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for EU-level stakeholders
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Gender Equality
GE ACADEMY

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND:
HARMONISING CAPACITIES FOR GENDER EQUALITY PLANS IN THE ERA

INTRODUCTION

Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) have been recognised as an effective instrument for Research and Innovation (R&I) and Higher Education (HE) institutions to tackle the objectives of the European Research Area (ERA) for mainstreaming gender in research through comprehensive sets of actions implemented along clear timelines and monitored through specific indicators. Considered a transformative tool "to achieve long-term and sustainable advancement towards Gender equality in R&I" (Ljubljana Declaration, 2021), GEPs have been made an eligibility criterion for accessing Horizon Europe funding and a legal requirement in 13 EU Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (SWG GRI, 2021).

Their implementation, however, requires significant human and financial resources, as well as capabilities in terms of knowledge (about the institution, about gender and organisational change…) and skills (to facilitate and monitor change) which are rarely readily available at implementing institutions, undermining the capacity of GEPs to support sustainable change. Additionally, these resources are unevenly distributed across institutions, disciplines and countries, depending largely on whether GEPs have been made a legal requirement and/or promoted through the National Action Plans (NAPs) adopted by ERA countries, and whether assistance is made available to implementing organisations. In particular, "widening countries", and more specifically those from Central and Eastern Europe, are reported to have adopted less comprehensive policies to advance gender equality and the gender dimension in R&I and HE, thus limiting their ability to close the gender and innovation gaps (SWGGRI, 2021). This results in far fewer Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) having adopted a GEP in this region to date, and in the strategies enforced at national level, to cover a narrower scope of issues.

A robust policy framework is in place at EU level, underpinned by the EU Strategy for gender equality 2020-2025[1], the Competitiveness Council Conclusions on Advancing Gender Equality in the European Research Area of 1 December 2015 and the Competitiveness Council Conclusions on Future Governance of the European Research Area of 26 November 2021[2], the Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in the EU[3], the recently adopted Ljubljana Declaration and the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, and supported by regularly updated data (She Figures, 2021)[4] and tools (GEAR, 2016, 2022)[5].

[1] European Commission (2020): A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025
[2] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14308-2021-INIT/en/pdf
[3] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13701-2021-INIT/en/pdf
[4] She Figures 2021, Publication office of the European Union
[5] EIGE: Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) toolkit (updated version to be released in March, 2022)

Despite this policy framework, this policy brief calls the attention of EU-level stakeholders, notably relevant services from the European Commission and the European Institute for Gender Equality, to **capacity-building challenges ahead**. It aims to support harmonised efforts towards building capacities for GEPs in the ERA, leaving no one behind. The brief elaborates upon the extensive mapping of gender training activities in the realm of R&I and HE carried out by GE Academy, and accounts of the main lessons learnt through the design and delivery of 60 capacity-building sessions in a variety of formats (in-person and online training sessions, interactive workshops, webinars, summer schools and Distributive Open Collaborative Courses - DOCC), to diverse audiences and on a wide range of topics. It highlights the necessity to keep providing resources for building capacities for GEP, to address regional and other disparities in terms of their availability, and to promote robust quality standards for activities aimed at enhancing such capacities, drawing actionable recommendations to achieve those aims.

ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE

Since the publication of the Gender training manifesto (2006), and the Madrid Declaration on gender training and gender expertise (2011) launched by the QUING project (FP7), no advanced standard for building capacities on advancing gender equality has emerged at EU level, despite clear recommendations in that regard[6] and the continuous growth of capacity-building needs as a result of gender mainstreaming. Instead, the extensive mapping carried out by GE Academy regarding gender training in the R&I and HE sectors[7], documented a fragmented capacity-building offer: a variety of suppliers were found to be operating with different degrees of proficiency, along uneven quality standards and where the 3 ERA objectives for gendering R&I and HE[8] were addressed to very different extents.

Although gender training is part of the definition of the GEP promoted under Horizon Europe, capacity-building efforts remain insufficiently addressed in most GEPs due to scarce resources, and too often limited to ad-hoc, non-mandatory awareness-raising sessions disjoined from broader, institutionalised on-the-job training programmes and curricula. Moreover, those usually cover a narrow scope of issues and are therefore unable to support GEPs addressing the full range of issues at stake, including fighting gender-based violence and sexual harassment, and integrating the gender dimension in research and teaching.

