EUROPEAN
POLICYBRIEF

RESET - Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together

This policy brief outlines main results of the RESET project after four years of its implementation. It summarises issues and challenges that should be addressed at the policy level of RPOs and RFOs to enable efficient gender and diversity mainstreaming and strengthening of the ERA.

20 DECEMBER 2024

INTRODUCTION

The European Research Area 2022-2024 policy agenda recalls the persistence of gender inequalities in the European Union and integrates gender equality policy as one of its priorities. Through inclusive Gender Equality Plans (GEP), actions to counteract gender-based violence, the inclusion of intersectionality and the evaluation of gender and diversity dimensions in research, it strives to impulse a cultural change in the ERA.

More specifically, GEP is considered as an important instrument for institutional change, as stated both in the ERA 2022-2024 policy agenda and the Ljubljana declaration signed in 2021. GEP helps institutions to understand the state of the situation and act effectively to improve the situation. As a result, having a GEP is a mandatory requirement for HEIs competing for Horizon Europe funds. An increasing attention is brought to all forms of discrimination and is requested in this "inclusive gender equality plan". Facilitating equal career paths in an intersectional perspective is highlighted, while taking into account a gender and diversity dimension in research and teaching is strongly encouraged, as well as favouring gender balance in leadership and decision-making. Implementing actions to facilitate work-life balance and to prevent gender-based violence is also highly considered.

Yet the ERA 2022-2024 is coming to an end and a new policy agenda is to be adopted. At the same time, the next Framework Programme for Research and Technical Development (FP RTD), which will enter into force in 2028, is currently under discussion in the European Parliament. This implies that gender equality might not be such a core topic. In particular, the mission letter of the newly elected Commissioner for start-up, research and innovation does not refer to gender equality, which might be an obstacle for the effective and impactful implementation of an equality policy.

In this context, this policy-brief will present and highlight RESET experiences regarding gender and diversity dimensions in academia. During the 4 years of RESET, partners have implemented different actions to favour cultural change in their organisations but also to highlight the importance of taking

into account gender and diversity in academia, all of this evidencing their capacity and willingness to bear the accountability for gender equality.

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EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

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Four partner universities implemented their first GEPs in line with the European Commission's requirements, from 2022 to 2024 and adopted their second GEPs at the end of 2024. Their experiences, as well as the one of the mentor universities, confirm the importance of this document. Indeed, this formal obligation encourages HEIs to integrate gender equality and diversity policies. It thus contributes to cultural change and strengthens actions related to this topic. Sustainable progress will be facilitated by taking greater account of different minority groups and students.

To enforce a cultural change within their institutions and to ease the implementation of GEPs, various actions and activities were organised at RESET universities, covering most areas of a university: administration, human resources, communication, institutional organisation, research, teaching, etc. All this work allows the project partners to identify key elements in the success of gender equality in academia.

If GEP is a formal obligation at the EU level, its implementation aims to support cultural change in HEIs. Indeed, their implementation requires the involvement of the whole community, because different departments are concerned, from the human resources department to communication. Moreover, it requires from departments to work in close relation to and coordinate actions with one another. The experience of RESET also shows that the changes that GEPs can incur can be really important, especially for universities located in countries which still have different gender-related challenges visible in Gender Equality Index. The University of Lodz stands as a success story: despite various challenges and resistances, its first GEP contributes to the collection of data, extensive training, conduction of awareness-raising campaigns but also the development of an anti-discrimination and anti-mobbing procedure, and overall, the institutionalisation of this policy.

The work of RESET also shows the importance of having intersectional gender equality plans. Addressing various overlapping discriminatory practices is crucial in the university context and contributes to sustainable cultural change that RESET is aiming for. However, it is also a challenge. On the one hand, data might be difficult to collect to assess the state of intersecting discriminations. On the other hand, it is important to adopt a clear intersectional approach, rather than considering each discrimination process independently, resulting in the invisibility of certain experiences.

The success of gender equality policy strongly depends on the involvement of top management. This has been expressed by RESET mentor universities and experienced by GEP implementing partners. Indeed, progress is more significant and stable in universities that have received strong support from their top management (Rector) and directors. This support is facilitated by their active involvement, through the use of co-design methods, which invite various stakeholders to fully interact on the topic. The institutionalisation of bodies such as the Gender Equality Board contributes to the structural institutionalisation of gender equality and diversity policy. However, the participation of top management raises the question of *whom* to involve. Indeed, engaging the governance contributes to strong political commitment but the participation of staff members, who are on the operational part, could also facilitate the implementation of concrete actions. Altogether, the implication of top management ensures the institutionalisation of GEP.

The implementation of training programmes for the whole community and by the community is a key element to favour cultural change. As a result RESET team project has developed 15 modules and trained more than 10,000 people, both students and staff, in gender-based violence and discrimination prevention, work-life balance, GIA in research, among others topics. This training contributes to discuss the notion of scientific excellence with regard to gender and discrimination.

