

Chapter 10

Promoting Structural Change in Small Organisations: Strengths, Resistance and the Quest for Excellence

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Abstract

Research-funding organisations (RFOs) and research-performing organisations (RPOs) are in a privileged position to significantly reshape the research and innovation landscape – not only by implementing gender equality plans (GEPs) as institutions but also in terms of the relationship and potential impact of these plans on the institutional context in which they are embedded. This paper reflects on the content and methodology of the GEP implementation at two RFOs and one non-university RPOs. Grounded in the knowledge base of each organisation, the analysis provides insights and expert feedback in order to understand to what extent and under which conditions GEPs are a systematic and comprehensive policy in promoting structural change that has a high potential impact on research policy definition and funding. Reviewing the internal assessment phase, the preliminary steps in the design process as well as the implementation and monitoring phase, the analysis detects both the strengths and challenges or resistance connected to external and internal factors as well as the specific strategies that small organisations employ to promote and sustain organisational and cultural change.

Keywords: Research-funding organisations; research-performing organisations; gender equality plans; small organisations; institutional change; community of practice

**Overcoming the Challenge of Structural Change in Research Organisations:
A Reflexive Approach to Gender Equality, 181–198**



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doi:[10.1108/978-1-80262-119-820221011](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80262-119-820221011)

Introduction

In the framework of the TARGET project, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini (FGB) is the supporting partner of two research-funding organisations (RFOs) and one research-performing organisation (RPO). The three organisations in this case study, the Research Promotion Foundation – Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF) (Cyprus), the Regional Foundation for Biomedical Research – FRRB (Italy) and the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy – ELIAMEP (Greece), although acting in different legal, economic and social environments all have slightly different nuances of the Mediterranean culture in common (Calloni, 2019; Forest, Arnaut, & Mergaert, 2016). During the four years of the project, all three organisations worked on the definition, adoption and implementation of their gender equality plans (GEPs), which are similar in some specific aspects. The three organisations represent a heterogeneous group, with two of them aiming at initiating gender equality policies in RFOs through specific steering instruments that have a direct or indirect influence on funded organisations. All three are small in size (ranging from less than 10 to not more than 100 employees), exhibit a lower level of organisational complexity than other TARGET partners (e.g. universities) but have a strict level of connections with the highest regional or national political authorities in the field of research and science. RIF (Cyprus) is a national RFO, founded in 1996 at the initiative of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus with a view to promoting scientific and technological research in Cyprus. It is a private, non-profit legal entity that is registered as a foundation and acts as the only national agency responsible for the support and promotion of research, technological development and innovation in Cyprus. FRRB (Italy) is a regional funding body for biomedical research, a non-for-profit organisation established in October 2011 by the Lombardy Region, an entity governed by public law with the aim of promoting and supporting scientific research in Life Sciences in the Lombardy Region. ELIAMEP is an independent, non-profit and policy-oriented research and training institute based in Athens and founded in 1988. Its mission is to conduct research and training and to provide a forum for open dialogue and deliberation on topical matters in European and foreign policy.

This chapter presents the results of the three-year pathway to initiating sustainable institutional change in these organisations through the TARGET project and embedding the GEP process within the institutions. It describes the specific strategies adopted by the implementing partners so far, looking more specifically at the challenges faced in the different contexts. The analysis is based on documentary evidence: we draw on the TARGET project's documentation over three years as well as our own reflections on this process as supporting partner of the organisations. We conclude by highlighting the strategy of building consensus at multiple levels to achieve organisational transformation in small organisations as well as the need to focus on the dynamics of the involvement of different stakeholders. In addition, when taking a closer look at the policy framework for integrating gender equality into an organisation's activities, it appears also relevant to account for developments in the research-funding mechanism. As an exploratory

study seeking to identify different approaches, the analysis of the three cases is not comparative in the conventional sense. The innovative aspect of the analysis stands in its focus on GEP definition and implementation in small organisations, concentrating on their specificities and the importance of external push factors to support the implementation.

Policy Framework

Changes to gender equality in research and innovation (R&I) reflect wider societal changes but are also directly affected by a range of influences, including government legislation, regulatory frameworks, action plans and strategies as well as committed individuals (Bencivenga & Drew, 2021; Linková, Mladenić, Papp, & Saldovala, 2007; Lipinsky, 2014). The role of external gender equality legal and regulatory frameworks in both fostering and shaping the contours of GEP development and implementation is however an important factor. In Italy, Cyprus and Greece, there is no GEP requirement instituted at the national level through law, policy or strategy that is compliant with the Horizon Europe requirement (see also Anagnostou in this volume). However, expertise in the field has been developed as a result of the participation of many R&I institutions in Horizon 2020 Science with and for Society (SwafS) calls (Bencivenga, Siri, Leone, & Taramasso, 2021).

