



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

TARGET } Taking a Reflexive approach
to Gender Equality for
institutional Transformation



Successful GEP implementation depends on national frameworks: Institutional engagement alone is not enough

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INTRODUCTION

The European Commission is committed to promoting gender equality in research and innovation. Numerous structural change projects have been funded to support Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) in setting up Gender Equality Plans (GEP) tailored to their respective needs. In Horizon Europe, having a GEP in place has become an eligibility criterion for many legal entities in Member States and Associated Countries. Based on the experiences of structural change projects, standards for GEP development and implementation have emerged and been fed into the GEP requirements formulated in Horizon Europe.

TARGET and GEECCO have both been funded within Horizon 2020 (Science with and for Society programme – SwafS). Both projects supported the development and implementation of GEPs in RPOs and RFOs in a total of 12 institutions from 11 countries. GEECCO and TARGET implementing partners started a reflexive structural change process: in both projects, capacity-building took place, and the partners analysed the status quo of gender equality, defined objectives and developed a customized GEP. They also began implementing these GEPs and reflected on them using monitoring and evaluation results, which subsequently led to an adaptation of the GEPs in some institutions. An evidence-based, cyclical approach of this kind needs time, financial and personnel resources, top-down commitment, the support of an internal community of practice (CoP) and advice from facilitators to varying degrees depending on the level of management support and the political context. The implementation of GEPs is, however, also challenged by resistance at institutional level and changes in management as well as by the absence of a national discourse on gender equality in research and innovation (R&I) in the countries where the implementing institutions are based.

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EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Experiences in the GEECCO and TARGET projects¹ show that the main drivers for institutional gender equality policies are common across different organisations. The willingness to develop and implement GEPs depends on incentives or pressure from external authorities. These can be funding scheme requirements, national authorities as well as journals or publishers. Once an institution is motivated to set up a GEP, corresponding support and expertise are needed to develop a GEP that is tailored to its specific needs. GEECCO and TARGET assumed that a sustainable gender equality policy goes beyond the formal adoption of a GEP and is based on an evidence-based and reflexive process. The core elements of such a process are:

- an in-depth analysis of gender imbalances within the institution and the identification of underlying mechanisms.
- the formulation of gender equality objectives, target groups and targets based on the aforementioned analysis.
- the development of specific measures to address and achieve these objectives.
- a close monitoring of GEP implementation and an evaluation of its effects.
- the reflection on the process and results achieved based on monitoring that may lead to adjustment of the GEP and/or specific measures.

There are three essential elements to such an evidence-based, cyclical approach: 1) the time to set up and implement the process; 2) sufficient resources for such a process, both financial and human, as well as in the form of top-down support; and 3) leadership commitment.

Common problems encountered in the implementation of GEPs have been reported from many structural change projects, and a comprehensive overview of resistances within institutions and strategies to overcome them can be found in the FESTA Handbook on Resistances. Experiences from our partners in Central and South-Eastern European countries – which have been characterized as rather inactive when it comes to gender equality policies in R&I (Lipinsky 2014, Wroblewski 2020) – reveal additional specific challenges when implementing a GEP.

Implementation is impeded to varying degrees by two particularly unfavourable conditions, the first of which is the complete or widespread absence of a national gender equality discourse in R&I. The second major obstacle is a local or national anti-gender movement, manifested in a lack of acceptance of gender as a social construct, the revival of traditional values and strong resistance to gender studies.

It transpires that non-compatibility of institutional targets and measures with national science and research policy not only counteracts institutional efforts but also requires additional initiative to overcome these barriers. This puts actors under particular pressure and can lead in a worst-case scenario to ineffective implementation of a GEP.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These experiences become especially relevant when it comes to the GEP requirement for institutions applying for funding in Horizon Europe. Experiences in the GEECCO and TARGET projects show that the orientation towards the European Union and the requirements of funding organisations as well as journals or publishers are the main drivers for institutional GEPs.

¹ This Policy Brief is based on the discussions and results of the final conference of GEECCO and TARGET in March 2021 (<https://www.gendertarget.eu/2021/01/27/target-geecco-conference/>)

Given that, the GEP requirement in Horizon Europe carries enormous potential to support gender equality in R&I and especially the further development of policies in countries and institutions which have already started engaging with gender equality. **However, it also entails the risk of widening the gap between more and less advanced countries or institutions regarding gender equality.** One aspect that supports this assumption is the fact that the countries which are more active in terms of gender equality started their commitment to gender equality in R&I more than 20 years ago, or at the latest when gender mainstreaming became a European strategy. It is not easy to compensate for this process and the related learnings without time and resources.

We are therefore convinced that **targeted support is needed for countries and institutions that are starting out on this journey.** However, direct support alone will not be enough. The GEP requirement should also be embedded in a policy discourse between the EU, Member States and associated countries. This policy discourse should be initiated by the European Commission and involve existing governance structures such as the Standing Working Group Gender in R&I (SWG GRI) to act as facilitators. This discourse should aim to

- establish a shared understanding of gender equality that goes beyond women's representation,
- provide arguments for engagement in gender equality, and
- establish quality criteria for GEPs.

GEECCO and TARGET experiences clearly show, however, that it is difficult for implementing institutions to compensate for a lack of national policy discourse on gender equality and to counteract explicit anti-gender public policies. This underscores the aforementioned need to embed GEP implementation in a national or European gender equality policy discourse in R&I. European and national opportunities for mutual learning and experience sharing could support both the development of GEPs at the institutional level and a policy discourse.

