has been made to raise the awareness and enhance gender competences among researchers and research support officers across all member states by way of the Gender in Research Project running from 2010-12: tools have been provided and disseminated to guide RPOs and RFO in integrating gender in the entire research cycle and gender trainings organized with support of the FP7 National Points of Contacts.

Evidence base for these policies has been provided by the comprehensive and EU level She Figures Reports Supported by the year 2012 the issue was fully integrated into European Research Area policies leveraging on the argument of fostering research excellence and avoiding women's talents to get wasted (European Commission 2012a, 2012b): the Commission has officially invited member states to foster the removal of any barriers to women's career progression in research, gender inequalities in decision making and launching a 40% target of the under represented sex in all decision making bodies as well as recruitment and research evaluation committees.

By measuring and comparing national results, the European Research Area has started sparking competition among member states with regard to accomplishment of gender equality in research: in 2009, 19 countries – 17 Member States and two associated countries (BG, CY, CZ, EE, FR, GR, HR, HU, IL, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, PT, SI, SK, TR) were identified as ‘relatively inactive’ countries coinciding with academic systems of so called ‘lower innovation’, providing limited policy impulses to gender equality.

In contrast, systems of rather ‘higher innovation’ fall into the category of ‘global leaders’ (EC 2009: 21) when it comes to gender policy implementation: Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland; or as a further category ‘proactive’ countries: Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as the UK, Ireland and Spain. (European Commission 2014)

It has gradually become clear how the main goal is to change structures and institutions rather than women the policy goal has become and been framed as “structural change” and gender sensitivity made integral part of RPO’s and RFOs modernization processes and an Expert Group on Structural Change has been appointed by DG Research to provide policy guidance in the field.

The official report drafted by the Group articulates 3 main problems faced by RPOs in terms of Gender Inequalities:

- Opaqueness in decision making- lack of transparency in recruitment
- Institutional practices inhibiting career opportunities as due to shrinking resources insufficient time is dedicated mentoring colleagues and to review research materials in evaluating candidates
- Unconscious bias in evaluation
- Cognitive errors in research due to missed integration of gender as a research variable/dimension
- Employment policies and practices

Elements of and solutions for structural change are also highlighted as summarized in the figure below:

**Table 1** Elements of Structural Change (European Commission 2012b)

<b>Knowing the institutions</b>	<b>Ensuring Top level Support</b>	<b>Generating effective management practices</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender Audits</li> <li>• Gender Statistics</li> <li>• Morale / Climate surveys with staff members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top level management in policy formulation</li> <li>• Gender equality proposed as key factor for positioning in international academic &amp; research competitiveness</li> <li>• Administrative managers involvement</li> <li>• Gender Equality Officers: possibly chosen from Faculty and provided with staff and budgets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make faculties aware of facts and figures of gender inequalities in their contexts</li> <li>• Raise the awareness on implicit gender bias in purely merit based recruitment processes</li> <li>• Promoting a management culture valuing transparency, accountability, peer learning</li> </ul>

A full set of possible actions and examples on how to address the 5 above mentioned critical areas for Research Organizations is also put forward and among final recommended actions to RPOs and RFOs willing to concretely endorse structural change, the adoption of an Equality Plan is included: a plan, it is suggested, shall include audit results (gender disaggregated statistics) in annual reports comprehensive of gender pay gap, staff statistics and senior committee membership.

The 2014 ERA survey has measured progress made by EU 28 RPOs in adopting gender equality plans and detected a positive trend, as 64 % of the respondent organisations implement such a plan, although it is stressed that a large portion of participating RPOs avoided to answer to this specific question of the Survey (European Commission 2014).

Only 8 Member States were found to have above the average GEPs adoption rates (AT, DE, FI, FR, MT, NL, SE, UK). Framework contexts at national levels seem to impact as almost all of them (all but MT) are featured by national measures or strategies to improve gender equality in public research which the other 20 countries are equally split between those featured by supporting provisions (BE, BG, CZ, DK, EE, EL, ES, HR, LT, SI) and others where such measures could not be identified (CY, HU, IE, IT, LU, LV, PL, PT, RO, SK).

A triggering role in the increase of the adoption of Gender Equality Plans at EU RPOs has been for sure played by the establishment of a EC dedicated call for project proposals under FP7 Science in Society and more recently H2020 on the promotion of structural change and equality in research: under those calls for proposals the estab-

ishment of Gender Equality Plans has become a central requirement in the articulation of projects' work plans.

More recently, the European Institute for Gender Equality have included the topic among its priorities and research areas and has commissioned a Study on the subject which has included a EU level mapping of good practices in structural change implementation and the release of the *Gender Equality in Academia and Research Toolkit*. In the toolkit, the core role of Gender Equality Plans as suitable measures to adopt a systematic approach towards the promotion of gender equality is confirmed. The tool includes a step by step guide from analysis to implementation and monitoring of Gender Equality Plans.

## **2 Research Methodology and Criteria to Identify Good Practices**

This study has meant to start investigating into the following research questions:

- Which are the main dimensions to define a Gender Equality Plan implementation process as a good practice?
- To what extent and under which conditions Gender Equality Plans can prove to have an added value as systematic and comprehensive policies in promoting structural change if compared with specific interventions or actions addressing particular inequality areas?

In the process of identifying Gender Equality Plans at national and EU levels to be included in the study, the comprehensive EIGE definition of good practices in gender mainstreaming has been taken into account: "a practice that, upon evaluation, demonstrates success at producing an impact which is reputed as good, and can be replicated" (EIGE 2013, 10).

Desk research has been conducted on EU Funded Projects on structural change in research and their coordinators have been contacted via e-mail to collect relevant literature and outputs. 9 project's leaders have replied and provided information and resources: TRIGGER, INTEGER, GENDERTIME, LIBRA, STAGES, PRAGES, EGERA, GENERA and GARCIA.

To complement the desk research, all EQUAL-IST partners have uploaded and filled in the an on line Database with 48 GEPs mostly from their own countries: among them only partners from Lichtenstein and Ukraine have been found as having no Research Institution with a Gender Equality Plan in place at present.

Based on desk review of existing literature on structural changes process and deliverables from other EU funded projects with the same priority, a set of criteria has been designed and agreed upon among partners which was used both to guide partners during the

continued collection of information on GEPs in their own countries to be uploaded on the EQUAL-IST Database, especially in those countries where the rate of RPOs/RFOs having an approved GEP is high (such as Germany and Italy, where Universities and Research Institutions are obliged by National Regulations to have Gender Equality Plans or so called Positive Action Plans in place) and to filter from the initially collected data those GEPs which could be considered as good practices invited to be interviewed.

A first set of selection criteria derives from the particular EQUAL-IST approach and methodology [tab. 2], while a second type set of criteria oriented to take the impact of the GEPs into account has been included to identify those Gender Equality Plans which have gone through effective implementation: we referred to these types of criteria as ‘impact oriented’, driven by the choice of focusing on good practice and therefore putting at the centre their ‘working well’ characteristic, and they are listed below in table 3.

**Table 2** Criteria based on the EQUAL-IST approach and methodology

Criteria	Description – analytical categories	Background
<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Areas of intervention of the GEP_ balanced coverage</b></p>	HR practices and management processes (recruitment, career advancement, evaluation and performance assessment, work life balance, leadership, gender disaggregated data collection) ICT-IST Research design and delivery Teaching and Student services (gender sensitive teaching methods and practices, initiatives to attract more girls, career guidance, mentoring etc.) Institutional Communication	As we have defined in the Technical Annex, EQUAL-IST quadruple dimensional approach is confirmed at least as a direction we aim at tending towards. Such a balance would be interesting to be found within each one of the selected GEPs but if not feasible it should feature the totality of the selected GEPs- good practices
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Leadership issues addressed through concrete measures</b></p>	Problem: glass ceiling/gender segregation in top academic and administrative positions Type of interventions: Gender quotas in selection’s criteria Gender quotas in selection committee panels Soft measures to raise the awareness	According to the EC survey conducted within ERA on GEPs implementation, leadership is one of the areas which have been less frequently addressed by Gender Equality Plans so far. For IST and ICT studies it has particular relevance (European Commission 2016)

Criteria	Description – analytical categories	Background
<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Gender Mainstreaming and positive actions_ balanced coverage</b></p>	<p>Use of measures that balance the two prevailing approaches to gender equality policies: Mainstreaming approach and Equality measures: crosscutting measures targeting both men and women and all areas of the institutional operations Positive actions: measures addressing women in particular in order to favour women in particular in order to counter balance their structural discrimination</p>	<p>Coherently with most knowledgeable literature on gender equality policies this is a productive tension/dilemma The EQUAL-IST approach was formulated and presented as a mixed one as well.</p>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Balanced Bottom up – Top Down approach</b></p>	<p>Design and implementation to be carried out both ensuring engagement and commitment of highest hierarchical representatives (academic and administrative levels) and taking into account needs and voices of employees, students and stakeholders at the involved research organizations.</p>	<p>Most EC studies on structural change in Research Institutions stress the importance of top management support. Critical studies on gender equality policies raise the concern the field has become affected by excessively technocratic normative approach (Squires 2008). Participatory approach to GEPs’ design is crucial in EQUAL-IST. Participation of beneficiaries is also embedded into the “good practice” definition of EIGE (EIGE 2013).</p>
<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>Process started at IST/ICT Faculties and expanded to the whole University</b></p>	<p>The EQUAL-IST project is applying a sectoral approach to GEPs design and implementation: Faculties-Schools-Departments specialized in IST/ICT are taking the lead in initiating the process and have the goal to expand the GEPs since the initial steps of the process. Strengths and potential risks-weaknesses of such an approach are of interest for the consortium.</p>	<p>Available studies don’t seem to have focused on this particular aspect so far. The EC is investing on both projects which are undertaking a sectoral approach and those encompassing different Faculties and Scientific fields. The expert communities on Gender in Research are paying attention to this as it is witnessed by the agenda of the Gender Summit 2016 where the panel on structural change is featured by 2 sectoral projects.</p>
<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>Intersectional approach</b></p>	<p>While gender inequalities remain the core focus of EQUAL-IST, the project will pay attention to the complex intersections of gender with ethnicity, age, social class, sexual orientation etc. Projects which have addressed these aspects and therefore created synergies between equality and diversity policies might therefore have interesting lessons to teach.</p>	<p>EQUAL-IST Technical Annex and ESR valuing this aspect under the Excellence evaluation criteria. Vast literature on intersectionality in gender equality policies (see for example: <i>Social Politics Special Issue</i>, 2012, 19, 4).</p>

**Table 3** GEPs' Impact Criteria

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Description – analytic categories</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>1 Effective Impact</b>	The GEP has provoked visible and measurable results: “positive change of access to goods, services, status, decision-making and opportunities; rectification of power imbalances; expansion of the subjective and objective range of legal, social and psychological choices available to both men and women; break gender stereotypes, norms and patterns” (EIGE 2013)	EIGE 2013
<b>2 Sustainable impact in time</b>	The GEP has undergone to a full implementation phase and has been eventually renewed for more than one cycle	GenderNET Project 2015 EC, 2012b EC, 2014
<b>3 Sustainable impact_actors involved</b>	Promoters/institutional owners have permanent roles at the University; Top Managers at strategic sectors are supporting the Plan Implementation	GenderNet Analysis Report EC, 2012b EC, 2014
<b>4 Sustainable Impact as integration into internal policies and regulations</b>	The GEP is integrated into internal policies such as Performance Evaluation Plans, ERA Human Resources Strategy 4 Researchers Processes.	GenderNET Project 2015, D2.6 EC, 2012b EC, 2014
<b>5 Regular monitoring against defined indicators &amp; KPIs</b>	Indicators and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) have been defined and monitoring, evaluation procedures are in place	GenderNET Project 2015, D2.6 EC, 2012b EC, 2014
<b>6 Assigned resources</b>	The University is assigning both human and economic resources to the structural change process and the GEP management	GenderNET Project 2015, D2.6 EC, 2012b EC, 2014
<b>7 Integration into national regulations</b>	The GEP is stemming from national provisions and/or is monitored upon the initiative of National Authorities or has lead (or has functioned as a best example leading) to significant changes in national regulations policies.	GenderNET Project 2015, D2.6 Genovate Project 2016 EC, 2012b EC, 2014

*Positive feedback on impact from knowledgeable experts at national or international level can be taken into account)*

Overall 83 GEPs (48 collected on the on line Database and other additional 35 GEPs identified from other EU funded projects on Structural Change) have been collected and based on the above reported criteria a selection have been made of 70 contacts from just as many research institutions which have been invited to participate to the EQUAL-IST research and asked for their availability for an in-depth interview.