Finally, as the GEAR tool points out, data are needed to develop, monitor and evaluate gender and diversity policies and actions. It can help policy makers. However, one of the challenges is the collection of data, especially when it comes to data on intersectionality, as mentioned. Indeed, some data cannot be collected because of the legal framework, and so the lack of available data limits the possibility to study the intersection of certain forms of discrimination.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this 4-years experience, RESET shares its recommendations:

- The current ERA policy agenda is coming to an end and its new version will be announced soon. Considering the important impact GEP's implementation has on favouring gender equality, maintaining GEP as a mandatory criteria for the next FP RTD appears to be particularly relevant in regard to RESET experience. Indeed, in different universities, this guarantees minimum actions regarding gender equality, while giving legitimacy to transforming actions, strong enough to impulse a cultural change.
- Training is a lever to cultural change. Training sessions should be available to students, administrative staff, teachers and researchers as well as top and middle management. Institutionalising them through their integration into curricula as well as within the staff training plan, but also ensuring their communication favours their impact. This can only work if sufficient human and financial resources are provided.
- Systemic changes can only happen if various realms are taken into account. Gender inequalities, discriminations and also violence at work such as bullying or micro-aggressions happen at different stages of one's career and tackling them requires to work from the recruitment process to the end of the career. Working on work-life balance is also an important element to limit gender inequalities, more specifically if measures include strongly men and not only women as caregivers.
- As language shapes our understanding of societies, gender-inclusive communication is a tool to promote gender equality. Promoting it within our institutions supports gender and diversity policies and favours cultural change. Furthermore, it is a tool that can easily be appropriated by the community, favouring a bottom-up approach.
- Altogether, implementing actions dedicated to reduce gender inequalities, but also better include people of different origins, is not enough if scientific excellence is still based on scientific productivity, international mobility or prizes, which are not neutral and disadvantage certain academics coming from minorities. Redesigning the definition of scientific excellence is key to include all researchers.
- On the research side, encouraging the use of Gender Impact Assessment contributes to present the importance of taking gender and diversity into account, while helping researchers to include it effectively. It is thus important to emphasise in concrete terms the enrichment of research results by taking gender into account through targeted case studies by discipline.
- All this work needs to be supported by the collection of data, its analysis and dissemination. This offers a general view on the existing inequalities but also the progress made thanks to the actions implemented. It helps policy-design and evaluation.
- Co-design ensures the involvement of various persons of the community. On the one hand, it helps designing policies that are inclusive and that better take into account everyone's need, and, as a result, that fit the institution better. On the other hand, it facilitates the involvement of services in the implementation of actions. This is particularly true for Gender Equality Plan, whose success depends partly on its acceptance by the community.
- Creating Community of Practices can support the implementation of Gender Equality Plans, but can also be used to work on specific topics, such as work-life balance and parenthood.
- Adopting an intersectional approach is a key element to ensure sustainable change towards gender equality, while addressing better discriminations. However, it is to be well used to prevent organisations to dilute one discrimination or the other.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

Over the course of this four-year project, the RESET partners have proposed a range of reports, tools and policy documents that may be of use in support of the recommendations.

- Two GEPs per implementing institution have been designed throughout the project, based on an extensive qualitative and quantitative analysis (focus groups, surveys, co-design sessions), which includes, before the design of the second GEP, a survey to assess the knowledge of GEPs among the community.
- Throughout the project, two GEPs were developed for each implementing partner. The second edition was developed based on an analysis of the GEPs 1.0, their successes and pitfalls. As a result, the scope of the GEPs 2.0 has been broadened to include more issues addressing discrimination, but also students as a key stakeholders group and the reinforcement of certain actions. They are also aligned with various HR labels, including HRS4R.
- In 2022, the seven RESET institutions committed themselves to equality, diversity and excellence in research. Divided into 4 topics, the joint statement is updated to integrate indicators that will help institutions to monitor this engagement.
- A comprehensive database of training materials and methods has been developed and used by RESET partners. Consisting of 15 modules covering topics such as harassment, diversity and inclusivity, prevention of discrimination or gender and diversity in research, this database can be used by any organisation wishing to implement such training.
- Taking gender and diversity dimension into one's research is an important element to increase the quality of research and ensures it fits the whole society. RESET has developed a Gender Impact Assessment checklist that has been digitalised, to help researchers and support services, but also a set of recommendations for institutions.
- Considering this importance of language in shaping a more inclusive environment, RESET has developed a Gender-Inclusive Language toolbox, available online and which has already been adapted and adopted by three RESET partners.
- Various tools developed during the project have been digitalised and are now accessible on the online RESET toolkit. This includes data of RESET universities, recruitment roadmap, training toolbox and GIA checklist.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Throughout the last period of the project, partners have based their work methodological pluralism, with qualitative and qualitative data: group and individual interviews, discourse analysis, questionnaire, study of quantitative data, surveys, but also extensive literature review. Co-design sessions were key to design institutional documents such as GEPs 2.0.

Furthermore, the different reports and documents developed in the frame of the project are freely available on Zenodo. A joint publication is under preparation, to enlighten the methodology and share scientific insights of the project. It will be available on open access.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME   RESET (Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together)

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CONSORTIUM   Aristotle University of Thessaloniki – AUTH – Thessaloniki, Greece
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University of Łódź – UL – Łódź, Poland
University of Oulu – UOULU – Oulu, Finland
University of Porto – U.Porto – Porto, Portugal

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DURATION   January 2021 – December 2024 (48 months)

BUDGET   EU contribution: 2 998 297,50 €

WEBSITE   https://wereset.eu/

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FURTHER READING