In Greece, the existing legislation for promoting gender equality is based on the State Constitution of 1975 and its 2001 revision, which entails three legal provisions that concentrate on gender equality and condemn discrimination on the ground of sex. Since 1975, several important pieces of legislation have been introduced, while the country ratified several international treaties. As a result of the country's accession to the European Union (EU) in 1981, EU rules and regulations for the promotion of gender equality became part of Greek Law, leading to various types of legislative and other actions, including the modernisation of the Family Law in 1983, which brought significant changes to the position of women in society (Tsaoussis-Hatzis, 2003). The revision of the State Constitution in 2001 provided that the implementation of positive measures which promote gender equality do not constitute discriminatory acts towards sex and are necessary for the eradication of gender inequalities, thus constituting the foundation for achieving gender equality in a substantive form (Anagnostou, 2013). Gender-mainstreaming policy and action in Greece has focused on issues of employment, education, health, domestic violence, access to public administration, equity in representation and women's empowerment. These policy areas are developed in the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016–2020 and promoted in collaboration with representatives of civil society, academia and public administration to define concrete objectives and synergies with stakeholders (Konsta, 2018). Priority 4 of the National Action Plan for R&I within the European Research Area (ERA) strategy stresses horizontal and vertical segregation and the fact that almost no gender equality policies had been implemented as of 2015 (Ministry of Interior, 2018). The description of the status quo (reference year 2015) depicts a lack of gender equality policies in

general. Law 4604/2019 (Art. 21) refers for the first time to GEPs as key tools that can be used by public and private organisations to promote gender equality. Organisations that adopt a GEP may be rewarded with an ‘Equality Badge’ (*Sima Isotitas*) by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE, Greece’s main public body responsible for implementing gender equality policy).

In Cyprus, the Constitution has a section on gender equality, focusing on the equal treatment of women and prohibiting discrimination (Art. 28). In 2017, the Cyprus Directorate General for European Programmes, Coordination, and Development published the National Policy for the ERA 2016–2020 ([Republic of Cyprus, 2017](#)) with the aim of increasing awareness for gender equality throughout the country. Cyprus has adopted a legislative framework for the protection and promotion of equality in sectors such as the workplace, family relations, inheritance and property issues and has also adopted legislation for tackling violence against women and combatting racial and other discrimination. Equality action plans include policies for equal distribution of care responsibilities, harmonisation of career and family obligations, access to affordable and good quality childcare services, equal access to education, training, health and justice services, combatting all forms of gender-based violence and elimination of inequalities, discrimination and stereotypes.

In Italy, alongside the formal statement for the recognition of gender equality and non-discrimination in Article 3 of the Constitution, the National Code of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men – which was established by Legislative Decree No 198 of 2006 – is considered the Italian legal framework on gender equality and women’s empowerment ([Gottardi & Calafà, 2009](#)). The Code gathers 11 laws on equal opportunities in a single text, with a view to rationalising and harmonising the current legislative provisions on gender equality and regulates the promotion of equal opportunities between women and men in the areas of ethical, social and economic relations and in civil and political rights. Italy has a legal requirement for national, regional and local public authorities and non-profit institutions (including RPOs) to adopt a triennial Positive Action Plan (PAP) aimed at removing the obstacles that hamper the full realisation of equal opportunities at work. In 2006, the Italian National Code of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men made it mandatory by law (Legislative Decree 198) for all public administrations, including the 96 state universities, to produce a PAP to remove obstacles preventing the full realisation of equality between women and men. An Italian university’s PAP is prepared and implemented by an internal Unique Guarantee Committee for Equal Opportunities in Public Administrations for workers’ wellbeing and against discriminations (CUG), established in 2010. In its PAP, the university outlines the positive actions planned for the following three years to promote gender equality. There is no common template for a PAP, which takes a narrative form and is similar to a GEP. Until recently, the GEP requirement did not provide any guidelines, budget, building blocks or sanctions. However, in July 2021, the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) published and disseminated guidelines (*Vademecum*) for the preparation and drafting of GEPs in universities ([CRUI, 2021](#)).