It was GE Academy's overarching goal to contribute to harmonising practices and enhancing capacity-building resources, with a focus on supporting sustainable GEPs. To achieve this, the available expertise was pooled to design contents based on consistent data and inclusive definitions, mobilising a wide set of peer-reviewed standardised methods validated by external experts, and to deliver sessions tailored to a variety of audiences. Emerging innovative methods inspired from social design and feminist pedagogy were privileged. Since a growing community of gender trainers, committed to high quality criteria, is deemed necessary to support the systematisation of fully-fledged gender training programmes as part of GEPs, GE Academy developed, tested and assessed the implementation of quality standards for gender training, summarised in a booklet aimed at guiding trainers, as well as RPOs and RFOs, towards quality assurance and high-quality training delivery. This booklet[9] contains 38 annotated standards to be applied to the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of capacity-building sessions and 14 criteria defining the profile of a qualified gender trainer in terms of a) basic expertise, b) methodological skills and c) personal and social competence.

The roll-out of the GE Academy programme also evidenced that different degrees of ownership over ERA priorities, varying levels of experience with gender equality planning and mainstreaming and various levels of resistance towards structural change or the challenging of a gender-neutral understanding of research excellence are largely bound to institutional specifics, as well as to sectora, regional or national differences. Specific efforts were

[6] See, for instance: EIGE (2016): Gender Training. Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit, Vilnius

[7] https://ge-academy.eu/ge-uploads/repository/GEAcademy_D1.1-State-of-play-map-on-GE-in-research-capacity-building.pdf

[8] Removing legal and other barriers to recruitment and career progression of female researchers (1), addressing gender imbalances in decision making(2) and strengthening the gender dimension in research (3).

[9] https://ge-academy.eu/quality-standards/

delivered to address those differences, tailoring gender training contents to the needs of different types of organisations (RPOs and RFOs), disciplines, degrees of advancement in setting up gender equality strategies, and addressing the status quo in widening countries, including those from Central and Eastern Europe. GE Academy also took stock of the most advanced practices and reflections on how to address resistances to institutional change, building change agents' capacities to address them as an integral part of the process of change itself[10]. Similar efforts were brought to build capacities for the design and implementation of inclusive GEPs, mainstreaming an intersectional lens to cover a broader scope of inequalities and bias. This dual commitment to harmonisation and inclusiveness is reflected in the open-source, easily replicable formats, contents and participatory methods and tools made available by GE Academy, which constitute a major contribution to the field, at a time when RPOs and RFOs are put to the test of designing holistic GEPs.

The experience of GE Academy in developing and rolling out an EU-wide train-of-trainers programme supports the necessity to step up efforts for ensuring the quality and availability of capacity-building resources to all RPOs and RFOs involved in designing and implementing GEPs. This is of utmost importance:

a) To prevent maintaining different clusters of ERA countries in terms of their capability and advancement in achieving gender equality and integrating the gender dimension, and to ensure that both gender and innovation gaps are bridged.

b) To avoid the implementation of GEP related criteria in Horizon Europe to be turned into a mere tick-the-box exercise due to lacking capacities for the design, implementation and monitoring of holistic plans.

c) To disseminate references, co-designed and tested quality standards, updated open-source contents for gender training, and to facilitate their uptake and further enhancement.

This cannot be achieved without the continuous involvement and support of EU institutions and increasing coordination among relevant EU-led initiatives.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As decisive steps have been taken towards the generalisation of comprehensive GEPs across the ERA, building capacities for structural change and ensuring that no country, sector or type of R&I and HE organisation is left behind should receive continuous attention. Below, we formulate five recommendations aimed at ensuring an inclusive generalisation of GEPs, strengthening existing capabilities, bridging knowledge and implementation gaps among ERA countries and developing the use of reflexive and innovative methods and standards as those designed by GE Academy for transferring and circulating knowledge and skills on advancing gender equality and the gender dimension in R&I and HE.

Maintaining and further expanding an ERA-wide community of highly skilled gender trainers

To ensure that the growing capacity-building needs of RPOs and RFOs will be met with a qualified training offer equipped with sufficient credentials, methodological resources and an updated knowledge of most recent policy and developments, we recommend:

- The network of 35 highly skilled, vetted and trained gender trainers built by GE Academy to be maintained and further expanded. This requires the European Commission to provide this network with a) the formal framework to keep operating in and b) (online) communication tools for this Community of Practice, which is also an epistemic community, to interact and keep promoting highest quality standards, while being easily identified and mobilised by RPOs and RFOs to meet their training needs. Whereas

[10] https://ge-academy.eu/dealing-with-resistances/

some of the recommendations below offer opportunities for a sustainable framework to be set up, endorsing and pro-actively mobilising and engaging with this network from the side of the European Commission would be already an important step.

