Success factors for promoting gender equality through institutional change

In the past number of years, key elements that appear to support gender equality work in research and higher education institutions have been identified. When these elements are present in research and higher education institutions, efforts towards gender equality are more likely to succeed and to contribute to effective change. The following success factors can help promote gender equality through institutional change in research and higher education settings.

These success factors can also be understood as 'basic requirements' to ensure that gender equality actions are more resilient and impactful. Furthermore, the presence of these basic requirements may help avoid and/or overcome common obstacles that are encountered when carrying out gender equality work in research and higher education institutions.

1. Leadership and senior management support:
- Endorse initiatives promoting gender equality.
- Counter opposition/resistance to initiatives promoting gender equality.
- Facilitate the mobilisation and availability of human and financial resources within the institution.
- Ensure the sustainability of actions.

2. A well-equipped and well-located 'gender equality body' (e.g. a dedicated unit, working group, team, or office):
- Coordinates and monitors gender equality efforts.
- Ensures the implementation of gender equality actions with the support of and in cooperation with leadership and executive bodies (e.g. human resources department).
- Ensures that human resources, knowledge and expertise are available in-house.

3. Involvement of different categories of stakeholders (inside and outside the institution):
- Allows the combination of different expertise and types of knowledge.
- Creates a feeling of ownership for gender equality actions implementation.
- Reduces opposition/resistance to initiatives promoting gender equality.
- Guarantees that tasks and responsibilities are shared.
- Allows for reaching different organisational and/or disciplinary staff and departments.
- Increases the commitment and potential impact of gender equality measures.
- Helps achieve sustainable changes institution wide.
- Ensures that the process is more transparent inside and outside the institution.

4. Embedding into existing structures and management procedures:
- Ensures institutional change towards gender equality and strengthens the sustainability of planned measures.
- Guarantees that gender-sensitive and gender-specific actions are incorporated into standard management procedures (e.g. gender training, gender-sensitive recruitment and career management procedures, collection of sex-disaggregated data).

5. Availability of sex-disaggregated data:
- Allows a gender diagnosis of the institution for each category and level of staff and students.
- Helps design evidence-based and effective measures to address any identified problems.
- Allows monitoring of achievements and progress.

6. Setting clear targets and practical objectives:
- Proves commitment to implement the planned gender equality actions.
- Allows the assessment of progress and makes the Gender Equality Plan more concrete and tangible.
- Allows for definition of responsibilities within the institution.

7. Developing competences:
- Enhances knowledge and its transfer among different staff and employees within the institution.
- Ensures a common understanding of what promoting gender equality through institutional change implies.

8. Monitoring and evaluation practices:
- Increase the robustness and sustainability of gender mainstreaming strategies.
- Allow for drawing upon lessons learnt from implemented initiatives.
- Provide visibility, enable measuring actual progress and help identify areas for further improvement.

9. Flexibility and resilience:
- Allow for the reassessment of gender-specific priorities for the institution at different levels.
- Allow for the adaptation and reshaping of gender equality measures, in cooperation with (the growing circles of) stakeholders, based on insights and/or data in order to ensure that targets and objectives are achieved.

Common obstacles and how to overcome them

Obstacles to set up, implement, monitor and evaluate a Gender Equality Plan are diverse and frequent. Some examples of obstacles and suggestions on how to overcome them are provided below.

Resistance to gender equality initiatives can be observed both at the individual and at the institutional level, and can take many forms (both explicit and implicit). Overcoming resistance can be challenging, but not impossible:

- Consider setting up awareness-raising training tailored to different staff.
- Ensure explicit and visible commitment from leadership and senior management.
- Involve key actors in identifying problems and resistance points so that solutions can be devised together, and create a feeling of ownership of these solutions.

An **absence of dedicated, adequate and sustained resources**, both human and financial, for gender equality work and for developing, implementing and monitoring Gender Equality Plans is a common obstacle. Some tips to help overcome this obstacle are:

- Clearly outline the value and the concrete results of gender equality actions (such as increased staff retention, more robust research, more diversity in staff).
- Search for human and financial resources at national, regional or institutional level in the early stages of the development of a Gender Equality Plan.

The lack of institutional or organisational authority can undermine gender equality initiatives. The staff involved in the development and roll-out of a Gender Equality Plan may not hold the authority or decision-making powers to promote and drive change in the institution. This can lead to frustration, limited progress and blockages in terms of achievements of the Plan. This obstacle can generally be resolved by:

- Ensuring an early involvement, commitment and visible on-going support from leaders.
- Identify in the Gender Equality Plan where lies the responsibility to take decisions and liaise with these actors throughout the process.