Approaches, Content and Methodology of Implementing GEPs in Small Organisations

RIF, ELIAMEP and FRRB were supported in the development and implementation of their GEPs by the methodologies and tools defined in the framework of the TARGET project. The TARGET approach includes the implementation of a gender equality audit, the identification of a gender agent, the constitution of a community of practice (CoP), the identification of monitoring indicators, competence-building and awareness-raising events as well as participation in transnational meetings with representatives from all project partners as occasions for mutual learning and exchange. The first key challenge was the lack of available information, data and indicators. In small organisations, the matter of collecting and sharing (sensitive) information is a crucial point: all three of the organisations faced difficulties in collecting complete data, especially about salaries, employment contracts and promotion processes. This challenge is explained by the fact that RIF, ELIAMEP and FRRB are relatively small institutions where most staff members know each other, making privacy very difficult to maintain when data is collected and disaggregated. Due to the lack of previous gender policies within the organisations and, consequently, the lack of sex-disaggregated data, the main priority of each of the organisations was to define a clear policy for the GEPs and raise awareness within the institution and beyond.

The adoption and implementation of a GEP creates space for a systematic consideration and discussion of gender and equality issues within organisations—including data collection. It also provides a framework for mutual learning among relevant stakeholders and starting a process for systematically reflecting on gender inequalities and unconscious bias as well as catalysing cultural and structural changes. The GEPs at RIF, ELIAMEP and FRRB all propose systematic data collection and several measures to tackle diverse issues in relation to gender equality, the most popular of which focus on career progression, developing gender sensitive language, briefing evaluators of research proposals on gender bias and the importance of a gender focus in research as a way to promoting excellence. In addition, the reflection in groups dedicated to the implementation of GEP activities aimed at identifying inequalities and introducing institutional solutions to address the problems; it also helped to develop a critical attitude towards whatever was presented as gender neutral in the organisation, both questioning this neutrality and/or gender blindness.

While the three organisations focused on different tools and strategies, they all used similar approaches and methodologies to build a long-term process of organisational change aimed at embedding a gender-sensitive culture throughout their internal operations as well as in the approach and content of their activities. Despite the wide differences between their stated goals, priorities and activities, some priority areas of action and significant developments can be highlighted for the three organisations.

Internal Procedures and Data Collection

The three organisations had no previous specific gender equality policies, due not least to their small numbers of staff and the limited and weak national policies in place in their respective countries to promote gender equality and encourage or require academic, R&I organisations to take measures to pursue it. Consequently, most of the internal documents did not specifically refer to gender equality, and formalised policies for counteracting gender bias and promoting gender equality when it came to recruitment or promotion were lacking. Main operative documents (internal rules of operation, ethics in research guidelines, presidential decree) often referred to meritocracy and non-discrimination but not to gender equality. As a consequence, gender issues did not emerge in their external communication strategies. At the same time, the formal endorsement of a general principle of equality and non-discrimination contained in most operating documents formed a favourable substratum of pre-existing organisational norms and values upon which to build an explicit commitment to gender equality. This led to a formal inclusion of a reference to gender-related issues in internal procedures. FRRB has analysed its internal regulations and procedures and decided to focus on its Ethics Code by introducing a statement on gender equality, while RIF has included a gender-sensitive statement in all calls for proposals issued by the Foundation as well as other related documents (e.g. Guide for Evaluators, Proposal Submission Forms). ELIAMEP has included an Equal Opportunity Principle in its internal operating rules (IRO) and Code of Ethics to ensure that an overall gender-balanced participation is achieved in the recruitment process and in top management positions and to introduce specific gender-neutral language into official documents.

Since collecting and monitoring relevant gender-related data was one of the main objectives of the GEPs, the three organisations have been building up their corresponding institutional capacity by starting a process of collecting information and statistics as well as planning and establishing systematic procedures and information systems to improve collection processes and address data gaps. As already mentioned, monitoring sex-disaggregated data at all levels has proven to be demanding, and the three organisations are still working on their procedures for the regular collection of data to monitor trends. Progress can, however, be reported concerning sex-disaggregated data related to funding activities. RIF has collected data for the period 2017–2020 regarding the female coordinators of submitted proposals and funded projects and expects this process to be facilitated by the establishment of a new information system within the institution. FRRB has created a database to include the data of applicants and grant awardees disaggregated by sex. The database, which collects the results of all projects disaggregated by sex, will support the analysis of gender gaps in research funding and aid the planning of tailored actions to promote gender equal participation. ELIAMEP has started monitoring the number of projects and proposals that incorporate a gender dimension. In particular, it has produced a new project information template which all researchers will have to complete for each project they implement. The information that they now need to provide includes whether one of the main

focus of their projects is gender or whether it includes the gender dimension in research content. Over the next year, ELIAMEP will thus be able to gather data on this aspect, as regular and systematic collection of data is seen overall as relevant for the long-term sustainability of its GEP.

