



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



RESET - Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together

This policy brief highlights main results achieved during the first year of the RESET project and sheds the light on the difficulties encountered, addressing the issues that should be considered by the RPOs and RFOs within further gender mainstreaming and GEP-making.

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INTRODUCTION

As a project funded under the “Science with and for society” call of Horizon 2020, RESET – “Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together” has a double objective of paving the way for and implementing the structural change within the partners’ institutions, but also of studying questions of gender inequalities and diversity through intersectional perspective in academia.

The launch of Horizon Europe with the required implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEP) as an eligibility criterion has pivoted the perspective of multiple HEIs putting an emphasis on the accelerated creation and implementation of measures targeting gender equality. This major transformation has also had an impact on RESET: fostering its strive for innovation and dedication in GEP making, concentrating its efforts on the mobilisation of the top-management, mainstreaming of gender dimension in research and the consequent contribution to the Responsible Research and Innovation and the European Research Area. Taking into consideration local political and social contexts and related differences, RESET aims at tackling contemporary challenges (COVID-19, work-life balance, inclusivity of scientific excellence, sustainable development, prevention of sexual harassment, violence, homophobia and other discriminations) and looks for tailor-made solutions (via GEP-making, development of trainings, toolboxes, benchmarking, communication, co-design). These objectives are also aligned with the core principles of the Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation. Although the application of intersectional approach has to be framed within national and local regulations, this method remains crucial for RESET and its diversity- and inclusion-oriented strategy.

After the first 15 months of the project's implementation, the initial choices and approaches of RESET have to be examined with regard to its first results and possible implications should be considered for the further development.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Due to the qualitative and quantitative analysis carried out within the RESET, partner institutions were able not only to identify gaps or mismatches to be tackled with the help of GEPs, but also to run an extensive assessment of the state of the art in terms of awareness on equality, diversity and inclusion within university communities. The most important findings within RESET GEP implementing institutions (University of Aristotle in Thessaloniki, University of Porto, University of Lodz, University of Bordeaux) reveal the deficiency of collection of sex-disaggregated data (its scope varies according to the local context) or data that provides an intersectional perspective. The results also confirm the lack of content related to gender equality and diversity in curricula, as well as a rather difficult establishment or evolvement of systems tackling sexual harassment and other forms of violence and discrimination (level of implementation differs according to the institutions' local context). The existing data display clear patterns of both horizontal and vertical segregation and provide evidence to the strong underrepresentation of women in academic decision-making positions, though they constitute the majority of all personnel. Despite institutional and cultural differences, multiple universities across Europe are confronted with the same persistent structural issues.

Caring responsibilities are acknowledged as a major factor slowing down women's career and professional accomplishments, stressing the importance of developing inclusive work-life balance facilities adapted to the local contexts. In the light of this issue, the project has also attempted to define the impact of COVID-19 crisis on work-life balance. Although no significant results have been observed yet, it confirms the multitude of challenges that academic and administrative personnel of HEIs area encounters. Within the intersectional perspective, another important element is a crossing of gender and age, which presumably results in some patterns of discrimination, especially during the recruitment and progression processes at HEIs. Despite the fact that numerous tools, guidelines and other means of promotion of diversity and inclusion exist at the universities, their communication and dissemination within the communities is far from being efficient.

According to the results of the RESET survey, the participation of personnel in gender equality (GE) and related training is rather low, though it is generally considered to be relevant and predominantly supported by women. The topics that are the most quoted as significant in this context are inclusion of gender dimension into research, gender inclusive language and communication, as well as prevention of mobbing and sexual harassment. Among the target groups identified for such training sessions, there are mainly representatives of top-management and HR structures.

Considering integration of gender dimension in research, all universities recognize its relevance in research and teaching activities, though there are almost no policies or formal incentives in place. The findings of RESET confirm the general need for integrative, mainstreamed and crosscutting resources for gender integration into research and curricula. Gender mainstreaming seems to be very challenging, as it provokes political debates around the subjects of quotas, meritocracy, excellence and "neutrality" of selection. According to the results of RESET analysis, women – teachers and researchers spend more time on teaching activities than on research, and consequently, are less recognized as contributors to excellence. Therefore, one of the final components of the institutional assessment was a comprehensive analysis of the concept of scientific excellence and its reflection within different environments in academia: including vision of decision-makers, teachers, researchers and administrative staff, focusing on responsible research and innovation criteria and developing more inclusive indicators.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The preliminary findings of RESET expose the need for organisational, structural and cultural change, which leans on the further intersectional analysis. Moreover, the development of tools, guidelines or standards at the level of RESET or any other multinational project requires an additional contextualization to ensure its local convenience and actual usage.

