

# GENDERACTION POSITION PAPER ON THE RELEVANCE OF MONITORING FOR EFFECTIVE GENDER EQUALITY POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

## Gender Equality in the European Research Area

European Research Area Priority 4 focuses on gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research and innovation (EC 2012, Council of Europe 2012). The objective is to foster scientific excellence and breadth of research approaches by fully utilising gender diversity and equality and avoiding an indefensible waste of talent. Within their National Action Plans (NAPs 2016-2020), European Union Member States were asked to develop policies that address gender imbalances particularly at senior levels and in decision making, and which strengthen the gender dimension in research.

In September 2020 the European Commission launched the Communication “A New ERA for Research and Innovation” which reinforced its commitment to gender equality in order to strengthen the European R&I potential (EC 2020; EC 2021). The Council of the European Union also formulated a strong commitment to gender equality in R&I with its conclusions from December 2020 and May 2021. Hence, there is a commitment to strengthen and further develop ERA gender equality policies at the European as well as national level and to integrate gender equality objectives in new policy instruments like the Pact for R&I, the ERA Scoreboard, the new ERA policy agenda, and the new ERA governance structure.

## Gender equality in Member States ERA Roadmaps 2016-2020

In total 26 out of the 28 EU Member States and four Associated Countries participated in the ERA process.<sup>1</sup> For several countries, the ERA Roadmap was the initial spark that

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**1** | Our analysis is based on key ERA documents at European and national level, two surveys of national stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the national ERA Roadmaps or NAPs (2019 and 2021) as well as a series of interviews with experts (Wroblewski 2021).

triggered the development of their first-ever gender equality strategy for R&I (e.g. Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, or Norway). In others, the NAP was used to consolidate and further develop existing policies which support gender equality in R&I. Member States were given considerable scope when it came to developing a NAP within the framework of the ERA Roadmap. This allowed the NAPs to be aligned with actual circumstances in each country (e.g. by addressing specific gender inequalities, building on existing experience with gender equality policies, and involving relevant national stakeholders).

## All that glitters isn't gold

It is an important finding that the **cluster of countries which the GENDERACTION assessment categorises as good practice countries with regard to NAP implementation differs significantly from the countries identified as the leading group in the ERA Progress Report 2018** (EC 2019a).

This difference in assessment results from different approaches to gender equality and the indicators used to measure the implementation of gender equality policies. While the GENDERACTION assessment focuses on the implementation process of gender equality policies based on multiple data sources and indicators, the ERA progress report focuses on the headline indicator and two supporting indicators. Our analysis shows that this approach is too limited to provide meaningful information for the assessment of progress towards gender equality in R&I.

The focus of monitoring on one main dimension – the share of women in Grade A positions – is problematic not only for the assessment of NAP implementation but also for the discourse on gender equality as it allows gender equality be reduced to female representation. ERA progress report country snapshots do not include a discussion of the development regarding gender equality that refers to the three-dimensional construct defined in the ERA Roadmap (ERAC 2015).

Furthermore, our analysis shows no positive correlation between the share of women in Grade A and the innovation and excellence indicators. But the higher a country scores on the Gender Equality Index, the higher its innovation potential. Similarly, the correlation between the share of RPOs with Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) and the innovation indicators is significant and positive. This means that an increasing share of RPOs with GEPs is positively correlated with a country's innovation potential.

## Lessons learned

Experiences with NAP implementation and the results achieved so far show the **potential** of this instrument **to initiate the development of gender equality policies** for the first time or, in the case of more experienced countries, to further develop and consolidate existing policies. However, it is also evident that the process linked to the ERA Roadmap development, implementation, and monitoring does not provide incentives to increase engagement for gender equality in R&I in fairly inactive countries. Consequently, the gap between experienced and inactive countries is widening.

The process initiated by the ERA Roadmap 2016-2020 has only had **limited success in increasing the engagement of countries that have hitherto been fairly inactive** regarding gender equality in R&I. While some countries (Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway)

developed a gender equality policy for R&I for the first time, others either did not submit a NAP (Hungary, Slovakia) or did not address gender equality issues in their NAP (Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland). This also illustrates the need for a gender equality discourse within the ERA aimed at establishing a **shared understanding of gender equality and common gender equality goals**.

Our analysis of the implementation of the NAPs produces results that are not in line with the **ERA progress report**, thus suggesting that the latter is **not a meaningful instrument for measuring NAP implementation**. The current monitoring of ERA progress focuses not only on a restricted set of indicators but also on the aggregate level, which does not consider the structural change dimension and the implementation level. Hence, the dominance of the headline indicator (share of women in Grade A positions) brings with it the risk that gender equality will be reduced to one single dimension. This approach allows countries with a high representation of women in Grade A positions to neglect any need for gender equality policies even if women are underrepresented in decision making and no actions are taken regarding the other two objectives.