Some individuals may strongly adhere to the belief that a **commitment to academic excellence or promotion on merit alone is at odd with initiatives promoting gender equality.** This belief appears to have led to an absence of women in many fields and at higher levels of academia and research settings. There are several ways to address this argument:

- Provide and promote unconscious bias training for all staff within the organisation.
- Refer to international and European research, reports and projects to show that excellence in research is based on the diversity of expertise, experience and staff, and to find evidence to support your arguments. Check, for instance, the European Commission's She Figures, or websites of EU-funded projects such as Gendered Innovations or GenPort for inspiration.

In some countries or regions, there may be **limited autonomy for (public) institutions to enable changes related to gender equality** (e.g. in relation to hiring, recruitment and promotion procedures and regulations). The following actions can nevertheless be undertaken:

- Check if there is any lack of compliance with the principles of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment, as set by Directive 2006/54/EC.
- Check whether there are European, national or regional (non-)binding regulations that promote gender equality in research and/or higher education and use them as convincing arguments to enact change.
- Involve different actors to help create solutions, put actions into motion and convince senior management and leadership.

A fundamental **lack of understanding of the need for and importance of gender equality** may be encountered. This can lead to lack of engagement and involvement of key actors. To prevent and counteract such situation it is important to:

- Clearly reiterate that gender equality is not a 'minority' or 'women's' issue, but concerns everyone working in the institution.
- Frame gender equality as a key element to develop a successful, inclusive, open and forward-thinking research and higher education institution.
- Give visibility to gender equality by setting up a Gender Equality Plan and ensure that it is fully and publicly supported by leaders and senior managers.
- Set up (possibly mandatory) training on gender equality, in person or online, for all staff in order to ensure a shared understanding of its importance and benefits.
- Make the institution aware of gender imbalances and inequalities, as well as gender equality achievements, by regularly publishing sex-disaggregated data.

A lack of availability, or access to, sex-disaggregated human resources data is a challenge. These data are required to develop a baseline or initial assessment of where gender equality actions need to be targeted, to help counter resistance with actual up-to-date facts and figures, and to monitor progress. The following actions can be considered to make sex-disaggregated data available:

- Update existing human resources data collection and management systems to enable statistics broken down by sex (and other intersectional variables, such as age).
- Allocate resources (time and budget) for collecting and analysing data (e.g. as a measure of a Gender Equality Plan).
- Store any resultant data in a way that complies with European and national data protection requirements.

Not engaging potential key allies and/or actors early in the Gender Equality Plan process can seriously limit results. Therefore, it is important to:

- Recruit allies and enablers of gender equality work early in the process.
- Deliver training, workshops, seminars, meetings etc. to staff not directly involved in drafting or rolling out the Gender Equality Plan, because their support is important to progress and avoid obstacles during the implementation of the Plan.
- Frame the Gender Equality Plan as an encompassing, institutional plan so that a greater cross-departmental and faculty support is ensured.

Some research and higher education institutions may not have had a previous history or tradition of teaching or engaging with gender studies. This can mean that it is more challenging to convince staff of the importance and benefits of gender equality work and Gender Equality Plans. This obstacle may require to:

- Look for support from and utilise gender equality networks (at a national, regional or international level).
- Make use of such networks and gender expertise to enhance institutional competence and knowledge.
- Check Eurogender's Stakeholders Directory to find gender experts and trainers in your country or GenPort's People directory to find, among others, gender networks, and gender equality practitioners and advisers.

Ensuring the sustainability and resilience of gains related to gender equality can be challenging. Change of leadership, budget cutbacks, or apathy can lead to reduced or limited sustainability of a Gender Equality Plan. To overcome this obstacle, it is necessary to:

- Embed a commitment to both gender equality and the work related to the Gender Equality Plan into multiple organisational structures. This means that support, buy-in and commitment for the Plan will need to be sought from multiple stakeholders and not only allocated to a specific school or department.
- Allocate gender equality work to a specific multi-annual budget.
- Create and implement regular accountability, monitoring and evaluation structures, and/or tools into a Gender Equality Plan to flag when sustainability begins to lag and to indicate actions needed prior to crisis points being reached.

Want to know more?
Visit GEAR, EIGE's online tool about Gender Equality in Academia and Research:
www.eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/tools-methods/GEAR

EIGE
European Institute
for Gender Equality

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The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policy-makers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans and beyond by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe. More information: http://www.eige.europe.eu

The information gathered in this roadmap originates from a project focusing on the integration of gender equality into research and higher education institutions developed in cooperation with the European Commission, Directorate-General Research and Innovation. This project ran from July 2015 until October 2016. The legal and policy framework and other stimulatory initiatives promoting gender equality in research were mapped out in the 28 EU Member States. Based on national initiatives and projects funded by the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development, and in consultation with experts and stakeholders, an online tool was developed to assist research and higher education institutions in setting up, implementing, monitoring and evaluating gender equality plans. The most important tips of the step-by-step guide available in the online tool have been summarised in this roadmap.