A set of guiding questions have been derived to cover all the above mentioned criteria, complemented by 2 additional questions included on Challenges and Resistances in order to allow a more thorough and complete understanding of the process which could respond to EQUAL-IST partners' learning needs.<sup>1</sup>

In the following paragraphs, reference to the institutions is included in each quotation as agreed with research participants, apart from the sections of the interviews referred to Challenges and Resistances which have been de-identified as potentially including sensitive information.

Overall, 19 RPOs out of the 70 invited institutions accepted to be interviewed with slightly more than a 27 % response rate. Interviews took place in the second semester of 2016.

Only one out of the 24 participants was a man, confirming the high prevalence of women gender equality policies and research implementers. Significantly enough, most of the interviewees (10) are researchers- academics who, jointly with their role of change agents on gender equality policies at their own universities, have structural change and gender equality as their own research subjects. Among the others, we had mostly administrative or staff with roles within the Gender Equality Institutional Machineries (7) or having taken the role of main drivers of gender equality policies at their own universities/departments (3).

**Table 4** List of Participating RPOs

<b>Institution</b>	<b>EU funded Project</b>	<b>Involved Depts</b>	<b>Country</b>
Lulea Technical University (abbr. Lulea)	GENOVATE	ICT	Sweden
Siauliai University (abbr. Siauliai)	INTEGER	ICT	Lithuania
Università di Padova (abbr. UNIPD)	GenderTime	Entire University	Italy

<sup>1</sup> Full set of questions available in D2.1.

<b>Institution</b>	<b>EU funded Project</b>	<b>Involved Depts</b>	<b>Country</b>
Università di Ferrara (abbr. UNIFE)	//	Entire University	Italy
Politecnico do Porto (abbr. Porto)		School of Educational studies	Portugal
Lausanne University (abbr. Lausanne)	GARCIA	Entire University	Switzerland
Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences- ZRC (abbr. ZRC)	GARCIA	STEM & Social Sciences	Slovenia
Università degli Studi di Milano (abbr. UNIMI)	STAGES	Health – Medical Studies- Agricultural Sciences	Italy
University of Iceland	GARCIA	Entire University	Iceland
Sumy State University (abbr. Sumy)	//	Humanities Faculty	Ukraine
Università di Torino (abbr. UNITO)	//	Entire University	Italy
Pantheion University (abbr. Pantheion)	//	Entire University	Greece
University Ioan Alexander Cuza of Iasi (abbr. UAIC)	STAGES	Entire University	Romania
Universidad de Tras of Monte –(abbr. UTAD)	//	Entire University	Portugal
Dortmund Technical University (abb. TU Dortmund)	//	Entire University	Germany
Radboud University (abbr. Radboud)	STAGES	2 STEM Faculties	Netherlands

### 3 Results of the Study

#### 3.1 Different Contexts and Stages of GEPs Implementation

The 18 collected good practices cover a wide range of national, institutional and policy contexts and the Gender Equality Plans of the participating institutions are at different stages of implementation.

All RPOs have Gender Equality Plans in place or under approval (ZRC), but two institutions (Pantheon, Greece and Sumy, Ukraine) who are either still in the process of having started internal dialogue between their Centre/Department and the highest academic levels (Pantheon University) or in an internal assessment/audit phase triggered by a nation wide project funded by International Cooperation Funds (Sumy University). We decided it would still be meaningful to interview them as both the Greek and Ukrainian institutions are found to be national contexts with limited or null presence of RPOs with GEPs in place (in Greece only 2 Universities, while only one in Ukraine): furthermore, from initial contacts it was clear how both cases had considerable expertise in gender policies and showed promising recent developments.

All the remaining Institutions have come to put GEPs in place either in compliance with national legislations or policies requiring to do so (all Italian Universities, Dortmund Technical University, Lausanne and Hasselt)<sup>2</sup> or as an outcome of being partners in a EU funded project (UAIC, Radboud, ZRC, Siauliai, Lulea) or both (Universities of Milano and Padova, University of Iceland). A peculiar case is represented by the three Portuguese Universities, in connection with a co-funded Government- ERDF Program providing seed funds for enhancing structural change in Universities and Public Administration bodies.

Also in terms of stages of implementation we have a quite differentiated picture:

- Auditing- assessment - internal research phase completed and GEP at a draft stage (ZRC)
- Auditing - assessment internal research phase completed and GEP finalized and validly adopted (UBI)
- GEPs started and implemented directly without preliminary internal assessment (Lulea, UAIC)
- GEP recently put in place following a series of mixed actions (internal audit/assessment and implementation of measures) or in parallel with those actions (Radboud)

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<sup>2</sup> In Germany, Switzerland and Flanders, national or federal regulations making GEPs a compulsory policy measure are specifically targeting Universities or framed in High Education programmes and allocate fundings for implementation.

- GEP already iterated for several terms with recurring internal assessment as monitoring of the GEP itself (Lausanne, Dortmund, Ferrara, Iceland).

Processes have been targeting STEM Faculties for the following ones among the interviewed Universities: ZRC (one STEM and one SHH), Lulea, Radboud (one STEM and one SSH), Siauliai, TU Dortmund.

UTAD, UBI, Polytechnic of Porto have been implementing their GEPs mainly at Social Sciences, Humanities and Educational Studies Departments, Milano has involved Health- Medicine and Agricultural Studies, while the remaining ones have taken an overall scope targeting the entire universities for their GEPs and actions (UNITO, UNIPD, Lausanne, Dortmund, IS).

### 3.2 Audits and Internal Assessment as Enablers and as Part of GEPs

Assessment and internal auditing have been interpreted in many different ways, so that the boundaries between assessment and implementation phases appear to be blurred in structural change processes: they are not always deemed necessary especially in cases where gender equality is already institutionalized like in the Swedish Lulea University, while in other contexts internal assessment and state of the art analysis have been reported to form integral part of the GEPs themselves.

The option is to have a quantitative measurement of the main indicators for gender equality across HR, share of women in academic leadership positions, student population, use of existing work life balance measures and services, and in most cases mixed methodologies are used including interviews and focus groups to better grasp more subtle aspects of gendered organizational cultures.

The institutions where GEPs are better embedded into gender equality machineries are also those where routine assessment of gender statistics are systematically conducted and it becomes a section of the Gender Equality Plan for the next period or the baseline for the GEP itself: this is for example the case at Dortmund Technical University and at the University of Ferrara. At Ferrara an Annual Gender Report combines Data Collection and monitoring of previous GEPs' actions results and is also integrated with the GEP itself:

Mixed methods for the assessment seem to be the most typical option, combining statistics and focus groups or in depth interviews.

Some respondents stressed how the assessment phase allowed them to reach out to broad audiences and sometime constituted also an initial raising awareness opportunity: at UTAD being still in the auditing phase they organized series of seminars and focus groups which also worked as effective tools to stimulate an internal discus-

sion on the issues. At the Porto Polytechnic, the audit involved more than 300 people into trainings and about 600 into research actions.

Also the Hasselt University included an Audit directly as part of its GEP and precisely with raising awareness purposes and the intention to target the so called ‘business culture’ of both administrative and academic units:

**Difficulties in retrieving gender disaggregated data during the assessment phase** can easily lead to specific internal surveying actions which might end up being part of GEPs, aimed at **changing and innovating the way data are collected and analyzed in order to mainstream a gender perspective in internal statistics**.

The case of ZRC is very interesting from this point of view: starting from trying to make an assessment and facing a lack of gender disaggregated figures at the HR level, a software company was hired to set up a new tool designed for having sex/gender and variables in HR data management and analytics. Attaching a gender equality measure to an organizational technological innovation in HR data collection has proved to be positively received at ZRC.

Missing gender disaggregated figures can create the opportunity for a dedicated Action in the GEP on Engendering statistic and data collection, like it happened at Padua University, also thanks to the creation of a permanent Observatory as a result of the EU funded GenderTime Project.

### 3.3 Gender Equality Plans, Institutional Gender Mechanisms and EU Funded Projects

Among the interviewed countries, Iceland, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium- Flanders are operating in the framework of national legislations which, although in different ways and through different provisions, make compulsory for Universities to formally set up gender equality plans. In all these contexts, apart from Belgium, Officers for Gender Equality are also in place (elected and/or appointed) as well as other bodies such as Equality Commissions. (Gender) Equality Offices might be also having an implementing role in GEPs, and sometimes, like it is the case of our interviewees in Germany, Switzerland and Italy, this goes along with being in charge of broader internal policies and services, like welfare and/or diversity.

It’s worth stressing that judgement about the **efficacy of institutional gender equality mechanisms** seems to vary a lot. Complex organizational settings with different, sometimes overlapping competences (Committees, Commissions, Officers, Administrative Units) are indeed featuring those countries where Gender Equality Plans are foreseen by Law (Iceland, Italy, Germany, Switzerland). Few interviewees have reported about effective synergy established among

the different layers of the Institutional Gender Equality Machinery (University of Ferrara, Lausanne University, Dortmund Technical University); others have expressed frustration about gender equality machineries addressing problems and approving GEPs mainly at a bureaucratic-procedural and formal levels stated (University of Torino, University of Milano) or being hindered by lack of time and resources (University of Padua and Torino) and more nuanced standpoints where the effective functioning of institutional machineries has been seen as dependent on political willingness of promoting change by the top academic positions (University of Iceland).

Plans to create institutional owners of GEPs in the form of Gender Equality Commissions/Groups or Committees are undergoing at those RPOs where GEPs still have to be formally adopted and implemented as only the first stage of internal assessment and/or design have been completed (UTAD, ZRC) or where commitment has been publicly but no formal adoption steps have been made (Pantheon). In these cases, our a crosscutting composition of academic, administrative staff and in some cases students as well is foreseen.

A considerable part of the surveyed good practices have also operated in the framework of EU funded projects on Structural Change, while at the same time having already in place institutional gender equality bodies in charge of designing and implementing GEPs to comply with national regulations. These were the cases of the University of Lausanne (EGERA), the University of Milano (STAGES), the Iceland University (GARCIA) and the University of Padua (GenderTIME).