In addition to this policy discourse, further arrangements are needed to realize the potential of the GEP requirement in Horizon Europe. In an ideal world, GEPs will also become mandatory in other funding contexts (e.g., national funding programs). If GEPs become a must, it will also be necessary in the near future to talk about sanctions for non-compliance.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

Chizzola, Valentina; De Micheli, Barbara; Vingelli, Giovanna (2018) [TARGET. Gender Equality Audit Tool - GEAT \(D 3.1\).](#)

Knoll, Bente (2021): [Dos and Don'ts while Degendering the STEM Field. Learning Experiences of Four European Universities and Two European Research Funding Organisations. GEECCO. Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment](#)

Palmén, Rachel; Caprile, Maria (2018) [TARGET. Guidelines to design customised GEPs \(D3.3.\).](#)

Ratzer, Brigitte (2019): [Integrating Gender Dimensions in the Content of Research and Innovation. An Exhibition. GEECCO. Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment](#)

Mergaert, Lut; Allori, Agostina; Ratzer, Brigitte; Enzenhofer, Bettina; Lusa García, Amaia; Marino, Concettina; Zakowska, Lidia; Bryniarska, Zofia (2020): [Tailor-made Gender Equality Plans \(GEP version 3.0\). GEECCO. Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment](#)

Wroblewski, Angela; Eckstein, Kirstin (2018) [TARGET. D 4.1 - Gender equality monitoring tool and guidelines for self-assessment.](#)

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FESTA – Female Empowerment in Science Technology Academia (2016): Handbook on Resistance to Gender Equality in Academia, FESTA Deliverable WP7: <https://www.festa-europa.eu/public/handbook-resistance-gender-equality-academia>

Lipinsky, Anke (2014): Gender Equality Policies in Public Research, European Commission, Brussels, DOI: 10.2777/6595.

Wroblewski, Angela (2020): Report on Monitoring of ERA Priority 4 Implementation, GENDERACTION Deliverable WP3: <https://genderaction.eu/about-project/deliverable-reports/>

PROJECT IDENTITY - GEECCO

PROJECT NAME	Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment (GEECCO).
COORDINATOR	Brigitte Ratzer, TU Wien, Vienna, Austria, brigitte.ratzer@tuwien.ac.at .
CONSORTIUM	B NK GMBH - B-NK GmbH – Vienna, Austria Gesis – Leibniz Institut für Sozialwissenschaften e.V. – GESIS – Bonn, Germany Politechnika Krakowska – PK- Krakow, Poland Technische Universität Wien – TUW – Vienna, Austria Technologicka Agentura Ceske Republiky – TA CR – Prague, Czech Republic Universita degli studi mediterranea di Reggio Calabria – UNIRC – Reggio Calabria, Italy Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya – UPC – Barcelona, Spain Wiener Wissenschafts- und Technologiefonds – WWTF – Vienna, Austria YELLOW WINDOW – YW – Antwerp, Belgium
FUNDING SCHEME	Call: H2020-SwafS-2016-1, Coordination & Support Action Topic: SwafS-03-2016-2017 Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
DURATION	May 2017 – April 2021 (48 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution: 2 025 493 €.
WEBSITE	http://www.geecco-project.eu/home/
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Contact: Brigitte Ratzer, brigitte.ratzer@tuwien.ac.at
FURTHER READING	Ratzer, Brigitte; Burtscher, Sabrina; Lehmann, Tobias; Mort, Harrie; Pillinger, Anna (2020): Enhanced Gender Knowledge and New Content. GEECCO. Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment Lasinger, Donia; Nagl, Elisabeth; Dvořáčková, Jana; Kraus, Marcel (2019): Best Practice Examples of Gender Mainstreaming in Research Funding Organizations. GEECCO. Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment Lasinger, Donia; Nagl, Elisabeth; Dvořáčková, Jana; Kraus, Marcel (2020): Overview and Assessment of Gender Criteria for Funding Programmes. GEECCO. Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment Mergaert, Lut; Knoll, Bente; Renkin, Agnes (2021): Final Report on Supporting Activities. GEECCO. Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment

PROJECT IDENTITY – TARGET

PROJECT NAME	Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation (TARGET)
COORDINATOR	Angela Wroblewski, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Vienna, Austria, wroblews@ihs.ac.at .
CONSORTIUM	Applied Social Research – NOTUS – Barcelona, Spain Belgrade University – UB – Belgrade, Serbia Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini – FGB, Rome, Italy Fondazione Regionale per la Ricerca Biomedica – FRRB – Milan, Italy Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy – ELIAMEP – Athens, Greece Institute for Advanced Studies – IHS – Vienna, Austria National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ARACIS – Bucharest, Romania Réseau Méditerranéen des Ecoles d'Ingénieurs et de Management – RMEI – Marseille, France Research and Innovation Foundation – RIF – Nicosia, Cyprus Université Hassan II Casablanca – UH2C – Casablanca, Morocco
FUNDING SCHEME	Call: H2020-SwafS-2016-1, Coordination & Support Action Topic: SwafS-03-2016-2017 Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
DURATION	May 2017 – December 2021 (56 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution: 1 994 950 €.
WEBSITE	http://www.gendertarget.eu
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Contact: Angela Wroblewski, wroblews@ihs.ac.at
FURTHER READING	Wroblewski, Angela (2019) TARGET: Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for Institutional Transformation . The Project Repository Journal PRJ, 2, pp. 94-97. Wroblewski, Angela (2020) The relevance of a community of practice for the successful implementation of a gender equality policy . The Project Repository Journal, 6, pp. 80-83.