The TARGET project's reflexive approach has supported all three organisations in the process of deciding (1) which kind of sex-disaggregated data should be collected as a priority and (2) how this should be permanently integrated into data collection systems. The gender teams and CoPs in the organisations had the opportunity to share their views on how deeply the absence of sex-disaggregated data might influence strategic decisions and daily choices. The implementation of the gender audit has been not only a preliminary step for the development of the GEPs but also an interesting reflexive exercise on the importance of sex-disaggregated data collection to overcome a gender-blind description of the organisation.

Competence-Building, Awareness-Raising and Funding

Competence-building and awareness-raising activities (training and workshops) have addressed the importance of the gender dimension, both in the composition of staff, decision-making bodies and research teams as well as in the content of training and research activities. As emerged in the monitoring reports, and before the TARGET project, gender issues were not considered as a priority within the three organisations – due to a lack of knowledge, expertise and resources or an unconscious gender bias at various levels. As a consequence, awareness-raising activities were considered a crucial measure to influence decision-making and promote gender-related issues. Specific training events or meetings were planned to increase awareness, link gender equality to scientific excellence and act as a reminder that the gender perspective is an awarding criterion in European and international projects. At FRRB, specific training tailored to the needs and structure of the organisation helped fill the knowledge gaps in terms of gender equality policies and provided an insight into the gender impact of different policies and political initiatives. In addition, the exceptional situation in Italy (and Lombardy in particular) since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led FRRB to organise a roundtable on the scientific, social and political aspects of this health emergency from a gender equality point of view. At ELIAMEP, the integration of the gender dimension into research content was implemented mainly through the organisation of workshops for young researchers in the organisation and other research centres and universities. RIF also organised an information session for staff on the implementation of a sexual harassment policy. Funding activities were also implemented to promote the integration of the gender dimension into research content. These activities mainly addressed gender-related issues in calls for proposals and aimed at increasing gender equality awareness among peer reviewers. FRRB promoted a meeting to raise awareness on the importance of the gender dimension not only in the composition of research teams but also in the research activities themselves and how it can affect the overall organisation of a research institution. It also promoted a mandatory 'Gender Issues Survey' for all

institutions participating in calls for proposals in order to keep track of the gender policies in place in the participating organisations. In addition, the calls now clearly request that project proposals address the gender dimension in the design and implementation of the research as well as the gender balance in the composition of the research team. Regarding proposal submissions, RIF suggests that researchers set up research teams which are as gender balanced as possible and prompts research teams to describe whether and how gender issues are relevant to their proposals. Informative videos have been uploaded to the foundation's website and a reference has been included in the 'Guide for Evaluators' with the aim of improving evaluators' awareness of gender issues and gender integration in the proposals.

Networking and Dissemination

Networking and dissemination activities include presentations in conferences and events, publication of policy papers and academic articles. Many of these are intended to support a gender equality discourse and the adoption of GEPs at the national level. By adopting a GEP, ELIAMEP set the trend and encouraged other research organisations to do the same, particularly in the light of the law recently passed in Greece (Law 4604/2019 on 'Promoting substantive equality between the sexes and combatting gender-based violence') that for the first time provides for the adoption of GEPs by public and private enterprises as a key tool to promote gender equality. In this regard, ELIAMEP published two policy papers. The first provides an overview of the EU policy over the last 20 years to develop a comprehensive policy of gender mainstreaming in the area of gender equality in science, research and higher education. The second was published in response to the Ministry of Education call for ideas and proposals for a new bill for higher education and Greek universities, arguing for the need to incorporate and mainstream gender in the higher education reform, and advocated the development of GEPs. ELIAMEP also provided a practical guide on how higher education and research organisations can develop GEPs in order to transfer the knowledge it had acquired in the TARGET project to Greek universities (ELIAMEP, 2021). Position papers have also been drafted by FRRB (on the state-of-the-art in gender equality in Lombardy, national gender equality policy in research and the status of gender equality policy implementation in main hospitals and research centres that collaborate with FRRB) and will be published in 2022.

Building Consensus: A Strategy for Institutional Change

Attempts to introduce change in institutional contexts where power structures and dynamics are entrenched with gender inequalities inevitably provoke internal resistance at various levels (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013). Studies on structural change in R&I organisations stress the importance of top management support (Ferguson, 2021). However, our analysis highlights the importance of both top-down and bottom-up commitment, and the interplay of both. Whilst top-level management commitment is considered a key factor in facilitating the

implementation of interventions, the involvement of all employees and a larger community of actors and stakeholders is an essential factor for successful implementation in small RFOs. Given the small numbers, employees have the opportunity to learn about the process, and many of them get involved from the outset. This strategy raises awareness for the topic, improves acceptance, increases motivation and decreases resistance, thereby greatly facilitating the acceptance of planned measures amongst staff. The willingness and interest of staff members to participate is thus an important facilitator for the success of the intervention. At the same time, and to support the sustainability of the project, the larger community of stakeholders acts as a catalyst to foster knowledge sharing and knowledge creation by providing a forum for mutual learning and capacity building. Especially in small organisations, this can reduce opportunities for resistance since the CoP approach emphasises community engagement, participation, sharing, consensus and competence development (Cambridge, Kaplan, & Suter, 2005).