At the University of Lausanne the process of responding to national legislation and setting up GEPs had started in 2013, one year before the kick off of the EGERA project which allowed to provide an international framework for implementing the Plan, as well as additional resources.

At the University of Iceland, concreteness seems the main added value brought about by the GARCIA EU funded project through additional research and internal raising awareness and communication actions, beside the legitimacy of an international platform playing a role into triggering a real commitment from the Leadership:

In Padua the Positive Action Plan formally due by the CUG (Single Guarantee Committee composed of administrative personnel only) proceeded in parallel with a GEP designed and implemented by the GenderTime team which instead focused more on academic and research levels and led to the creation of an Gender Equality Observatory to work on engendering statistics and providing gender equality indicators as a baseline for all gender equality policies at the Academic Level. Synergy among the two parallel actions resulted in having gender data analysis and collection as Objective n° 1 of the Plan, in collaboration with the Observatory itself.

In Milano, also due to the parallel effect of the Reform of Education and internal changes in the structure of the Gender Equality machineries, the STAGES project implementation and related GEP was the initiative of the University Centre on Gender Studies whose team decided on purpose to minimize collaboration with the official Committee and to work on a parallel track: the Committee was not considered as a suitable actor to establish collaboration with at that time. STAGES implementation finally led to a peculiar and quite effective way of mainstreaming results and achieving impact also at the levels of the internal Gender Equality machinery, as illustrated in Chapter 3.4.5 on Impact.

Although as already clarified, the main interest of this study is to spotlight on the process of implementing comprehensive and systematic gender equality policies via GEPs and not on investigating nature and effectiveness of specific actions/measures to enhance parity, our respondents have referred about multiple actions covering all the 4 main areas of interventions foreseen in the EQUAL-IST approach: Human Resources and Management; Teaching and Student Services; Research Design and Content and Institutional Communication.<sup>3</sup> An additional area of action has been mentioned by five of the interviewed RPOs (UNITO, UNIFE, UBI, Pantheon, UNIPD) and it is Gender Based Violence, including Sexual Harassment and Domestic Violence.

We found the bulk of provisions are concentrated in the HR and Management macro area and, within this area of potential intervention, Work life Balance is definitely the most addressed meso level, possibly under the influence of nation level policies which have tended, some times controversially, to incorporate gender equality issues into family -organizational welfare and wellbeing. From the interviews with RPOs which have focused their GEPs on initial audits of their organizations and on proposing inception measures (UTAD, Porto Polytechnic, Sumy University), it also emerged how work life balance seems more easily approachable at least as an initial step of GEP implementation.

Our small sample of interviewees confirms what is already reported by the ERA survey on GEPs which is showing the same type of prevalence in work life balance as a feature of GEPs across the whole EU, jointly with the trend of leaving measures to enhance gender balance in leadership behind (European Commission 2013). Structural changes to promote gender balance decision making appear as clearly more challenging to be addressed in STEM faculties in particular where lack of women in full professorship prevents female access to

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**3** A comprehensive map of actions from the GEPs of institutions taking part to the study can be found in D2.1.

leadership positions or as an alternative to the over – exploitation of the few ones in charge.

### 3.4 Addressing the Lack of Women in Leadership Positions Via Measures Included in Gender Equality Plans

Studies on academic leadership have identified three main categories of academic-research leadership, namely research centre leadership, university administrative leadership, and discipline leadership.

STEM centre leaders have formal coordinating positions at university labs and research centres or institutes. Administrative leaders include deans, department heads and chairs, provosts and other formal university administrative positions, while discipline leaders are defined as scientists with roles in professional science associations and regulatory organizations (Parker, Welch 2013).

The first two of definitions have been covered by our research on good practices in GEPs implementation while during the interviews some of the partners were also including in their answers about measures to foster female leadership actions they are taking to raise the share of female professorships as preliminary measures to enlarge the pool of potential candidates to top leadership positions: we will also refer to those in this chapter, as they at least partially cover the category of ‘discipline leaders’.

Studies have investigated how social networks, research productivity and reputation, grant production as well as gender are impacting as determinants of leadership attainment in academic and research environments within STEM and Engineering. They found that women are more likely to be in discipline leadership positions and less likely to be leaders of a research centre or to have an administrative university leadership position, roles which are more strongly associated with science productivity and collaboration networks but also, as in the case of administrative leadership, to grant submission and production. According to the same authors, the importance of social networks as leadership determinants and the inverse correlation between a gender balanced network composition and leadership attainment indicate the role that should be played by policy in this field:

Currently, leaders who have significant impact on faculty promotion and development need to pay particular attention to the potential for biased selection of leaders. Policy must also anticipate potential for inequitable distribution of leadership positions among men and women. Practices need to be devised at the department, university and national levels (e.g. federal granting agencies) such that women receive greater opportunity and encouragement to ob-

tain research-related leadership positions. It is no longer enough to provide grant funding opportunities for women as single investigators or primary investigators on projects. This research shows that greater attention needs to be placed on intentional creation of STEM centre leadership positions for women. (Parker, Welch 2013, 346)

Along these lines, we have intended to explore strategies and measures put in place by universities through GEPs to support female leadership and have found a variety of practices included into the Plans. We will consider those aimed at increasing the number of women leaders given the above mentioned definitions. In addition,

Policy measures to promote female leadership have been conceptualized into two main typologies as 'supply or demand side' actions. Supply side actions typically entail initiatives such as networking, mentoring, training basically addressing women and prepare or better qualify them as potential candidates.

As supply side strategies alone have demonstrated to be insufficient to increase the proportion of women in senior leadership (Pande, Ford 2011), complementary strategies have been also set, and are defined as "demand-side" which are clustered into three sub categories:

1. Reporting requirements imply measuring the gender gap in leadership positions, analysing its causes as well as eventually discussing envisaged counter-measures.
2. Targets set goals refer to expected shares/number of women or each gender in leadership positions, but with minimal or no enforcement mechanisms or sanctions in case of non compliance. They are also defined as *soft or voluntary quotas*.
3. Quotas are mandatory percentages of representation or numbers of women or each gender in leadership positions accompanied by monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for non-compliance.

Distinction between targets and quotas has been clarified as revolving around the existence or not of sanctions and enforcement procedures.

Challenging goals, particularly those that challenge conventions or norms, are more likely to be rejected or ignored without some accompanying consequences. Therefore, the level of enforcement of regulatory actions should impact the performance and outcome. Targets and quotas both include assignment of specific goals, but the two strategies differ in the consequences for failing to achieve the goals. Quotas are effectively targets with enforcement strategies or sanctions for failure to achieve the goals. Hypothesis 3 is that goals for representation of women in leadership that are

set with clear accountability and enforcement mechanisms (i.e., quotas) will be more effective in increasing female representation than goals without enforcing mechanisms. (Sojo et al. 2016, 521)

Reference has to be made to the fact that positive actions –positive discriminations such as quotas in particular tend to be received with critical remarks and often opposition arguing about the limits of identity politics as contradictory measures applying unfair methods to contrast inequalities, therefore exposed to the risk of violating meritocratic principles (Bacchi 2006).

Targets are usually presented as more viable and more easily accepted measures within Higher Education and research institutions, where meritocracy is strongly embedded into the organizational culture and objective and measurable evaluation of research and knowledge production stand as main variables in defining career progression criteria. Although gender studies have shed light on the dark sides of objective research excellence standards and explored the gendered constructions behind them and the ways they are operationalized in evaluation procedures (Van der Brink, Benschop 2012a; Van der Brink, Stobbe 2014), still quotas find substantial resistance in academic environments in particular.

A recent study on the subject has stressed again how one size fits all measures such as targets or quotas seem to face difficulties in acceptance and implementation in academia, while at least in the realm of hiring professors a new so called flexible ‘cascade model’ seems to prove to be successful, although it is still at its initial steps of implementation. In the cascade model quotas are based

on the percentage of women at the level immediately below for each type of position, are applied to all career levels, mandated by a government and with strong financial incentives and sanctions for non-compliance. The benefits of this model are that it is based on real numbers for each individual department or other unit, precluding the dangers of one-size-fits-all quotas that do not reflect the recruitment pool; and, the model requires the active participation of the unit in defining their quotas, thus ensuring that the values are attainable. Potential advantages to be gained from the incentives may also ensure the buy-in of academics. The caveats include unnecessarily complicated calculations, potentially leading to a skewing of the estimated target values, and the possibility of perpetuation of small numbers due to low numbers at the entry level. (Wallon, Bendiscioli, Garfinkel 2015, ii)

Overall in the last years, according to the European Research Area

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Survey, there has been a raise in the adoption of such softer measures:

since 2008, the number of countries applying some type of target or quota regulation (fixed quota (10), cascade model (11) or flexible quota (12) has increased from eight to 18 countries today [...]. Besides the use of quotas and targets, in a total of 19 countries, policies are in place to establish clear rules for the composition of selection panels, including roles and gender balance. (European Commission 2014)

Our respondents answers on the issue of leadership can be grouped into several types, mostly approaching the problem from the demand side (11 organizations), showing mainly adoption of soft quotas (4 cases applied to leadership positions; 3 cases applied to full professors recruitment) and other 3 different initiatives put in place and aiming at changing internal processes and procedures.

Only 4 institutions have applied supply side measures, and one of them clearly stated they were not adequate to meet the goal.

#### 3.4.1 Soft Quota/Targets Applied to Academic Boards and Council Composition

- The University of Ferrara has established a mandatory quota forcing to have a minimum of 1/3 for each sex among candidates to the positions of Administration Board's members and for the Rector, by a Resolution of the Academic Senate and the University Board; if the requirement is not met, the deadline is postponed for a second time and collection of candidates has to be continued. This provision didn't work for the Rector's election but it was successful for the Administration Board where for the very first time there was an equal share of candidates.
- The University of Iceland applies to its University Council a National Law from 2008 referred to all public bodies committees where 40% of each sex has to be ensured and, it was said, the target it is 'more or less' met.
- The University of Milan took the opportunity of a change of Statutes required by the Higher Education National Reform to include gender quotas (3 out of 8 members minimum for each sex) in the Board composition (elected by the Academic Council), which is now met.
- The University of Hasselt is applying a so called 'gender norm', after on 13 July 2012 the Flemish Parliament enacted a decree according to which Hasselt University (and the University of Antwerp) are bound to obligations aimed at ensuring a balanced representation of men and women in management bodies, councils and commissions, although with some acknowledged diffi-

culties in implementation tackled via further flexibility measures also presented in the interview.

### 3.4.2 Soft Quotas/Targets Applied to Professorship Recruitment

- University of Lausanne applies a target quota stating that women should represent 40% of all newly appointed positions between 2013 and 2016, jointly with other measures aimed at ensuring transparency in recruitment and overcome of gender bias (see interview). The target was only partially reached to 30% and then is kept as target goal in the 2017-20 GEP. The preference rule (in case a choice has to be made between two equally qualified candidates) is mentioned in intern regulations of UNIL but it's not legally binding to be applied to individual hiring process.
- At Radboud University target quota to ensure women candidates to be invited to interviews was adopted in one of the participating STEM Institutes as an outcome of the institute's leaders attending the STAGES Project Academic Leadership Course.
- At Dortmund Technical University the two combined levels (Federal and State level) have led first to applying a voluntary cascade quota to professorship levels as part of the DFG (German Research Foundation) Research Oriented Standards on Gender Equality and then, as the High Education Act of North Rhine-Westphalia was renewed in 2014, the issue of gender equality in leadership positions was pushed even further by setting up gender soft quotas for the professorship level.
- The University of Padova took a softer approach to the issues as the Senate issued a Recommendation to take gender inequalities into account in hiring choices and resource allocation, why the GEP (Positive Action Plan) is not including any measure as it is only referring to administrative staff where vertical segregation is not a strong issue.