- To leverage any certification system to be created following one of the models expounded in GE Academy position paper on the certification system (either focused on trainers or training providers) as a source of legitimacy and capabilities enhancement for the members of this training community, evidencing peer-validated proficiency and responding to highest quality criteria. Depending on the certification model adopted, this would entail ensuring the swift certification: a) of the pool of trainers from 21 countries operating in 22 languages built under GE Academy or b) of the GE Academy community as a training provider in its own right.

- To consider the role of the future European Centre of Excellence on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation[11] and of the EU GE certification system in R&I and HE currently being studied by the CASPER project, in further maintaining and enhancing this gender training community.[12]

Taking up and promoting GE Academy quality standards for gender training

The above recommendation cannot be separated from the relevance for the European Commission to subscribe to and promote the quality standards co-designed and tested by GE Academy, and thoroughly described in the recently released GE Academy Quality standards booklet[13]. This can be achieved through:

- Endorsing those quality standards, as well as the quality criteria set for gender training profiles, and disseminating them in whichever setting capacity-building for GEPs is at stake, notably on the EC webpage devoted to gender in research, in the updated version of the GEAR tool and when facilitating information on GEP implementation to its own services, to National Contact Points (NCPs) and to potential GEP implementers.

- Adopting and promoting those standards to be considered a core mission of any EU-wide GEP support structure to be established in the nearest future, as the European Centre of Excellence on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation.

- Systematically using those standards for assessing the performance of Member States and scrutinised RPOs and RFOs in designing and delivering holistic, inclusive and participatory gender training programmes and/or selecting qualified trainers.

Systematising the implementation of fully-fledged gender training programmes

Promoting quality standards for gender training should go hand in hand with EU stakeholders supporting the systematisation of holistic and inclusive gender training plans as an integral part of any advanced GEP. This can be achieved through:

- Placing a greater emphasis on capacity-building in the mandatory process requirements for the GEPs to be adopted under Horizon Europe, highlighting the importance to a) respect quality criteria set by GE Academy; b) to ensure the mobilisation of participatory and experienced-based methodologies; c) to ensure a mix of online and in-person formats, as online capacity-building activities cannot be fully substituted to the pedagogical value of in-person interactions and d) to address both individual and organisational resistances to change and to cover intersecting inequalities.
- Providing additional guidance to GEP implementing organisations in R&I and HE, to ensure the sustainability of their gender training plans, explicitly encouraging their institutionalisation as part of regular on-the-job training programmes and insisting on the importance to formally acknowledge the skills and knowledge gained by the participants to these activities

[11] Such Centre of Excellence will be funded under Horizon Europe (WIDERA Work Programme)
[12] https://www.caspergender.eu/
[13] https://ge-academy.eu/quality-standards/

Making gender training in R&I and HE more disruptive

Due to capacity-building activities being considered both a precondition and an enabling factor for achieving sustainable change in research and academia, they are not usually seen as bearing the potential for being disruptive measures for gender equality and integrating the gender dimension (See: GENDERACTION Policy Brief n°13, 2019). This is due to a large proportion of gender training activities failing to adopt experience-based and innovative participatory methods, to engage with intersecting inequalities and area- and context-specific features, and to be articulated through comprehensive and holistic capacity-building programmes responding to high quality standards. Hence, it is recommended:

- For EIGE, to build upon the Compilation of all capacity-building and train-the-trainers materials developed by GE Academy by providing access through the updated GEAR tool to: a) selected participatory methods and tools, including those inspired from social design and mobilised to tackle resistances; b) intersectionality- and diversity-sensitive training contents; c) capacity-building contents addressing the specificities of widening countries or particular disciplinary areas (such as robotics, AI…) covered by GE Academy (including Distributive Online Collaborative Courses and Summer Schools' materials).

- For both the European Commission and EIGE, to emphasise the disruptive potential of gender training as a trigger for organisational, research and pedagogical innovation, if mobilising adequate methods and contents, and fostering epistemological inclusiveness through acknowledging a diversity of knowledge on gender and combining different knowledge transfer formats.

- For EU stakeholders, acknowledging the disruptive potential of gender training should be based on the understanding that capacity-building for the design and implementation of GEPs aiming at bringing structural changes in R&I and HE organisations, is substantially different from standard capacity-building for gender mainstreaming. The former intends to build up specific skills and generate participation and consensus, rather than specific expertise among a few.