In our analysis, building consensus to achieve substantive change through GEPs and the (enlarged) CoP is one of the main strategies developed by smaller organisations – under the assumption that resistance in small institutions can be better played down or even avoided through close collaboration and competence building. Promoting GEPs is not just a technical task of developing a steering instrument; it can also be seen in the wider context of building a common framework and understanding of gender equality in the R&I context as well as integrating structural change more systematically into policy making. As a transformation tool, building consensus takes a considerable amount of time to be effective and become visible, as change cannot be realised in a restricted and relatively short period of time. Gender competences and gender expertise are key players in these change processes, which often come up against gender fatigue (Kelan, 2009) and/or gender blindness (Konrad, Prasad, & Pringle, 2006).

Building consensus – through trust, legitimacy and authoritativeness – is thus a practice that involves both building a community of committed and engaged colleagues and co-workers and mobilising stakeholders in order to cope with an extensive institutional and cultural transformation. In our analysis, community building and networking have been the key to mutual empowerment, overcoming resistance and mobilising evidence-based gender expertise and organisation-based knowledge.

In fact, GEP promotion and implementation in our three organisations have been embedded in an institutional gender equality discourse and required a strategy that connects external windows of opportunities and specific organisational features and tools. To support sustainable change, the three organisations positioned themselves differently, relying on different national legal frameworks and contexts, diverse structures and distinct forms of support from the CoP. To ensure a self-reflexive culture – and therefore a sustainable implementation of the GEPs – different stakeholders were actively involved in setting up the CoPs in the three organisations. Throughout the process of the audit, formulation and adoption of the GEP, they relied on the support of the CoPs, which were made up primarily of internal staff (RIF) but also external experts and stakeholders (ELI-AMEP and FRRB), who provided encouragement, assistance and experience.

The identification of relevant stakeholders within the institution was part of the gender audit, which represented the starting point for the development of a customised GEP. Relevant stakeholders (heads or members of the human resources (HR) department, strategic working groups, decision-making bodies, experts) were identified by their function and were approached with requests to cooperate on specific activities within the GEP. Developing tools for building gender competence among staff and stakeholders and reflexive engagement with selected stakeholders are thus part of this consensus-building strategy. Such efforts were built upon reflexive organisational self-analysis, at the same time acknowledging the context, the strategic interests of stakeholders and the specificities of their positioning in the R&I environment.

FRRB: Building Up Gender Expertise for Strengthening the Network

A key element in a sustainable infrastructure for gender equality is the building up of gender expertise to support cooperation and exchange between institutions and transform the gendered R&I culture (Lipinsky & Wroblewski, 2021; Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019). This was the case at FRRB, whose activity regarding gender equality in the field of biomedical research was established on the basis of existing networks. In the FRRB case, the CoP has proven to be very effective since it gathers relevant stakeholders and allows a qualified exchange of inputs. It also facilitates fair and open discussions about critical gender equality issues which concern more than one organisation (e.g. how small scientific organisations should acknowledge and remove barriers to women careers; how the scientific community should deal with gender bias in the selection processes). These issues are then only assessed in the specific contexts of one single organisation in a second step. In this way, when it comes to the specific case, both the wider community and the organisation under analysis are already aware that it's not just an internal issue – something that needs to be fixed in that specific organisation – but a challenge to which all the members of the CoP should rise. Since FRRB maintains constant contact with the Lombardy regional authority (implementing the main research priorities identified by the Directorate General for Welfare and Healthcare) and its beneficiaries (hospitals, research centres and universities located in the Lombardy region), a specific CoP has been established within this network, including representatives of hospitals, universities and research centres interested in gender equality issues, which collaborates with FRRB. Being both a funding agency and a beneficiary of funding, FRRB drafted its GEP bearing in mind the role model it can represent and its potential as a trigger of change for its stakeholders (hospitals, research centres, universities, etc.). In fact, the FRRB CoP mainly included two levels of institutional stakeholders: (1) organisational stakeholders (i.e. members of the management bodies and the scientific committee) and (2) the scientific community (scientists and researchers who apply to FRRB's calls for proposals). After several successful events and initiatives, FRRB can now rely on a strong CoP that provides feedback and advice and benefits from the activities it organises (i.e. seminars and meetings). FRRB mostly uses its dissemination activities and CoP events to strengthen its position regarding