Lulea University is opting for mainstreaming a gender perspective into recruitment processes and guidelines: raising the awareness of HR and Centres/Department leaders on the need and profitability of attracting women's talents were mentioned as an alternative measure to achieve the same goal in a context where quotas are not seen in a favourable way as they would lead to identifying women as weak subjects.

A specific and quite unique demand side provision has become part of the Sialuliai University GEP consisting of **lowering seniority requirements to be eligible as Council's members** from 10 to 5 years of experience in management and supervising, in the framework of the Council Elections Tactics and Strategy put in place with-

in the INTEGER EU project:

Also UAIC –Iasi University situated their actions on the demand side type of interventions, but choosing a particular scope (female leadership in research meant as increasing the number of women as research coordinators and applicants to research grants) and a specific strategy: **lobbying National Research Funding Institutions for changing external structural conditions by way of changing eligibility requirements and evaluation standards in research funding applications.**

Among our respondents we found also 3 examples of ‘supply side’ measures aimed at supporting and motivating women to candidate to leadership positions:

- At University of Beira Interior and ZRC, women academics have been offered **training sessions** to this purpose. In the Slovenian Research Organization, trainings are going to be targeting both men and women who plan to apply for promotion and to become appointed as members of Committees, while at Beira women considering to candidate to top leadership positions have been addressed as the only beneficiaries. Interestingly, Beira has experienced as training does not represent an effective strategy to overcome women’s resistances to apply for leadership positions.
- **Motivational and communication actions** have been at the core of the successful GEP for the electoral strategy at Siauliai University where mainly eligible women have been addressed to motivate them to get candidates and leadership bodies members have been consulted and approached by way of meetings and raising awareness/communication activities. Communication and role models promotion have also been extensively used by UAIC in Romania as well as by UBI in Portugal.

Finally, few of the interviewed RPOs stated leadership issues are not identified as a priority at their institution (UTAD) or not even perceived as an issue to be tackled (Porto School of Education, University of Torino). In the latter case, our respondent referred to how strongly male dominated power networks are resisting to change in a caustic and ironic way which might be worth reporting:

### 3.5 Including Measures Based Both on Gender Mainstreaming and Positive Actions

Feminist interventions to influence public policies have accumulated a long story from the second half of the XX Century until today and extensive literature in political studies has contributed to critically disclose and analyse its developments: the table below, elaborated

based on some of these studies, is summarizing main existing typologies and their guiding principles/policy goals (Rees 2005; Squires 2005; Booth, Bennet 2002).

**Table 5** Types of Gender Equality Policies according to their policy goals and principles

Type of Policies	Principles/goals	
	Equal opportunity- equal treatment	Equality-redistribution
	Positive Actions/Women Policies	Difference-recognition
	Gender Mainstreaming	Process and structures transformation

As far as EU gender equality policies are concerned, the predominant strategy has been initially based on equal opportunities and equal treatment. Positive actions have been introduced between the second half of the '80s and the '90s and more recently as equal treatment policies have progressively shown to bear the intrinsic limit of treating the symptoms of inequality and missing to tackle conditions and structural- material causes hindering full equal rights possession (Lombardo 2003).

Positive Actions policies have been grounded in the difference and recognition principles presuming that, precisely due to inequalities and differences, citizens cannot make use of equal rights to the same extent: adopting positive actions - positive discrimination and specific actions to support women, the purpose is to counterweight to given initial conditions in order to make equality between men and women possible in reality. This has been translated into the creation of Committees and Agencies on Women Politics and the establishment of positive actions have been set up and legislated (including quotas) often leading to harsh debates on the adequacy of such measures and their contradictory nature of promoting equality by mean of discrimination.

As in parallel the debate has been shifting from women as subjects/victims of inequalities to 'gender inequalities' meant as a structural problem pertaining to the relation between men and women and a new focus on 'gender' has been gained, gender mainstreaming has become the new predominant policy orientation , after the Beijing UN Conference on the Advancement of Women launched it globally in 1995. The idea behind gender mainstreaming is opening up the boundaries of separated gender/women policy structures and embedding a gender view in a cross cutting and transversal way, addressing and structurally changing all public policy areas. The Council

of Europe has provided a comprehensive definition of gender mainstreaming highlighting its radical orientation in terms of promoting structural changes:

Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by the actors involved in policy-making. (Council of Europe 1998)

Several risks and limitations have been highlighted also for gender mainstreaming policies, such as that the broadened scope would risk to make policies more superficial and less specific (Hoskyns 1999). The risk of dismantling existing infrastructures, machineries and programmes has been also foreseen, and a dilution of gender expertise as gender issues would become “everyone’s responsibility but none’s job”, have also been highlighted (Lombardo 2003).

Partial implementation has been attributed to difficult legislative and political or financial conditions, difficulties to establish synergies, necessary for an horizontal policy approach such as Gender equality in a mainstreaming perspective, and also resistance towards its goals (Mósesdóttir, Erlingsdóttir 2005; Lombardo, Meier 2006; Pollack, Hafner-Burton 2002; Stratigaki 2005).

Within a process of increasing institutionalization of gender policies, technical reductionism, bureaucratization, managerialism have also been spotlighted as detrimental drifts of gender mainstreaming as it tends to focus on processes and tools and gender expertise losing grasp of needs and active participation of women and grassroots (Squires 2005; Benschop, Verloo 2011).

As gender Mainstreaming’s limitations have been extensively debated, the prevailing orientation is at present the so called **“double track” approach combining equal treatment and gender mainstreaming, integrated with actions targeting women only as well as targets and soft quota.**

Looking at the type of actions included in the Gender Equality Plans of our responding organizations, the dual - triple track orientation is clearly the most commonly adopted approach where equal opportunity interventions targeting the ‘disadvantaged sex’ (or both sexes in their parenting - care givers roles as far as work life balance is concerned), are complemented by gender mainstreaming measures and by different types of actions aimed at supporting women in particular to compensate existing disadvantages.

8 respondents (Universities of Milano, Beira Interior, Padova, Radboud, Lausanne, UAIC, Ferrara, Technical University of Dortmund) have explicitly stated that they have opted for a mixed and comprehensive approach combining the three types of approaches to gen-

der equality, although if we give a closer look at the measures which have been actually mentioned as implemented, we see how many more have pursued it in practice, and indeed the totality of our interviewees use both discursive frames based on equality of treatment and gender mainstreaming.<sup>4</sup>

The above mentioned debates on limits and critical aspects of the different approaches have been reflected also in the accounts of our interviewees, as for example the Technical University of Dortmund puts in place a series of different actions, several of them targeting women only, but made use of a main argumentation based on gender equality as a goal and gender mainstreaming whereas it has been acknowledged how the focus on women only, until recently kept in the official state policies and regulations on the matter, was not fully understood and accepted.

It looks like positive actions can get increased legitimacy if they are argued for and presented as specific measures and as part of a more comprehensive and broad policy framework which has gender equality as one of its goal.

Sometimes it is a matter of official policy labels being overcome or re-framed in practice, like it is the case of the Italian “Positive Action Plans” required by Law and which definitely go beyond a positive actions approach, encompassing mainstreaming and equal opportunity measures.

What was reported to be seen as really problematic in several contexts is actually the use of quotas:<sup>5</sup> 6 RPOs (UTAD, Porto Polytechnic, University of Iceland, Siauliai University, Lulea University, ZRC) have stressed how these would be a problematic issue in their institution and would be contested or not popular for several different reasons such as their being perceived as discriminatory or as policy measures which are part of the past and not relevant any longer.

As we have seen above, 7 institutions among our interviewees have set up targets or soft quotas to foster gender equality in academic leadership, and among them only 2 have chosen to formulate them as women’s quotas, while for the others the measure applies to the under represented sex.

At Hasselt University, in spite it was not a popular measure, the Flemish government issuing a decree on gender quota made it a necessity to call faculties and central services to become accountable about the gender neutral composition of boards and committees, it

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**4** Although a more fine grained textual analysis which was out of the scope of this study would be needed to create a nuanced map of discursive frameworks at play.

**5** As the formulation used in the guiding questions was referring to women’s quota, it is likely that the comments were referring to this type in particular.

worked as a raising awareness process so that gender balance started to be seen as an evident need.

### 3.6 Balancing Bottom Up/Top Down Approaches

There was clearly a common trait among all interviewed RPOs stating the importance of having support from top management at administrative and academic levels. The top down side of structural change processes is actually strongly highlighted as one of the main features in most of the EU funded reports and policy documents on this issue (European Commission 2012a, 2013).

Our respondents have referred to several types of reasons to argue for the importance of having top internal decision makers on board:

- Credibility and legitimacy of the entire policy
- Institutional support and facilitating/ensuring overall implementation and transition from a policy “on paper” to real operations and action
- Support to mainstream gender across several strategic policy areas and documents of the institution
- Facilitating the engagement of other levels of the organization by allowing employees to take part to GEPs related activities as part of their job’s duties.

Involvement has meant direct engagement into project teams or consulting top decision makers by inviting them as members of Advisory Boards or reporting on particular occasions. It can also be pursued, as in the case of Hasselt University, when the whole establishment of GEPs has been an outcome of joint initiative of Rectors, like in the case of Hasselt and Lausanne University (as well as for Radboud, even if for the voluntary set up of target quotas for women professors only).

For Lulea University, a top down approach and having top decision makers as members of the Genovate –GEAP Advisory board has meant also opening the advisory board to other external leaders of organizations from the regional –national ecosystem where LTU is active and, particularly relevant for the ICT research center where the Genovate Gender Action Plan was implemented, engaging ICT companies CEOs: the main trigger to embed a gender perspective into the design of mobile applications came directly from their request to have more customized and more marketable ICT products.

The bottom up –participatory approach to structural change for gender equality policies was definitely subject to a greater variety of different interpretations. First of all it is worth saying that none of the RPOs we interviewed has structured a participatory process to designing their GEP in a similar way to what the EQUAL-IST consortium has foreseen. Participation is intended to better grasping re-

al needs, to make sure that the policy is backed by a lively debate in the institution, and to activate the right internal stakeholders on the right issues. Bottom up approach often means starting from/involving Faculties (vs the central level of the Administration): this peculiarity was stressed from RPOs where there is also a GEP in place at central level and where therefore coming to a more specific and Faculty-tailored GEPs is framed as a form of participation (Lulea, Dortmund, Lausanne).

More than one interviewee has referred to students as their main target when ensuring participation to structural change processes, also given their potential role as multipliers also towards their teachers.

Reaching out to the whole academic community through audit procedures is also seen as an added value and a form of participation.

Collaborating with associations, city councils, different stakeholders from the territory is yet another way of interpreting an open and participatory approach to gender equality.

Finally, one of the RPOs very explicitly stated that in their case participation was not an important element and this might be explained by the specific focus of action in that particular case, being Rector's and Council's electoral strategies the core goal of the SIAULIAI University.

