

No data: No policies!

The MINDtheGEPs approach to evidence-based policies for Gender Equality Plans

Facts and figures strengthen our ability to undertake cultural and structural actions towards Gender Equality. We believe that sharing MINDtheGEPs knowledge on gender imbalances can contribute to sustainable change. This policy brief includes recommendations for how to build an evidence-based foundation for gender equality plans (GEPs) in research performing organizations, based on the assumption that without data, there will be no policy.

We need several types of data to be able to capture the various push and pull factors that (de)construct gender inequalities during different phases of a research career (early, middle, late) and at different levels (individual, organizational, national). Why? Because gender is a social structure that is characterized by multiple intersected barriers, requiring multiple intersected actions to be removed.

The MINDtheGEPs Project specifically aims at identifying and addressing the multiple obstacles toward gender equality in research and innovation organizations. In line with the European Research Area's key priorities on gender equality, MINDtheGEPs aims at removing barriers to recruitment, retention and career progression of female researchers, improving work-life balance, addressing gender imbalances in decision making and strengthening the gender dimension in research and teaching.

These are the key challenges that need to be addressed, in order to halt the waste of talent that is undermining Europe's future progress and to diversify the views and methodologies so as to increase the quality, the methodological accuracy and the relevance of research, as well as the individual and societal wellbeing. In addition, this work sheds light on how the dominant logic of science creates a 'devoted unconditional worker' ideal that harms not only women but also men and the entire organization.



This policy brief was written for research performing organizations (public and private universities and research centres), European Commission and members of the scientific community. The recommendations are based on the deliverable report 2.2 submitted to the European Commission. Data from this report will be made public in peer-reviewed publications and working papers from the project.

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Policy implications & recommendations: Learning from the MINDtheGEPs experience

MINDtheGEPs aims to implement seven GEPs in partner institutions to strengthen and complement National Frameworks, monitor the gender gap reduction to increase research value and innovation excellence; to improve the diversification of scientific teams, in terms of human resources, research contents and publications and teaching curricula. MINDtheGEPs takes a multidisciplinary multidimensional approach to challenging gender imbalances across five different countries that still have traditional gender regimes (Italy, Spain, Serbia, Ireland, Poland), and across various types of research performing organizations, implementing gender equality plans at the Jagiellonian University, Munster Technological University, University of Belgrade - School of Electrical Engineering, University of Gdansk, University of Turin, the National Research Council of Italy (CNR) & CTAG - Automotive Technology Centre of Galicia. The consortium is led by the University of Turin's Research Center for Women and Gender Studies (CIRSDe), supported by Knowledge & Innovation, Uppsala University and Elsevier.

Qualitative and quantitative evidence of the root causes of gender gaps in the organizations are of crucial importance for designing and implementing effective self-tailored Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). In MINDtheGEPs, under the supervision of University of Turin, the preliminary stage of the elaboration of GEPs was dedicated to the collection and analysis in 7 public and private RPOs of 4 types of data:

- **Quantitative and qualitative data on legislation and policies at the macro level:** in the field of R&I and higher education; equal opportunities; employment regulation and labour market; care & work-life balance, including father-friendly policies.
- **Quantitative data at the meso-level:** 53 indicators such as the share of women in governing bodies or in different grades; the share of women applying for or winning competitive funds; the existence of gender measures.
- **Quantitative data at the micro-level:** a web-survey to research and administrative staff on beliefs around how research performing organizations work and should work.
- **Qualitative data at the micro-level:** 63 qualitative semi-structured interviews with key-informants (such as rectors and vice rectors, departmental directors; members of competition commissions; the president of Equal Opportunities bodies); 118 qualitative semi-structured interviews with researchers (both early and advanced careers, male and female, representing both STEM and SSH fields).

This huge data collection and analysis is the fundament on which the 7 MINDtheGEPs GEPs are built. In this policy brief, some insights on each of the four key areas MINDtheGEPs is focusing on: balancing recruitment & career progression, gendering research & teaching, decision making, and improving work-life balance.