gender equality, while the members of the CoP are highly committed to pursuing gender equality and see it as a part of excellence. Given the lack of a regional gender equality discourse in R&I, the advice received, discussions and sharing of experiences in the CoP have been a valuable input for reflections – both in theory and in practice. This exchange has also been seen as something that strengthens both FRRB as well as the home institutions of gender experts in their institutional gender equality discourses. In this case, the CoP involvement had a two-fold effect: it supported the implementation of the GEP in the organisation and contributed to raising awareness among participants (relevant stakeholders in the local scientific community) on the importance of gender equality policies and their implications. Stakeholders involved in the CoP found a place (*outside* their own organisation but *inside* the local scientific community) and opportunity to discuss an issue that crosses multiple scientific disciplines, put the focus on their organisations and their working environment (instead of on their field of scientific interest, as is usually the case) and share views on how to make RPOs a better place to work and avoid toxic behaviours and discriminations.

As the FRRB case shows, participating in a CoP offers organisations and their community the opportunity to reflect on what can be improved at local level, which policies should be changed at national level and how to act to put pressure on the bodies in charge to implement change. The introduction of the GEP as a preliminary and compulsory requirement to submit project proposals to Horizon Europe (starting from January 2022) acted as an additional push factor to stimulate the interest of organisations to attend CoP meetings and to regard FRRB as a pioneer in promoting gender equality.

ELIAMEP: Dissemination, Lobbying and Expert Advice to Influence the Public Discourse

At ELIAMEP, an ongoing communication strategy has been very effective in initiating an internal gender equality discourse as well as in focusing and strengthening networking opportunities and its pioneering role in this field in the Greek context. Recent legal changes supporting the implementation of a GEP or the establishment of gender equality committees at Greek universities have created increasing interest in this topic. These developments have been used by ELIAMEP to disseminate its experiences and to strengthen its public positioning also in the field of gender equality. ELIAMEP has positioned itself as a pioneering institution in gender equality and taken a leading role in the Greek public debate. ELIAMEP's GEP formulated gender equality as an explicit goal for the organisation for the first time and contains several concrete actions to advance this in practice. To set up a longer-term process of organisational change aimed at embedding a gender-sensitive culture into the organisation and in the approach and content of its research and policy proposals, ELIAMEP also aspired to generate interest and disseminated information about the value of GEPs among its extended network of academics and researchers. Furthermore, it shared its experience and expertise with other organisations in Greece and abroad which are interested in formulating a GEP, especially in the fields of

research and higher education. The increased awareness among ELIAMEP staff also extended to this important dissemination function as well as the use of instruments like policy briefs to influence the national discourse. Since ELIAMEP has many contract staff who are affiliated with other universities, the new gender equality standards are communicated to these universities with the aim of encouraging similar standards. At the same time, GEP development and implementation is supported by members of the Board of Directors, who also represent the business sector and are interested in transferring experiences from ELIAMEP to their companies. To communicate its role as a pioneering institution in GEP development and implementation, ELIAMEP has presented the process of adopting and implementing a GEP to several stakeholders in a series of dissemination activities, including presentations at conferences and events as well as the publication of policy papers and newspaper articles. It has also published policy papers and guidelines on designing a customised GEP, arguing for the need to incorporate and mainstream gender in the higher education reform, advocating the development of GEPs and making specific reference to its own implementation of a GEP as a best practice. In 2019, a new law aimed at restructuring universities in Greece included an article that provided for the establishment of Committees for Gender Equality (CGE) in all Greek universities for the first time (4589/19, Article 33). It envisioned such committees as consultative bodies to assist university administrations in their efforts to promote gender equality. One of the main responsibilities of the CGEs is to develop Action Plans to promote substantive equality in the educational, research and administrative structures of higher education institutions. The above legislative developments have not only created a supportive external environment for the implementation of a GEP at ELIAMEP, they have also raised its value as an actual example, since ELIAMEP's experience in developing a GEP is attracting interested interlocutors at other Greek research centres and universities.

RIF: Combining the Internal and External Focus. Gender Equality and European Funding Procedures

The RIF¹ is the national R&I funding agency of Cyprus, established with a view to promoting scientific and technological research across the island. It is a relatively small organisation whose main responsibility is

to ensure that the research community of Cyprus is actively working to maximise collective knowledge, creativity and innovation, by funding projects that promote excellence and deliver results with maximum impact and social benefit, thus ensuring the quality of the Cypriot research system.

¹Since April 2019, the Research Promotion Foundation has been renamed as the Research and Innovation Foundation in order to reflect its expanded role as the executive branch of the new national R&I governance system.