Mainstreaming high-quality gender training in upcoming EU initiatives in the realm of R&I and HE

Stepping up efforts to mainstream gender capacity-building across the ERA and enhancing standards for those efforts to deliver their full potential requires to proceed cumulatively, fully integrating capacity-building in a broader, consistent EU discourse on mainstreaming gender equality and the gender dimension in R&I and HE, and articulating the legacy of GE Academy with important forthcoming initiatives.

To achieve this, it is recommended:

- To entrust the future Centre of Excellence on inclusive gender equality in R&I[14] with: a) the monitoring of gender training efforts in terms of the availability of capacity-building resources, knowledge and skills across EU Member states and Associated Countries, and consideration for context- and area-specific features and intersecting inequalities, so as to ensure inclusiveness; b) the promotion and enforcement of quality standards for gender training and quality criteria for gender trainers profiles developed by GE Academy. This is fully consistent with the objectives of the Centre of excellence to advance knowledge, policy and practice on inclusive gender equality in research and innovation institutions across Europe, with an intersectional, geographically inclusive, and multi-sectoral approach, and to reduce disparities across Member States.

- For gender training to be integrated in the future EU Gender Equality Certification system, for which different scenarios are being tested under the CASPER project: a) gender training efforts carried out by GEP institutions should

[14] Topic ID: HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ERA-01-80

be duly assessed against the quality standards developed by GE Academy as part of the award or certification system to be adopted; b) the proficiency of gender trainers or gender training providers and/or the adherence of gender training to such quality standards should itself be object of a specific certification scheme, following one of the models thoughtfully described and assessed in the GE Academy position paper on the certification system.

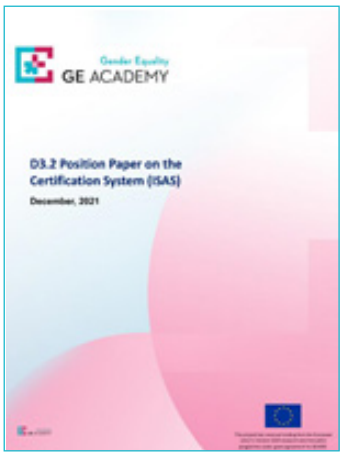
- To include comprehensive and sustained gender training efforts in the evaluation criteria used for the Award for Academic Gender Equality Champion foreseen by the Horizon Program 2021-2022, that is meant to "be a booster and complement to the requirement for HE and research organizations applying to Horizon Europe to have a Gender Equality Plan in Place".

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

Below are the main outputs of GE Academy, publicly available on the project website, which support this brief:

The GE Academy quality standards booklet defines a set of principles for gender training, and quality standards to be applied to the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of capacity-building sessions. For each standard, brief comments about their relevance and conditions of use are provided. The booklet also defines quality criteria providing guidance for the selection of gender trainers' profiles in terms of basic expertise, methodological skills and personal and social competence.

GE Academy also provides a compilation of all the materials (scripts, PPT presentations, handouts) for the respective capacity-building formats developed by GE Academy: 22 training sessions, 15 workshops, 14 webinars, 14 modules within the DOCCs (Distributed Open Collaborative Courses), 3 Summer Schools as well as 3 train-the-trainers sessions. Those original contents, tested with a variety of audiences and in a wide range of settings, do not only cover all objectives set for priority 4 of the ERA, but also address the needs of specific contexts (including widening countries or the COVID-19 pandemic), provide instruments for integrating gender in various research areas (STEMs, Health & Medicine, Mobility, Human-computer interactions, Robotics) and in-depth knowledge about change facilitation or tackling resistances.



This position paper defines and explores in detail four models for the certification of Gender Training activities in R&I and HE: Trainers' certification (1); Trainings' certification (2); certification of training providers (3) and certification of subsidiary training providers (4). For each model, a scenario indicating how the model could be put in place is outlined, and advantages and disadvantages of this solution are thoroughly reviewed, taking into account the potential interest of both the supply (trainers and training providers) and demand (commissioning institutions). Model 3 focuses on the more general capability of the certified organisation to provide adequate quality training, and could rely upon existing certification schemes as ISO. It is also presented as a potential continuation of GE-Academy as a certified training provider. The position paper offers recommendations, providing general guidance for the choice of the certification model and the assessment of its feasibility.

Other relevant outputs:

State-of-play map on GE in research capacity-building (D1.1), 2019
Trainers profiles and contacts (D6.1), 2021

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