

Gender Equality Plans in Action: First Evidence on Enhancing Gender Equality in European Research Organisations

Carolina Wienand and Merve Yorulmaz

Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research, Germany

Abstract

The continued underrepresentation of women in STEM fields as one of the most pressing problems in the contemporary research and education landscape has been extensively researched in recent years. Progress towards increasing female representation in STEM has been very slow and almost non-existent in decision-making positions. Researchers and policy makers have suggested numerous measures in order to combat inequality on different levels. In this light, with the implementation of Horizon Europe, the European Union's new flagship programme for research and innovation (R&I), Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), "a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in organisations through a process of structural change", have become mandatory for applying research organisations.

We present first practical evidence from CALIPER (2019-2023), an EU-funded project that has accompanied nine European research organisations in the design and implementation phase of their specific GEP. First evaluations of the effectiveness of the GEPs reveal their power and role in initiating significant changes in the organisations' culture and processes by, for example, introducing gender budgeting, including a gender dimension in research content or using gender-sensitive language. Findings show that universities can trigger far-reaching changes throughout distinct hierarchical levels, divisions and departments ranging from Institutional Governance to Human Resources or Research.

Change processes for more gender equality are especially necessary at institutions or faculties in STEM. However, it is not only about increasing representation since the mere presence of more women does not change the culture of research environments. Gender Equality is not only based on the pursuit of justice or fairness - an inclusive R&I approach can result in more creative and sustainable decision-making and broader knowledge production for a larger target group. This contribution seeks to provide first-hand experiences and insights from European research organisations that, by implementing a GEP, have been able to increase awareness for gender equality and lay the foundation for sustainable organisational and



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cultural change processes. Potential barriers hampering the achievement of more gender equality in STEM are also discussed.

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