When the TARGET project was launched, RIF was aware that gender equality in R&I had become a pillar of the ERA, as stated in ERA Priority 4 on *Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming in Research*² and in the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe regulations. RIF thus had a strong interest in joining the TARGET project in order to find a proper pathway towards scientific excellence that is achieved by combining gender equality and research quality. The European framework of gender equality policies in R&I was thus a crucial element in persuading the Board of Directors in 2018 to adopt the first GEP for RIF. The GEP has been elaborated on the basis of the results of the audit phase and commits RIF to gender equality initiatives beyond the organisational context and needs of the foundation itself. It contains elements which focus explicitly on *internal* dimensions – such as overcoming gender biases in HR management and supporting equal opportunities and participation in decision-making bodies and project research teams – as well as those which focus on *external* dimensions – such as the research content of the funded proposals.

It is important to underline that this double strategy, which combines *an internal and an external focus*, can be observed also in other small organisations and can be seen as a way to provide an answer to their specific dimensional characteristics. Given the limited numbers of internal staff in small organisations, actions focusing on internal institutional change need to be combined with and supported by actions involving the external (to the organisation) environment. This makes it more complicated to build – and maintain – the stable consensus needed to support institutional change. On the other hand, when these small organisation are RFOs – which means they can influence awareness and the allocation of resources to fund R&I in their scientific environments – having an impact on the R&I ecosystem external to the organisation's own focus of action is very important given the influence that the adoption of gender equality policies by these RFOs may have on the scientific environment itself. If an RFO introduces gender equality as one of the award criteria when allocating research funds, the impact on local RPOs may be higher – in terms of both the gender balance in research teams and the introduction of the gender dimension in research – than the impact of the institutional change within the (small) organisation. This was also true in the case of RIF. Once the GEP had been approved, RIF started to implement the actions it foresaw, moving at different speeds due to the varying complexity of the actions. A major element of the GEP was linked with the ongoing restructuring of the HR function, both in terms of organisational processes and related information and communication tools. Concerning the latter, RIF decided to establish an electronic database with sex- and age-disaggregated information for all submitted proposals and HR activities. This took quite a long time to be implemented due to delays in the functionality of RIF's electronic data collection system. However, it can be considered a lasting institutional change that will modify the view RIF has on its internal resources

²http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/gender-equality-and-gender-mainstreaming_en.htm. Accessed on 30 October 2021.

for the future, since disaggregated data were not previously collected at RIF. Another turning point was the definition and adoption of more gender-sensitive language to be used in all RIF official documents, including future programmes, as an attempt to address existing gender inequalities in R&I. These first steps were accompanied by the integration of the gender dimension into the content of new calls and the addition of gender-related criteria in evaluation procedures by asking evaluators to respond to specific questions on how the research proposal impacts on gender equality when reviewing the proposal. Once again, the double internal/external strategy emerges, together with the strengthening of its potential impact. Using gender-sensitive language in calls for proposals, introducing gender-related criteria and briefing evaluators on these new elements brings the importance of gender inclusiveness directly to the attention of RPOs answering the calls. Part of this strategy was also the creation of a ‘network of scientists’, including gender experts, to promote reflection on gender-related strategy. This network can be seen as an evolution of the initial CoP, which had only included members of RIF’s staff. As was the case in our other two organisations (FRRB and ELIAMEP), the CoP was opened up to people beyond the organisation itself, thus supporting the mutual exchange of knowledge on gender issues in the local scientific environment. As is common in organisational change processes, the implementation of the GEP met with some resistance. To identify and overcome this resistance, the gender Agent, together with a gender expert, decided to implement a specific activity addressing researchers in research organisations in Cyprus. The main aim of this activity is to identify barriers and challenges relating to gender equality in R&I in Cyprus. A set of focus groups and communication campaigns aim to formulate recommendations and corresponding best practices from other countries experiencing the same challenges. Once again, linking the internal to the external focus promotes institutional change while impacting on the external scientific community.

Conclusions

The process of adopting a GEP has improved the status quo of gender equality within organisations, and gender issues are increasingly recognised as an important dimension in the content of operations, decision-making and research or funding activities.

As gender bias in research funding still appears to be widespread in the scientific community, decision making and gatekeeping, including peer review and recruitment procedures, continue to be male dominated. Gender disparities in research funding are a manifestation of the long-standing gender divide in science, while gender-based double standards in assessing scientific competence and excellence further widen the funding gap. Women are underrepresented as applicants and recipients of research funding. Extensive studies on gender and research funding – and the underrepresentation of women among applicants and recipients – have been conducted, and research has pointed out that seemingly gender-neutral eligibility criteria may have gendered outcomes (Wennerås & Wold, 1997; Blake & LaValle, 2000). Gender bias modifies how a performance is evaluated or

affects how much competence is inferred from performance (Foschi, 2000). While excellence is seen as a gender-neutral standard of merit, research shows that it is a social construct that is inherently gendered (O'Connor & O'Hagan, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012).