More substantial criticism was raised towards structured forms of participation from the University of Beira Interior, as potential judgement from managers would prevent employees to express themselves freely within participatory processes.

### 3.7 Intersectionality in Gender Equality Plans

Intersectionality is defined as the interlocking, complex system of inequalities and differences in which individuals are embedded and through which identities, lived experiences, political alliances and relations and cultural representations are shaped and built, discursively and materially (Crenshaw 1991; Verloo 2006; Siim, Skieje 2008). The most common definition is broad and includes heterogeneous sites or differentiation axis, such as gender, race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, disability and religion. It has been argued and demonstrated how gender equality policies which do not take the intersectional dimension into account strongly risk not to acknowledge differences among women and to over-generalize perspectives and solutions which mainly fit white-heterosexual middle class women's needs and that intersectionality adds on reflexivity to gender equality. It is anyway a matter of fact that intersectional gender equality policies are still rare in Europe and when intersectionality is taken into account, this is happening more at the level of diagnosis of issues and problems than prognosis and proposed-im-

plemented measures. This discrepancy and gap between theory and practice has been found to be related mainly to competing interesting and power relations among different group as well as scarce resources (Lombardo, Verloo 2009). As the EQUAL-IST consortium has identified intersectionality among one of the main features of its methodological approach, it was also included as one of the criteria for identifying good practices in structural change, although with the awareness of how as mentioned, in reality this is still a largely unexplored and poorly implemented aspect. All the interviews but 2 (University of Milano and Hasselt) have explicitly addressed this topic.

The picture which is drawn from our study is quite diversified and still more than half of the interviewees, namely 8 of them, have referred to intersectionality as an important element of their GEPs.

Among them, we have 5 cases where an intersectional approach is both put in place although in very different ways and identified as an added value (Dortmund, Ferrara, Beira, Iceland, Pantheon) and 3 of them where some difficulties in implementation have been met, somehow reflecting the above mentioned gap between theory and practice in this field (Radboud, ZRC, Porto).

The University of Iceland has an Equality and not a Gender Equality Action Plan in place, and this is reported as a gain in legitimacy of gender equality policies as such as they were seen as too narrow in scope.

An intersectional approach is accepted and embedded. We have diversity policies in place, the GEP refers to equality in a very broad sense; we have an active students' movement here at the University, as well as several queer and feminist associations, they cooperate a lot and we could say there is pressure from the grassroots and associations are very cooperative. We have several research institutes working on gender and diversity issues. When the Policy (Plan) was dealing with gender only, it was criticized for being limited, now that an intersectional approach is adopted, it is more legitimate. (University of Iceland)

At the University of Beira, raising awareness actions on 'sexual minorities' and students with migrants and refugees background are carried out:

We continue to do a lot of raising awareness as this is always useful and there are changes in the student's population as well and not all people are motivated. We focused also on discrimination against sexual minorities as we realized thanks to our Observatory at the Commission, that this is happening in a quite conservative environment. There are more and more students from abroad (refugees, migrants) and the reaction of local student population

is not always open. We cooperate with other entities and NGOs on these issues as well. (University of Beira Interior)

The GEP or Positive Actions Plan of the University of Ferrara includes actions at the teaching level such as a cross departmental course on pluralism and intersected differences, but also initiatives on supporting students and staff with disabilities, up to the recent decision of setting up a dedicate Positive Action Plan on Disabilities. Both in Ferrara and in Torino, a specific measure to ensure transsexual students rights has been put in place:

UNIFE has adopted the so-called “Alias career” for male and female students who are in situations of gender transition. Following the advice of the University of Torino, pioneer in this field, the University bodies approved a resolution to definite the necessary informative procedure for the allocation of an alias career, and the confidentiality agreement to be signed between the interested person and the University. Here the resistance came from some student associations who were opposing to this for ideological reasons. In order to overcome this opposition, the opinion of the Ethical Commission was demanded, opinion which was in favour. (University of Ferrara)

The University of Dortmund has reported an institutional arrangement where the GEP and the Work of the Gender Equality Officer is not featuring an intersectional approach whereas the issue is under the responsibility of a Department on Equal Chances and a Pro-rector on Diversity Management: it is argued that keeping a thematic separation and at the same time ensuring cooperation between the two levels is proving to be fruitful.

The GEPs do not take an intersectional approach, but the overall philosophy of Gender Equality is intersectional. Issues concerning intersectionality rather fall into the thematic area of the administrative Department for Equal Chances, Family and Diversity as well as the Pro-Rectorate Diversity Management. In any case, we believe that linking diversity issues and gender equality gives more severity to fighting discrimination as a whole. There is an ongoing debate on whether Diversity Management shall also be the job of the Gender Equality Officer and at many universities in Germany this is actually the case; here at DTU we have this thematic separation and it works very well, but the cooperation between the two policy levels is happening thanks to the persons in charge and their good communication that finally makes the difference as far as collaborative attitudes are concerned. (Technical University Dortmund)

In some cases, like for ZRC, the intention of using an intersectional approach and taking it into consideration from a research perspective had to face some obstacles and resistances in practices, at HR and academic levels, due to different reasons and circumstances:

It was a crucial issue for us as we wanted to avoid heteronormativity; the toolkit on gender in research and teaching included this approach and we took intersectionality into account also when collecting data. In research this was easier, less in practice: where it was much more difficult. The HR Dept. didn't allow to ask candidates about what was considered to be sensitive data and this is actually masking a lot of discriminations. Another dimension was ethnicity and in our team we have migrant academics and it was an issue to us as we are imbued in a quite nationalist academic discourse here in our country. People even commented the website should be in our national language, there's a discussion on if English shall be included in university courses. It was difficult in this context to really pursue an intersectional approach but it was clear that threats came from several dimensions, not gender only. (ZRC)

At Radboud University also there's an overall acknowledgement of the issue as well as a comprehensive diversity policy, still implementation is limited:

Diversity Policies at Radboud is including Gender Equality and Migration Background; having a diverse work force is the goal of the university is to become more international, to have more people with international background on board. Age or sexual orientation is not really on focus although on paper these are mentioned as important. In practice we didn't applied an intersectional approach to the extent we would have liked to do, but for example after one year we set up the Women Network for Early Stages Researchers we took a series of steps to involve more women with a migration background and now the board of the network is made half of Dutch women and half with migration background but it took some time and it was a learning curve. (Radboud University)

In 3 cases (Lulea, Padova, Torino) reference was made to attempts which have been pursued but not entirely followed up, and in the case of UTAD to a 'new issue still to be taken into consideration', and with a less pronounced positive view expressed about an intersectional approach to Gender Equality Plans.

In Lulea for example gender sensitive recruitment methods have been proposed as examples to address also age and ethnicity:

We tried to look not only to gender but also to age and ethnicity. Our strategy was that we proposed HR department to use our gender sensitive methods applying it to age and ethnicity when they were trying to attract younger people or people from minorities. We understood that we wouldn't be able to address all the intersectional differences. Still gender was our main focus. (Lulea University)

Finally, for the Universities of Siauliai, Sumy, UAIC and Lausanne, the issue was considered as not relevant, either with reference to their own context or in general, in one case using merit as an argument, in a similar way as it is used to resist to gender equality equality policies and actions.

We had a few cases and reported to the Ombud person but we found it was confusing to mix the issues. (Siauliai University)

It was not relevant to us, we took age into consideration only... probably age is the only dimension which is relevant and we addressed it through the young women researcher network as well as establishing awards for young researchers. Otherwise no, we didn't have any type of measures, because all and all the University is a meritocratic environment... if you come from a poor family this doesn't really matter. (UAIC - Iasi University)

The argument used by the University of Lausanne was probably the strongest one, identifying a political pressure to espouse diversity-intersectionality as a selling point to meet new excellence criteria for Universities in the context of internationalization policies, although not really linked to real needs of the academic community:

We don't face this issue as we are not a Diversity office. There is a political pressure to do so, and indeed we have already persons in charge of dealing with disabled persons, we have a campus which is equipped for doing so, but there is not a diversity strategy. The board of the Rectors' Network was institutionalizing and establishing a Diversity Delegation, changing name but without contents behind. The selling argument was prevailing and Rectors discovered that in the highly competitive framework of the Shanghai Rankings diversity is a selling point. UNIL is a very much internationalized environment with half of the professors and almost 30% of students not being Swiss, so politically speaking diversity is not an issue, there are not groups asking for the rights of under-represented groups whatever. But it has become an issue when people has understood diversity is a criteria for excellence; what is happening now is that Diversity Delegation is taking over exactly

what the equality and Gender was doing. The name has changed but we'll probably go on doing what we have done in the last 15 years. (University of Lausanne)

### 3.8 Perceived GEPs' Impact

Among the RPOs participating in our study we could group three main patterns in terms of impact perception, where for sure we can imagine that our respondents' statements to this question were influenced by many contextual factors that we cannot fully grasp within the limitations this study, and possibly subjective judgements to some extent too.

#### 3.8.1 Successful Positive Impact and Structural Change Achieved

4 Universities presenting their impact level as a success in terms of achieving structural change, while all other Universities provided a more nuanced picture and described a partially achieved change, or a work in progress.

Significantly, self perceived success applies to Dortmund Technical University and University of Ferrara which have both National binding regulations making GEPs compulsory measures but still present dramatically different frameworks: the German policy framework being more articulated (a state law + federal standards from the German Research Foundation) and resourceful (funds made available to support projects of Gender Officers and 2 different Offices set up), therefore it is not possible to refer a positive perception of impact to national binding policies on Gender Equality per se. Furthermore, this was not the case for the other interviewed University (Lausanne) backed by a strong national policy framework to boost structural change who attributed full success just to few ones among their faculties, and identified many external context related factors.

At Ferrara impact is seen as an outcome of the **good cooperation and synergy established among the different positions and bodies of the Institutional gender machinery** and it is defined not only as successful implementation of the GEP (or Positive Actions Plans) but rather in terms of mainstreaming and changes introduced into policy and strategy documents (integration of Gender related Priorities into the University Strategic Plan, changes in the Statutes) and procedures (Senate Resolution imposing to present a gender balanced list of candidates to Senate and Board elections).

At TU Dortmund the reported impression was definitely to have triggered structural changes thanks to enforced measures from external authorities and the availability of resources jointly with a pos-

itive role played by the Equality Officer in streamlining and simplifying procedures and processes. The definition of change which is emerging is a broad one: from improved numbers (vertical and horizontal segregation), to a new appointed position of Pro-Rector for Diversity Management and a dedicated Department in charge of Equality and Diversity, a panel group on Gender Studies but also some changed procedural documents such as recruitment guidelines with sections on gender bias and less measurable shifts such as those related to language use.

At UAIC the impact was described in terms of successful internal actions put in place at the University Level, increased numbers of women in top positions, but also an approved sustainability plan after the EU funded Stages project conclusion and (in other sections of the interview) and the change which triggered on National Policies and Procedures on Research.

When explaining the roots/causes of this success in terms of the adopted strategy, reference is made to **exploiting a rhetoric of modernization as internationalization of universities** and at the same time, **adopting a non oppositional discursive strategy**.