Impact is part of our approach to develop GEPs. MINDtheGEPs has contributed to a more profound understanding of the gender biases and imbalances in partner organizations, building deeper knowledge of the various formal and informal practices and procedures that (re)produce gender inequality. In addition, we have learned about ways to improve them. The project also facilitated an increased awareness of gender issues among staff and governing/managing bodies as a direct result of the participatory approach to both quantitative and qualitative data collection. In particular, both quantitative and qualitative data collection engaged key-actors and reached a large group of employees, including teachers, researchers, administrative and technical staff. This engagement at different levels in the organizations has been pivotal to activate stakeholders' groups to be gradually involved in the GEPs implementation. Building a sustainable foundation for the legacy of GEPs in the medium to long term.

Balancing recruitment and career progression

"It's a tragedy, one works all the time, there are no hours... there are no weekends not... (...) you know you have to produce, you have to produce, so you're always trying to produce..."; " If the prospect is that of having to wait for six years killing themselves by working day and night, seven days a week, to produce twenty-four jobs before crossing the threshold and enter a tenure position, women will give up. There will always be enough fanatic men ready to accept it, but I don't think there will be the same number of women"

In the words of many researchers, especially of women, a recent neoliberal shift in the way research organizations are managed has caused a lot of damage. Perceived as a push towards a long and precarious path, where being a 'workaholic' is considered a desirable trait. All in the name of an apparent neutral 'meritocratic' ideal. This needs to be tackled with a mix of structural and cultural actions:

- **Structural actions**, such as introducing realistic research contracts with job security, or economic incentives for male-dominated departments hiring or promoting women, or providing extra mobility funds for non-tenured female caregivers. This would contribute to preventing women's giving up on being a scientist (known as the 'leaky pipeline') and to supporting their advancement.
- **Cultural actions**, such as trainings to reach top-positions, or mentoring programs aimed at young researchers from 'alternative' female leaders to challenge the norm that work-devotion and over-production are good things, are crucial.

Improving work-life balance

"If you have a child, you produce less. And so, because you are evaluated for your productivity, while you are having children others produce; therefore, they pass you by, and/so that's why nobody has children". Our data clearly show that, in a context where extra family support for care responsibilities is scarce, coupled with expectations of strong work-devotion, mothers (but also the few involved fathers), who cannot fit the unconditional worker model, are penalized. For young women, this penalization also takes the form of postponing or deciding not to build a family.

- **Structural actions**, such as the reduction of teaching or bureaucratic workload when returning from a parental leave, or renewing/expanding agreements with child-care or elderly-care services, can help mitigate the caregivers 'penalty'.
- **Cultural actions** addressed to both women and men, both at the bottom and top of organizations, help deconstruct the prevalent logic of science, showing its limit not only for women, but for the overall organization. This will serve to reduce stress and promote more collaborative and creative researchers.

Gendering research and teaching

Mapping trainings offered by partners shows a lack in the provision of gender-oriented courses and workshops, especially at those partners that do not have centers in gender studies as part of the organization. Our data shows that:

- **When training is offered**, the experience is positive. Empowerment trainings using a participatory approach are positively perceived since they provide researchers with the possibility of acquiring new skills and perspectives.
- **Gender and sex should be considered** as two pivotal dimensions to be addressed in scientific research and teaching, **not only in the humanities, but also in 'hard science'**.
- **Structural actions** such as MA or PhD thesis awards with official public presentations are a way to make high quality gender-framed research desirable and visible. Specific funds to call for proposals that are supporting gender-sensitive research can inspire, and should be promoted.

Decision making bodies: Gendering leaders and institutions

Our data shows that most MINDtheGEPs partners score below the glass ceiling index, which is in line with the more general European trend where the value 1 indicates that there is no difference between men and women in terms of probability to reach the highest positions. This 'glass ceiling' needs to be tackled both with cultural and structural actions. Our data suggests that:

- **Structural actions**, like the introduction of gender quotas, can have a positive effect in the medium term, but adjusting numbers alone has not, and cannot, transform institutions. In addition, this may be perceived as a top-down policy.
- **Cultural actions**, such as providing trainings on bias in the very definitions of leadership and excellence and in promotion practices, can change the institution in a deeper way providing more long-term impacts. This will also likely be perceived as a more bottom-up oriented policy.



MINDtheGEPs
gender equality in research

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