The different concepts of gender equality, as well as varying goals and foci of the gender equality policies presented in the NAPs, indicate, on the one hand, reference to theoretical concepts in a varying degree and, on the other hand, a lack of a European gender equality discourse. The **lack of a policy discourse** leads to the situation that not all Member States refer to the three ERA gender equality objectives in their NAPs.

Experiences from GENDERACTION also indicate the relevance of ongoing research on policy implementation which feeds constantly back in the ERA governance structures and to relevant stakeholders (European Commission, Council of the EU, Member States, Associated Countries). Especially a meaningful monitoring system provides a sound basis for strengthening and further developing gender equality policies in R&I.

## Recommendations

Since the ERA Roadmap is a European steering instrument that should contribute to a more coherent R&I policy, including gender equality, the recommendations formulated primarily address EU stakeholders (European Commission, Council of the EU). These recommendations are based on the assumption that the next ERA Roadmap will aim at

- strengthening national commitment regarding R&I based on a three-dimensional concept of gender equality,
- overcoming geographical inequalities in the EU, and
- contributing to the further development of gender equality policies.

Experiences with the NAPs 2015-2020 demonstrate a need for **adapting the procedure to develop and implement NAPs**. In concrete, **more detailed guidance** for NAP development that addresses the main procedural steps or elements would seem to be required. More specifically, NAPs should:

- include an assessment of the status quo of gender equality in R&I (context analysis) which covers all three gender equality dimensions,
- contain concrete targets or priorities derived from the context analysis,
- define responsibility, timeframes, and budgets for concrete measures, and
- indicate how the implementation of the NAP and the concrete policies will be monitored.

Furthermore, it should be recommended that

- main stakeholders are identified and involved in the NAP development process, and
- gender equality is also addressed in the other priorities (gender mainstreaming).

The involvement of relevant stakeholders at the national level could also support building a gender equality discourse at the national level in the more inactive countries. This would also support bottom-up initiatives from institutions or researchers interested in gender equality (e.g. researchers involved in EU-funded projects or institutions applying for the HRS4R label). Recently, interest in such bottom-up initiatives has been triggered by the announcement of a GEP requirement for applications in Horizon Europe.

To avoid a widening gap among the Member States, **specific support** should be provided for countries that are starting the journey and develop gender equality policies in R&I for the first time. Such support would also contribute to the development of a shared understanding of gender equality and stimulate the development of more comprehensive policies in the more inactive countries.

Furthermore, a **meaningful set of indicators for monitoring the NAP implementation** has to be developed. GENDERACTION suggests a combined approach using (available) quantitative indicators and qualitative/survey data provided by the Member States. This combined approach includes reporting by the Member States, which would provide several advantages:

- A compulsory report on NAP implementation by the Member States will increase their commitment to the NAPs and will make it more difficult to justify why no action has been taken.
- Such a report will allow Member States to present national developments, success stories, and barriers regarding gender equality in R&I.
- Experiences with concrete policies – especially good practice policies – could be used for mutual learning activities.
- A report would give the NAP more visibility at the EU level and could be used for national dissemination activities regarding gender equality in R&I.

**Adapted monitoring of NAP implementation** could be used as a starting point for a **gender equality discourse**, for instance when the assessment of developments as well as the implementation of policies refer to the three main gender equality objectives. This would also strengthen the NAPs as a European steering instrument (both on a general level and for gender equality in particular). Such discourse should already start during the submission phase, e.g. by providing feedback to the NAPs, and thus contribute to a shared understanding by all stakeholders of the problems to be addressed and the main gender equality objectives. In general, the discourse should be initiated by the EC and involve ERA structures – especially the SWG GRI – as well as other relevant European and national stakeholders. Members of the SWG GRI should act as mediators between the European and the national levels by promoting the topic, involving relevant stakeholders, and engaging with other ERA priorities. This would require that SWG GRI delegates hold positions that allow them to pursue the implementation of gender equality policies at the national level.

Another important aspect of a gender equality discourse is to stress the positive relationship between gender equality on the one hand and innovation and excellence on the other hand. To stress the link between comprehensive gender equality policies (like GEPs which address all three gender equality dimensions) could serve as a lever to en-

gage more stakeholders in R&I in a gender equality discourse. This approach would also support mainstreaming gender into the other ERA priorities. The upcoming discussion of major societal challenges provides numerous opportunities to discuss innovation and its application from a gender perspective – e.g. in the context of climate change, artificial intelligence, robotics.

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