Also our respondent from Lulea University has defined their GEP as a successful one, referring to a +5% increase of women professors in 5 years, and +10% women researchers at the Computer Science Electrical and Space Engineering Department in 3 years, a toolkit and individual coaching to researchers to integrate gender into their research projects as well as changed recruitment procedures and their contribution to having a gender module integrated in the training course for Research Managers and Administrators - EARMA.

### 3.8.2 Distinguishing Successful GEP Implementation from Institutional Change as a Gradual Process

The majority of respondents built their answers on impact and the GEPs as transformative measures to achieve effective structural change using more cautious and less positive arguments where they distinguished the positive and successful implementation of Gender Equality Plans from the achievement of structural change or pursue of gender equality more broadly. The conveyed message was therefore stressing limits, constraints and results still to be achieved, in some cases resonating also in the 'Resistances and Challenges' section of the Interview.

The case of Milano is interesting: most of the strategy of the Gender Studies Centre through a series of EU funded projects on structural change in research has aimed at adding gender equality as a new specific competence of the already existing Welfare Office and linking the Centre's identity to the sustainability plan of the STAGES project. The main limit to impact seems to be found in temporary

research positions of the core researchers in charge of implementing the policy, and to lack of resources, whereas the strategy was successful as it allowed to ensure that the two main skilled gender researchers could continue their work, and one of them becoming director of the Welfare and Equal Opportunities Office. In the answer about to what extent the achieved change could be considered as structural, individual commitment and roles are identified as key factors playing in the process:

Even if the project and its GEP were successful, equality is not achieved at all, as these are tremendously slow and complex change processes. It is really difficult to assess to what point we have achieved structural change, there's still so much to do [...]. It's a pity that there are first EU funded projects and then inevitably you experience a decreased scale of the actions. We are trying to keep the interest high but resources will not be available any longer to the same extent and this will make a difference. [...] In my experience equal opportunities policies are so much linked to individual personalities and commitment. For this reason we set among the Centre's objectives the sustainability of STAGES' results. And this was crucial as when now the Centre activities will be assessed and decisions will have to be made for the future this will be one of the main issues. And the strategy was also set this direction because all of the Centre's staff was working on temporary research fellowship contracts. (University of Milano)

As already mentioned, Siauliai University focused its Gender Equality Plan on Electoral Tactics and Strategies identified as a good practice by the EIGE, and the action is definitely presented as successful, based on results as the increased number of women into the University Board from zero to almost 40%, the revision of regulations for SU Council composition, and the success of other actions such as research grants to support parents, the training courses and other communication activities as well. In spite of this, our interviewee has stressed how **in order to define the achieved change as structural, more time would be needed:**

I would define our impact level as average (mediate), as these changes take time, minimum 10 years to show substantial results. But we started disseminating also at other Universities (Lithuania and EU countries), in local Šiauliai Municipality and exploring new areas in gender research such as urban planning and gender equality promotion on city level. (Siauliai University)

Padova University marks several mainstreaming results (Gender Budget included as strategic objective for the year 2017, a new role

established as pro-rector for Equal Opportunities, an Observatory on Equal Opportunities): still it was stressed how **a long way to go to achieve a change would entail deep cultural change.**

We managed to carry out everything we planned and to be successful, all seminars were organized, the help line in place and running. Anyway, in terms of transformativity, we can say **we started sowing some small seeds.** There is still a strong need for Positive Actions Plans to address what I consider to be a cultural issue. You have to think there are many of the women we dialogue with who refuse to sign using the feminine declination for their job position. This shows where we stand. It's part of a culturally entrenched system of prejudices where gender, age, disability are intertwined. (University of Padova)

At Lausanne University a complex Gender Equality Machinery is described and GEP established at the central level as well as Faculty level, all foreseen actions implemented, female professorships increased, but still partiality of results is highlighted, change described as non linear and at risk of backlashes, subject to external hindering structural factors (lack of welfare services, precarious research jobs, violence against women) but also, internally, change of people in key roles.

The project Vision 50/50 had a transformative and sustainable impact in 2 faculties, Earth Sciences and Life Sciences, with Action Plans, concrete measures, influent people behind the plans, and - in Earth Sciences - the nomination of 2 new women professors following their newly developed and very innovative recruitment guidelines procedures. Good support of the Rectorate and also from some Deans of Faculties; success depend on the people, and if they change.... You can have a Leninist type analysis here like '1 step forward and 2 steps backwards.' We are just experiencing it now when we try to promote gender sensitive language as the French are very resistant to this almost philosophical issue where the masculine is the norm, this is just a small example.

Important restrictions are coming from national policies, from a lack of care welfare system and cultural factors, especially in the German part of the country, where the mentality is to have the mother at home. We cannot establish all alone enough child care offers here at the university when there is a lack in general, overall the country and at local level. After the first action plan we made analysis and monitoring, both qualitative and quantitative and overall we can see there is quite a positive impact, 25 measures and actions implemented out of 26. But the change is not really measureable, and change is not linear, we are going back and

forth even when progressing. Sexual harassment will be an issue more and more, sorry to say but also due to an increasingly internationalized campus environment. It might be we'll have discussions on burkas on the campus one day. Violence is still being an issue on campus level. It's not only about more women into professorship, it is a broader issue about relation between men and women in the society. Inequality is exacerbated by more precarious working conditions at Universities, project based and temporary positions which mostly affect women, and this requires actions at the level of how you structure academic careers and promotion plans. (Lausanne University)

At Iceland University the slow pace of change is also emphasized, although assessed in a longer term perspective ("last 10- 20 years) and **achievements set more at the discursive than the structural level**, with main obstacles identified as the new scientific excellence mainstream concepts pulling to an opposite direction than gender equality, and **the attractiveness of internalization rhetoric's** seen as a trigger by others, it is here judged **as an obstacle to gender equality**:

Impact goes very very slowly and there is informal and formal resistance, mostly informal. So now we can say that in 10- 20 years we have been making progress, but still I would say it more about awareness raising and discursive acceptance than structural change.

The main contrasting factor is that since 2005 there is a strong emphasis on internationalization, the dream of becoming Harvard, and on performance based measurements. Research funding's have become based on publications on high impact journals. And all these trends are pushing us towards an opposite direction than gender equality and what our Equality Policy would aim at. So we are in the middle of two opposite directions. In our project and GARCIA in particular, we worked to de-construct the concept of scientific excellence because it is very much gendered: pressure towards excellence it about increased competition, tougher working conditions, publish or perish ideology, therefore it is worsening gender inequalities, but marginalized groups in general based on race, gender, disability and precarious research staff are becoming more vulnerable and have less opportunities to make it under tougher circumstances. And we see this as one of the reasons why gender structural change is not taking place to the extent we were expecting. (University of Iceland)

Also at Radboud considerable impact meant as **having a GEP in place** (funded and with human resources) **and soft quota as well**, is deemed ***as something different from structural change and***

***depending on political agenda of leaders.*** The enduring hindering factor is ***organizational cultures in research*** which prevent people to make use of the measures that have been already set, such as work life balance.

“I have to be nuanced about our having achieved structural change: at the raising awareness level by now, but the Deputy Rector is very much in favour of changing the organizational culture and becoming a family friendly university. This has become her agenda point. We already have facilities, we have paid parental leaves, opportunity to go on part time schemes or work flexible hours but this is all about organizational academic cultures and researchers’ fear that devoting time to family and using these arrangements will hinder their careers or that they cannot afford to take that time, but this is a great hindrance”. (Radboud University)

Three RPOs were found to be less than cautious or moderate and more prone to be either negative or to suspend their judgement on the GEP’s impact in view of future development to be assessed.

At ZRC in Slovenia, participation to the GARCIA project has led to make recruitment procedure more transparent and the project some impact in raising the internal awareness and allowing the design of a GEP which still be approved:

“Best impact we achieved when working on selection procedures, where we manage to make concrete implementation jointly with research: we made sure that Recruitment Committees had minutes and that full list and short lists of candidates were made available, gender of candidates was not known which was not a normal procedure until now [...]. The rest is to be settled and verified: we are going to establish a Gender Equality Internal Group to take the ownership of the Gender Equality Plan, which is currently a draft.

At Torino University, the final conclusive remarks on impact tend to define internal Gender Equality measures and the GEP as a policy which is not implemented, based on individual efforts only under difficult and unfavourable circumstances.

“I have to say behind the GEP there’s my individual work... it would be a transformative policy but I don’t see it is really implemented. I spent so many hours on organizational well being surveys that I almost lost hope.

We have really hard times into putting gender equality up on the policy agenda. The issue is touching on young women with temporary research positions in particular and they are not represented by trade unions, so there’s a bottleneck here. Trade unions are

the leaders in well being policies and they don't have very much advanced policies in my view. So we keep going working on the right to part-time and flexible working hours for permanently employed women, but then we have enormous amounts of non permanent contracts with zero protection and rights. It's very difficult... we have PhD candidates in Medicine who wait as much as possible to communicate they are pregnant or to decide to become mothers. There is no reflection made on these issues. This would really be an issue to work with together with top directors and for a long term strategy but I don't see this a realistic possibility.

At BEIRA the GEP (implemented at the School of Education level only and with main focus on work life balance) was said to have achieved superficial results, as the increase in the number of women in leadership cannot be attributed to the GEP only but was also an effect of retirement and generational changes, and outcomes in work life balance came as this is the easiest topic to be addressed.

If you ask about transformative change, my answer would be that we achieved superficial results until now, so we are still far from what we would need to be. Work life balance was the easiest topic to get for women and people in general, so much connected to personal distress that many experience. We improved work life balance, like flexible schedule is getting more usual and the number of men asking for it has increased, as well as men asking for parental leaves and care related leaves, but still there's a long way to go and gender inequalities are embedded in the culture in a way. This issue is so much easier for people to understand, more than access to leadership positions: in this area women tend to attribute their not trying to access top position to either their own fault of not managing to balance career and private life or their own choice of prioritizing family. We had impact in terms of women representation among head of faculties and departments, currently women count for 30% of them while as head of faculty we still have one woman out of 5. There's also a generational effect, due to retirement of the older male top academics, we like to think that is also due to the project impact. Students welcoming rituals for newly enrolled students are an example: they are highly gender biased and discriminatory. We made research on these phenomena as they imply harassment, they cause problems at the community level but it is accepted and recognized as a tradition. (University of Beira Interior)

The remaining Universities such as Polytechnic do Porto, UTAD, Sumy and Pantheon described their actions as initial or preliminary stages of structural change processes therefore could refer to

impact only to a minor extent (initial outcomes like gender sensitive language use or specific child care actions or referring to initiatives successfully carried out in the past on which they could rely for future steps) or didn't even mentioned it.

### 3.9 Sustainability of Gender Equality Plans

In our question the issue of GEP's sustainability was connected to 3 main indicators:

- Having completed a full implementation cycle
- Being supported by institutional owners in permanent positions
- Being integrated into internal Policies and Regulations

11 of our good practices had GEPs in Place which has already completed their first cycle of implementation, most typically lasting three years.

Most optimistic and positive views on sustainability were offered by RPOs where the GEP is framed into national - federal level regulations which make it compulsory for Universities to establish such policies and national resources are invested in specific programs to make Higher Education more Gender Equal.

As one of the most solid GEPs experiences among our interviewees, Lausanne University, where the Federal State allocates the equivalent of 200.000 € per year to each University implementing its Plan, still considered its achievements under fragile conditions and in continuous need of an institutional owner, i.e. an Office for Equality as, without this in place, all provisions could quickly evaporate:

If you ask about sustainability in time, I can say that if the Equality Office should be dismantled, the results we achieved might be dissolved in 12 months because if you don't have someone who is sensitive and vigilant and ringing alarm bells all kind of not gender sensitive practices could be put in place, also from the side of women professors, we know that for sure.