The adoption and implementation of a GEP has created space for a systematic consideration and discussion of gender and equality issues within the three organisations discussed in this chapter – also with a focus on gendered consequences and biases in the funding process. The GEP has started a process for systematically reflecting on whether and how gender influences and, in turn, is shaped by the organisation's structures, practices and research output. The process of adopting a GEP that was set in the TARGET project – and the relevant activities that have been undertaken in this regard – have substantially improved the status quo of gender equality. While previously virtually absent from the three organisations' structures, values and practices, gender is now recognised as a dimension that must be taken into consideration in the content of activities, starting from gender-disaggregated data collection, as well as in the decision-making sphere. Institutional workshops and training on the importance of formulating an explicit gender equality policy (with the participation of a very high share of staff members) and the changes that have been implemented in internal procedures have all contributed to creating this gender awareness. The possibility to share experiences within a wider CoP has proven to be supportive in the process of mutual learning. In addition, the GEPs themselves show how important it is for RFOs to take the gender challenge in funding seriously, as they can act as key levers for change by incorporating the gender equality perspective both at the programme level and in core activities at various stages of their funding procedures and practices (e.g. in calls, grant application and allocation processes).

The capacity of the GEP to produce structural change within these small organisations may be affected by their limited size and by the absence of structured internal policies or codes of conducts, which are often considered 'unnecessary' in small organisations with limited numbers of employees and flat hierarchies. The informal working environments in such organisation may offer additional resistance to gender equality issues: the usual reply that 'gender equality is not an issue' may be reinforced in a context where anonymity is impossible and where it is not possible to raise complaints about gender-based discriminations without personally bearing immediate consequences of stigma.

Our analysis shows that institutional change can be brought about via small steps by exploiting existing discursive opportunities. It can also be overtly resisted and seen as a destabilising factor for the status quo and existing power structures. The GEP is a soft policy tool that is intended to promote gender equality and diversity within organisations and, thus, also innovation and excellence. The organisations we analysed built upon reputable foundations and/or funding strategies and are using their GEPs to encourage others to do the same. Our analysis shows that bridging the gap in gender knowledge and building networks have implications for the sustainability of the gender change intervention both within the organisation and beyond. As a result of the four years of project implementation, FRRB and ELIAMEP produced policy briefs and/or position papers

stating the importance of gender equality policies in their scientific environment, while RIF finally found a way to make gender equality a topic of priority at the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy. As a transformation tool, building consensus takes a considerable amount of time to be effective and become visible, as change cannot be realised in a restricted and relatively short period of time. Gender competences and gender experts are key players in these change processes, often facing gender fatigue (Kelan, 2009) and/or gender blindness (Konrad et al., 2006). In our analysis, they are an important prerequisite, as long as they set strategic goals and facilitate the engagement with a larger network of actors and stakeholders, thus gaining the authority, legitimacy and resources to mobilise change. The building consensus approach supports sustainability in the organisations as well as in the ecosystems in which they are embedded. Especially in small organisations, specific implementation settings can be enhanced by collaborations between researchers and stakeholders, professionals, users and/or decision makers. Since organisations and institutions are not static but dynamic, relational spaces through which issues are translated and mediated, small organisations with a high level of authority, potential impact on funding and trans-local connectedness can be viewed as a particular setting and interface for policy enactment in different contexts.

In addition, given the crucial role these organisations play in the institutional context, the fact that they consider gender equality a priority and produce publications on the topic addressed at their stakeholders and the wider national scientific community has a potentially far-reaching impact on promoting the adoption of structural change measures in other organisations. Their capacity to influence the adoption of concrete gender equality policies and measures is reinforced by the power they exercise on the organisations receiving funds or by their own scientific prestige.

The undertext in these policy briefs or position papers is that if these organisations consider gender equality a key argument for the quality of research and/or education, their network should also gender equality measures into account and define indicators that demonstrate their commitment to more inclusive working environments and research projects. In conclusion, the establishment of gender equality as an institutional issue is due to strategies that are consistent with the organisation's mission and the opening of specific windows of opportunities: the adoption of GEPs in small organisations can be considered the starting step in a process of raising awareness of the importance of gender equality that moves from the internal to the external – via CoPs and publications – and impacts the wider regional or national scientific environment.

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