- In terms of institutional support, the impact from establishing Gender Equality Boards – GEBs, as institutional steering committees, on the subjects of gender equality and diversity should be further analyzed, as well as their involvement in development of inclusive indicators for scientific excellence. Their support should be sought to improve collection of gender-disaggregated and intersectional data, which could not only foster more efficient acknowledgment of decision-makers, but would also enable better identification of problems and elaboration of coherent corrective measures within GEP.
- On their way to more inclusive and sustainable societies, universities have to be examples if not leaders in terms of combating social issues: to increase the presence of women in decision-making positions, make different areas of research, teaching and university administration more attractive and accessible to the persons of the under-represented sex and manifest the consequent transparency in recruitment. All of the challenges present the basis of the excellent academic environment, which contributes to the positive image of the European Research Area.
- GEP implementing universities have to underline the institutional support towards tackling the issue of gender-based violence (GBV), discrimination and stereotypes. One of the possible solutions is establishment and enhancement of systems for reporting, statistics and prevention.
- The more efforts will be made to train the next generation in an inclusive and sustainable way (including intersectional training), the easier it will be to analyse the impact of research and innovation turned towards society. The combination of gender inclusive and non-discriminatory communication along with transversal presence of the gender category in all disciplines could contribute to the reduction of stereotypes and effects of unconscious bias.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

First RESET project outputs represent tools and guidelines that favour equality within multiple dimensions of academia and research:

- Development of a comprehensive template for a Gender Equality survey that was run at the first phase of the GEP preparation.
- Checklist for GEP monitoring and evaluation adapted to the post-Horizon Europe requirements, which enables HEIs to evaluate their accomplishment in terms of internal and external GE policy making.
- Tools for gradual integration of gender into research and support for gender mainstreaming: Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) guidelines, GIA checklist and protocol.
- Development of a toolbox for gender-neutral, diversity-oriented institutional communication: with this tool, universities may carry out a self-analysis that reveals gaps or problems in communication strategies and find methods necessary to increase their diverse reflection of the institutional environments.
- Co-design starter kit, which includes an introduction and guidelines for application of co-design methods tailored to the RESET dimensions, encouraging and enabling participants to envision, design and implement gender equality measures and actions in HEIs in an inclusive and collaborative manner.
- Communication actions targeted at students and personnel – webinar dedicated to the tackling of issues related to the GBV and digital campaigns aimed at promoting girls' and women visibility in science and particularly within STEM disciplines.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The first 15 months of the project were almost entirely dedicated to the analysis of partners' institutions. Due to the combination of multiple methods and approaches (survey, interviews, focus groups, collection and analysis of data, benchmarking of tools, procedures and systems), the partners were able to identify the areas of concern and evaluate the general situation in terms of GE and diversity through the prism of intersectionality. The following categories were taken into consideration: gender, age, disability, ethnicity, work contract, academic age, and statutory inequalities. Although the focal points of the study were administrative and scientific careers, particular attention was paid to the doctorate level and entrance to research careers.

With the progressive implementation of co-design methods, all RESET partners had complementary tools that provided more specific insights into the local recruitment and promotion policies. At the same time, application of the co-design approach seems to be an excellent solution for the exchange and development of good and best practices for work-life balance and occupational equality (recruitment, career advancement, access to decision-making positions), and provides a margin for local adaptation.

The project's strive to be compliant with Open Data Pilot requirements is manifested via the preparation and constant updating of the Data Management Plan, as well as via its engagement to publish all open to public results via the Zenodo platform.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	RESET (Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together)
COORDINATOR	University of Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France reset@u-bordeau.fr
CONSORTIUM	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki – AUTH – Thessaloniki, Greece Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques – ScPo – Paris, France Ruhr University Bochum – RUB – Bochum, Germany University of Bordeaux – UBx – Bordeaux, France University of Łódź – UL – Lodz, 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)
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WEBSITE	https://wereset.eu/
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Contact Marion Paoletti and/or Maryna Radchuk via reset@u-bordeaux.fr
FURTHER READING	Garraio C, Freitas JP, Magalhães SI and Matias M (2022) Work-Life Conflict Among Higher Education Institution Workers' During COVID-19: A Demands-Resources Approach. <i>Front. Sociol.</i> 7:856613. doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2022.856613



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