Unless there is continued investment of time and money on these issues there is no guarantee that things might be undone. (University of Lausanne)

Establishment of an Office - Unit which is in charge of Gender Equality within the administration to complement the work of Equality Officers and Commissions definitely seems as a key element to facilitate sustainability or at least a path that several RPOs among our respondents have been pursuing: Milano, Lausanne, Dortmund, Ferrara as main examples.

Still, not all RPOs operating by making GEP mandatory had the same type of experience as it is a matter of fact that obligation to set

up an Gender Equality Plan can be met also in a purely formalistic way and take the shape of a 'lip service' policy: both our Nordic interviewees from Iceland and Sweden witnessed how before implementing a EU funded project GEP their institutions had their own institutional GEPs in place at the university levels but they were not implemented or implementation was fragmented (IS). Also the Italian RPOs with a national law in the background requiring all Public Administration bodies to set up a Committee against discriminations and approve a GEP have shown different sustainability models but 3 of the four interviewed universities (Milano, Padova and Torino) were pointing at several limitations of their GEPs in terms of sustainability and resources, lack of monitoring, management support and integration into internal policies.

Overall, 12 RPOs reported either insufficient and/or shrinking resources as one of the main challenges they have to face to proceed with implementation, iteration of GEPs or both. Only 5 of our respondents manifested the perception of having enough funding and HR at disposal was predominant (Dortmund Technical University, Lausanne University, Ferrara University, Radboud University), while neither for Sumy University or Pantheon this was a relevant issue as they find themselves at very preliminary stages of the process.

A peculiar position is the one of all RPOs which have been partners in EU funded projects which are now concluded: they are experiencing a reduced scale of action for their GEPs and still define them as sustainable if economic and human resources are allocated to continue and institutional support from key stakeholders is ensured.

The issue of **integration into internal policies and regulations includes many different aspects and several respondents have referred it to particular documents or policies where gender has been mainstreamed as a parallel effect of having a GEP in place**: recruitment guidelines and procedures, official University Strategy Document, work life balance provisions are some examples.

If for many of our respondents establishing active collaboration networks with local, regional and national level stakeholders have proved to be important for strengthening their internal strategies at different stages of implementation (Lulea, Beira Interior, Radboud, Hasselt, Milano, Ferrara, Siauliai, Sumy University, Lausanne among the others), some of our respondents as it was the case of UAIC, put particular efforts in lobbying towards National RFOs to influence change in eligibility mechanism for accessing research funds by taking gender into consideration.

### 3.10 Challenges and Resistances

When it comes to challenges met into promoting structural change through Gender Equality Plans, we could detect both challenges connected to external and internal factors.

Several respondents referred to hurdles being part of the socio-political-economic context where their Institutions are operating and therefore potentially or effectively harming their action. Some examples are more or less directly referred to the **economic crisis impact**, which could have consequences in reduced incoming resources, both from public and private sources and could make gender policies be perceived as a luxury. Other external factors mentioned in different sections of the interviews and when referring to impact in particular **lack of welfare support to families**, and **gender biased new definitions and performance indicators of excellence in research in connection with international ranking systems**: these were found to be penalizing women and youngest precarious researchers in particular.

Also internal **power related issues** were mentioned, linked to the low status as temporary research fellows of the main spokespersons and implementers for the GEP policy, when almost entirely funded through EU projects and highly exposed to the impact of academic politics and changes and turn over among (the few supportive) decision makers.

Another interviewee has referred to the structural contradiction of enforcing gender equality in leadership positions through internal regulations in contexts (like it is the case for STEM and ICT in particular) where there are few women employed at the Grade A professorship levels and procedures to justify exceptions have to be put in place to adapt to particularly segregated academic environments.

#### **STEM professional identities and cultures were found to be strongly gender biased and lacking awareness**

The cultural trait which was pinpointed can be summarized as lack of sensitivity to social issues and found to be particularly relevant for ICT - IST research institutions. Lack of awareness has been reported jointly to the perception of gender inequalities as potentially disturbing questions upon which staff members would feel unease to disclose information in gender audit processes, or would deny the problem.

**Lack of time and/or resources** was also quite a recurring issue in several interviews, also recalled into the impact and/or sustainability related part of the dialogue to justify limitations to expected or desired impacts of policies and GEPs (not reported here). The argument was built according to two different frames: either lack of time by invited stakeholders from the management or teaching side, asked to join the process and finding it difficult to schedule and prioritize this agenda, or as lack of time (and resources) by the Gender Equal-

ity Machinery and/or other implementing stakeholders not getting enough resources to address very complicated issues and processes.

A few respondents pointed at the **lack of engaged men** and the typical situation where mostly women are engaged into gender equality policies and project, leading to isolation of gender equality policies in academia.

**Several strategies were suggested to address challenges**, among others the added value of steering the process with a careful and balanced involvement of the right stakeholders at the right moment and the necessary support of top level professors with high internal reputation.

What is needed is to know the organization well and **to orchestrate the process by activating the right persons on the right issues**, so to **activate stakeholders without extenuating them**. If you involve everybody on all issues than you will miss them all, you disperse energies.

Overall, in these processes **is very important to be an insider and know the organization very well but also have a position**, possibly having a full professor as driver, with also membership in National level Boards, for this I could be listened by the top decision makers at the University, which cannot really happen if you have lower positions, while I see that in several projects there are post-docs or people who are not even employed or just for the project duration.

**A tension between researching & implementing structural change was revealed, pointing at the challenges of building internal gender expertise in research institutions.** There's certainly a need for gender expertise to sustain gender equality change processes, in fact it is not by chance that several of the responding RPOs had and still have Gender Studies Centre or Research Units as main institutional owners of their GEPs. Still, there are a few implications of having gender scholars as main implementers of gender equality policies at RPOs that needs to be taken into account.

On one side, within scarcely funded policies, having scholars involved who can have gender structural change as part of their research subjects allows to leverage additional and non (entirely) funded extra work as potential publications can motivate efforts spent on the subject by researchers who can benefit from them in their career.

It will really depend a lot on the individual people involved in the process: there's a need to recognize the work which is done on gender equality and recognize it as real work beyond voluntary pro bono commitment. This recognition has to come from the Management and this would mean for us Institutionalize the Commis-

sion. For us it is in a way easier as sociologists and psychologists as these topics involve directly our scientific research as well and we publish on these topics, and we manage to involve several students contributing, so to be honest I wouldn't say it is entirely voluntary work, it is complicated involvement although all the organizational work is not.

On the other side, researchers with specific gender expertise who undertake this type of projects/activities most likely happen to have hard sciences departments where gender inequalities are more severe as implementation sites, even if their career progression as researchers depends on social/political sciences, which might imply a series of contradictions-trade offs, as another respondent stressed.

If we look at actions we implemented, there's one thing to be said: they were extremely time consuming with negative impact on careers of the involved researchers. It was really hard to pursue structural changes and at the same time to continue doing research and publications. Keeping the Department of Social Sciences out of the project in terms of implementation was a deliberate choice in order not to have too much high level sociological scientific expertise and theoretical debate on the issues at stake and to privilege a pragmatic approach which is so much easier with hard scientists who are not interested in developing their own theories on the subject. They were also much more available to give us visibility as this was not hindering their own academic profiles. Priority was to achieve change more than studying change processes. The trade off of this positive alliance with hard scientists is that finally all the organizational and logistic aspects were entirely on our shoulders.

**Resistances** to gender equality policies are inevitable as they are typically sites of productive tensions (Walby 2005a) aiming at achieving change and therefore implying a certain degree of conflict and resistance from stakeholders willing to maintain the status quo.

The work of Lombardo and Mergaert has offered a comprehensive classification of resistances in gender mainstreaming processes along three main axes: implicit/explicit; individual/institutional; gender specific/general (Lombardo, Mergaert 2013) which we have found well reflected across our interviews.

Great emphasis has been put by most of our respondents on individual/explicit and gender related resistances.

Nevertheless, one examples of generic resistance was also made, which could be described as **resistance to critical discourse and change**:

Someone labelled us as “those people who like to criticize everything” and took our discourse a direct personal critique to their own research work. This is sensitive, really, in particular when we dealt with gender and research issues.

Some have stressed that there was **no real resistance but rather influence of gender stereotypes** although in most cases these type of answer came from institutions being at their preliminary or initial stage of implementation and this might have an impact in that sense.

One respondent referred to implicit resistance as due to specific cultural elements where critical thinking has a negative connotation and another interviewee pointed at implicit resistance she met as a consequence of using a strongly consensus oriented strategy precisely to avoid conflict.

A recurring argument in most of the interviews was indeed the ‘individual’ factor also in terms of constructive support to gender equality change stressed well beyond the last question of the interview.

**Gender, age, type of job and position** were referred to as main variables. Their academic- scientific research professional identities are found to make people prone to think they are immune from bias.

“Resistance is coming from men and women at same level. The fact we have men who support is very important factor. It is also resistance from HR Departments, there are professors from older generations but also very young professors can be resistant as well. To this point having a top down approach is useful”.

“Resistance is always individually based, across gender and roles. You can have women who think they are very supportive of gender equality but when it comes to concrete actions they are not, they might lack knowledge. You could have administrators and bureaucrats who are supportive, have learned how things go by life experiences”.

“Academic staff are among the most resistant groups, neither on positive actions and women representation or on discriminations. The average professor feels free from biases, they don’t want to even listen if you refer to gender quotas”.

Interests related to staff employment position are also mentioned, recalling long time debated conflicting perspectives of **class and gender** (Scott 1986) both with regards to members of Trade Unions among employees and some top managers who seem to be attracted by academic internationalization policies much more than gender equality.

“I have already mentioned Trade Unions, they care about minimal wage raise for all already employed workers and don’t care about the precarious ones...and then there’s a “Gotha” of top managers and leaders who have totally different interests. Many of them only care of relations with Chinese Universities ... which is fine but just not the most equal rights oriented environment”.

“I guess it was also a generational issue as he was very old, he is now retired and luckily he cannot influence any longer. There will be soon an intergenerational impact as things are changing in terms of more equally shared care responsibilities in couples”.

Three respondents pointed at women and two of them at **senior academic women** as the most resistant subjects in their experience. Their accounts are recalling studies which have identified a so called “queen bee phenomenon” where women in top positions within male-dominated organizations can end up to distance themselves from more junior women therefore in a way being not supportive towards gender equality or reinforcing gender inequalities in their work place (Derks, Van Laar, Ellemers 2011).

“Resistance was that senior women academics were a bit threatened by these younger women organizing themselves they were hostile to us in the beginning and it was not encouraging at all. What we consciously did to overcome this was to make the very junior women in their 20s the network as chairs and secretaries of the women’s board and contact the senior academics and this finally worked and they started to support us and joined our meetings and invited us to their meetings”.

“We only encountered minor resistance from senior female academics (in particular regarding the replacement fund), stating that they “had made career without ‘supporting’ measures”.

“Many resistances come from women. We have three female Directors in three different Departments and they were all opposing our suggestion to use the feminine declination of their job position. Same for female students at the faculty of engineering. We experienced that gender stereotypes are sometimes deeply rooted in women”.

Different discursive structures of the arguments are brought as examples of resistance within the ILO Gender Audit Train the trainers workshops:<sup>6</sup> trivializing, denial, inversion, dilution, selection, subversion, compartmentalization, tokenism, shelving, lip service, investigation.

In the collected interviews, one of the most commonly reported forms of resistances has been **'politically correctness'** intended also as 'lip service' or formal agreement not followed by concrete availability to offer support, which were also the most typical forms of implicit resistance.

"Challenges and resistances in our country have mostly to do with politically correctness: it is not possible to disagree and state you are against gender equality or do not acknowledge this as a problem".

"We also met lack of Interest and lack of time in people who initially committed to support the process while most of the time we got support from male colleagues although often only for politically correctness".

**Denial, trivialization & naturalization** seem to constitute the prevailing resistance modes: gender equality is not perceived to be a problem any longer or it is not the case at one's own university/committee or group (denial), it is not a priority or doesn't have importance, it's a trendy topic; sexist jokes are made to feature the main gender equality spoke persons (trivialization), or the status quo is due to different choices men and women 'naturally' do (naturalization):

"In terms of resistance some people made jokes and didn't want to participate and spend time on the project making statements such as 'we have real problems to deal with' so to diminish the importance of what we were doing. Many of them were women".

"'This doesn't matter'; 'we have already dealt with this'. They can manifest this in similar ways although the arguments are different".

"We didn't meet any resistances, but rather gender stereotypes, among the most common ones:

'Girls and boys have different preferred disciplines'; 'The topic is not that urgent'".

<sup>6</sup> See the on-line Presentation: "Type of resistances and Strategies" [https://ecampus.itcilo.org/pluginfile.php/25084/course/section/3468/S4\\_4%201%20%20types%20of%20resistance.pdf](https://ecampus.itcilo.org/pluginfile.php/25084/course/section/3468/S4_4%201%20%20types%20of%20resistance.pdf).

“Resistances we met them, sure, denial and sentences like ‘they are all women in this Committee/Panel’ or for example when we tried to have the gender course accredited, one female professor told us this was something similar to fashion, or a non scientific -trendy topic”.

“An example of resistance: an important influential man stating in a conversation ‘don’t mention anything against gender equality as otherwise she will come and beat you with a sweep!”.

“On the other side he was supportive but for him it was a pain, something he had to comply with although against his own will. It’s a double flow, there’s the official side, but also the other one”.

“It is the typical resistance to gender equality: naturalization of the problem, not seeing it as a priority, don’t see the benefit of this type of policies if it is really good for the organization, being considered as a secondary issue and this is the most difficult part to my view. It can happen that you meet people who say no we are against it and this is non-sense, but more common is to have people whom after the workshops or trainings they come to you and say ‘yes, I never thought about these issues, now I can understand, it is important’ but then finally the don’t prioritize them”.

Only one interviewee mentioned they met no resistances at all, due to their GEP being enforced by national policies.

“Our action is strictly connected to overall top down legislation and provisions. Since the 1999 law on gender equality was titled “for the advancement of women” the Gender Equality Officer experienced some communication problems and reactions like “now we have to do these things for women” as if gender equality was for women only, but this was really more of a communication problem than real resistance. The whole discourse improved a lot with the Gender Equality Standards by DFG and their change of approach dealing with the underrepresentation of women; but since 1999 there was never any real room for resistances as it was due by law. We didn’t experience any real resistance. The deans were positive on the proposed measures and the members of the sounding board were very enthusiastic about the fact that University wanted to address work-life issues in general and gender issues in particular.”

Several **strategies to tackle resistances** were mentioned and reported by respondents, that we can summarize as follow:

- Continued Raising awareness and training are needed
- Keep a positive - consensual approach and use different media to touch on cultural elements

- Be patient and aware: it is a long process
- Use multiple arguments, adapt them to the type of resistance and the type of audience
- Show the benefits of equality, highlight the negative impacts of inequalities
- Strategically hide gender on certain occasions
- Leverage on the personal level
- Connect with what is there already and make use of unused resources

A final remark on the ‘economic benefits’ arguments which were recalled in several of the answers: these are considered as useful means to react and tackle resistances to gender equality as they resonate with the request from leaders and managers of achieving increased quality and productivity. This has been one of the hottest and most contested topics in the debate on gender and political studies (Elomaki 2005; Rönnblom 2004, 2009), often contested for ending up hindering the transformativity of gender equality policies.

Among our respondents only one main critical view was expressed about the use of the economic benefit. It was highlighted how in practice the use of this argument to legitimize gender equality policies needs to be supported by scientific proof of evidence in order to be effective, and it is therefore exposed to generate further resistances if not sustained by facts & figures in an appropriate way:

“I thought a lot about the economic benefit argument, I see it can be useful to stress how women’s employment can sustain the social security system or overall their participation in active life can benefit organization of society as a whole, but it has to be extremely well prepared and well sustained as an argument with accompanying figures as people from the management side in particular could counter argue and you need to dominate the issue quite well otherwise it could generate further resistances”.

#### 4 Concluding Remarks

At the beginning of this study we identified some key dimensions to define a Gender Equality Plan implementation process as a good practice in structural change for gender equality: our 19 interviews confirmed that most of the highlighted criteria are meaningful and perceived as such by respondents in framing quality and potential impact of Gender Equality Plans. It might be worth repeating how our goal was not to achieve an objective impact evaluation of the good practices participating to our study but, more limitedly, to collect perceptions and self reflections of subjects directly involved into GEPs implementation about their own strategies and achievements.

We have been aiming at improving our understanding of the conditions under which Gender Equality Plans can prove to have an added value as systematic and comprehensive policies in promoting structural change if compared with specific interventions or actions addressing particular inequality areas. Within the limitations of this study, we had the opportunity to start exploring this encompassing research question, and got a confirmation from the field that Gender Equality Plans can be effective in catalyzing interest and commitment from Research Performing Organizations as a suitable strategy to go beyond single, one-time actions to promote gender equality.

More in details, one main take-away from interviews is that GEPs risk to be put in place as merely formalistic exercises to comply with existing regulations, especially in cases where they are proposed as binding measures that Universities have to adopt but adequate funding for implementation is missing.

National policy frameworks and regulations where GEPs are required and linked to incentives/funds as well as to human resources and staff allocation to support GEPs implementation seem to constitute the optimal scenario to establish and sustain consistent institutional change processes. Still, also in these cases implementation is often uneven and works better in certain specific departments/faculties more than others, depending on individual contexts and decision makers support.

Strong motivation and active commitment from core groups of researchers, employees active in Gender Equality Bodies, as well as gender experts can represent a crucial factor enabling to attract further resources, such as National, Regional or EU funding to support GEPs implementation: several of the good practices we identified have benefited from this, leveraging on the networking capacities of the involved subjects.

Gender Equality machineries and bodies can be crucial players in these domains but not necessarily have a triggering role in pushing the structural change process forward as they might find themselves stuck into contradictions such as formal approval of GEPs on one side and lack of substantial backing and concrete endorsement from the organization on the other.

Structural change processes are acknowledged to be in great need of 'problem owners' and committed actors and mostly from the management levels: the quest for a top down support and approach in policy implementation is clearly emerging with a common understanding of what it should all be about: support from the Rectorate, Council, Head of Departments and Administrative (mainly HR) managers leading in the best case to integrating GEPs and Gender equality Actions in Strategic Plans of the University and official Recruitment procedures. Instead, the added value of a bottom up strategy was found to have a much more blurred meaning: it is seen as a tool

for raising internal awareness and consensus building, involving Faculties and Departments as opposed to a centralized strategy only, to engage young and non permanent researchers and/or students in order to connect GEPs as much as possible with real needs of the academic community.

The so called dual -triple track approach to gender equality policies combining equal opportunities strategies, affirmative -positive actions and gender mainstreaming is still considered as the most adequate strategy at EU level and in the literature on this topic: it also seems to feature most of the practices which were interviewed in our study. Resistances towards quotas perceived as inadequate measures were also mentioned by several RPOs with reference to academic and research cultures where meritocracy and evaluation of research quality are taken as objective criteria and their gendered, non neutral construction is ignored. Still, in several cases the setting up of targets - soft quotas for the under represented sex seems to meet consensus and be an effective tool in several of the cases we involved in our research.

Intersectionality was perceived by the majority of respondents as an added value for gender equality policies increasing its legitimacy (with reference to ethnicity, age, disability and LGBT identities), although some implementation concerns were raised and several of the challenges already highlighted by the literature on this subject were spotlighted during our conversations. Few other respondents stated they don't consider intersectionality as relevant, or they are concerned about risks to disempower gender policies in favor of more blurred diversity measures, or it would be subject to meet strong internal resistance. This is confirming the need to work more thoroughly to highlight how intersectional gender equality policies can be operationalized and be useful to avoid oversimplified 'universalistic' measures not taking structural differences and inequalities among women into account.

Overall and in terms of the challenges met in promoting institutional change through GEPs, sustainability and continuity in time were identified by most respondents as the biggest hurdle. There is a widespread awareness that change is uneven, discontinuous and slow as well as strongly subject to backlashes, even if it is pursued by way of a systematic approach through Gender Equality Plans. As anticipated, lack of sufficient human and financial resources is a big issue in many cases, that RPOs strive to face by making use of pro-bono work and, as said, external funding. Active engagement of gender researchers who can therefore take implementation as their own research subject and invest in it for their academic career in absence of dedicated resources is also a pattern in use, although research and policy implementation objectives operate at different levels and are likely to collide at one point or another.

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Resistances are acknowledged as to be met at several levels and across gender, age, employment sectors and career ladder's steps.

The interviews report which we collected are actually mirroring the tensions among different discursive frameworks and arguments used to promote gender equality which have been subject of a wide number of studies in political sciences in the latest decades: strategies to tackle resistances are either more apt at consensus building and adaptation to existing mainstream rhetoric's (the benefits of gender equality for academic productivity and excellence, and internationalization as main examples mentioned) or at struggling to highlight contradictions between recent research and higher education policy developments and gender equality. In both cases change is generated from the dynamic between dealing with existing power structures and achieving support from within and continuing to pushing the boundaries

A final mention could be worth making of the great variety of actions, measures and projects which are comprised under Gender Equality Plans, whereas few main concluding notes could be brought to the attention:

- Internal assessments and audits turn out to be more than preparatory research to feed into gender equality plans design and monitoring their implementation: they can become actions planned and included in the GEPs and availability of gender disaggregated data is always crucial.
- The trend is to have work life balance as a preferred topic in GEPs implementation and perceived as an easier topic to be addressed also at initial stages of structural change processes, varying from directly offering child care services or facilitated access to them, to promoting parental leave use, supporting research trips to parents or revising researchers' mobility schemes.
- Strategies and actions to address under-representation of women in academic and research leadership position seem to focus on the so called demand side and the use of soft quotas or targets is widespread and considered as effective, jointly with re-framing recruitment guidelines and procedures to make them more gender sensitive.
- While initiatives to attract female students in STEM are definitely more common and risk to shift the focus outside the institution itself to target high or middle school girls students, gender as a dimension in STEM research and design is still less explored as a topic: there is strong a need to build understanding and internal capacity among STEM researchers and computer scientists on societal and gendered implications of research in their disciplines.

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