



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

TARGET } Taking a Reflexive approach
to Gender Equality for
institutional Transformation

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Lessons Learned from TARGET – Meeting the challenge of structural change in difficult contexts

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INTRODUCTION

The European Commission (2021) as well as the Council of the European Union (2021) are committed to promoting gender equality in research and innovation. In Horizon Europe, having a gender equality plan (GEP) in place has become an eligibility criterion for many legal entities in Member States and Associated Countries. TARGET⁹ has been funded within Horizon 2020 (Science with and for Society programme – SwafS) and aimed to contribute to the advancement of gender equality in research and innovation (R&I) by supporting a reflexive gender equality policy in seven institutions. The seven institutions supported in developing and implementing for the first time a GEP represent different types of research organisations. In concrete, two research funding organisations (FRRB, RIF), one accreditation organisation (ARACIS), one research institution (ELIAMEP), two universities (UB, UH2C) and a network of engineering schools (RMEI). They share as a common characteristic that they had little experience with gender equality policies and that they are located in countries which were characterised as relatively “inactive” in developing gender equality policies in research and innovation (R&I) before TARGET started in 2017 (Lipinsky 2014, Wroblewski 2021).

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TARGET implementing partners started a reflexive structural change process: capacity-building took place, and the partners analysed the status quo of gender equality, defined objectives and developed a context-sensitive and customised GEP. They also began implementing these GEPs and reflected on them using monitoring and evaluation results, which subsequently led to an adaptation of the GEPs in some institutions.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The final evaluation report shows that TARGET successfully initiated sustainable structural change in seven institutions. All implementing partners established a community of practice, formulated a GEP and had it approved by its governing bodies, developed structures for gender equality (e.g. a working group or a gender equality officer) and reflected on the experiences regarding GEP implementation based on monitoring. The two research funding organisations as well as the accreditation institution raised awareness for the need of gender equality policies among research performing organisations through the implementation of gender criteria in funding or accreditation procedures. RMEI introduced gender equality as a main element in its mission statement which focuses on sustainability.

All partners started GEP implementation after its approval. Some partners had to postpone or modify some measures due to COVID-19 and in some cases due to internal reasons. Furthermore, at each implementing institution a community of practice has been established. The CoPs were key for the development of a shared understanding of gender equality as well as building up gender competence within the organisation. Finally, implementing partners engaged in dissemination activities at national level. In 2017, when TARGET started, the implementing institutions were located in countries which did not have policies to support gender equality in R&I specifically. In Greece and in Italy this changed recently. The increasing engagement regarding gender equality in R&I at national level represented an additional push for implementing partners and allowed them to become visible as a gender equality pioneering institution.

The Horizon Europe GEP requirement also increased the interest in institutional gender equality policies and exchange between TARGET implementing partners and other research performing institutions in the country. Without an external push – like the changing policy environment in Greece or Italy or the Horizon Europe GEP requirement – it remained difficult for implementing partners to contribute to a national discourse about gender equality in R&I. This applies in particular to the two universities in the consortium. Experiences with TARGET implementation will be presented to policy makers and other universities at the end of the project. Aim of the national dissemination event is to present the institutional gender equality policy (GEP), to raise interest of other universities to pursue a similar approach and to stress the need for specific gender equality policies in R&I. However, it has proven difficult to propagate gender equality plans in R&I in a country characterised by a lack of gender equality discourse.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of a reflexive gender equality policy is a challenging and presuppositional endeavour, especially for institutions which start the journey and cannot rely on a supporting national gender equality discourse in R&I or related support structures. The experiences of TARGET implementing partners show, however, that committed institutions

with highly engaged change agents and the necessary resources can achieve a great deal – even in difficult contexts. Nevertheless, TARGET implementation is also characterised by different forms of internal and external resistance, which affect individual institutions to varying degrees. For instance, decreasing support from management during the project lifetime, lack of support from colleagues, changes in key personnel for project implementation or the emergence of other challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-gender discourses at national level hampered GEP development and implementation. Such challenges highlight the central role of change agents for gender equality in the TARGET institutions, who used the obligations that arose from the project and from other European gender equality policies (e.g. the GEP requirement formulated in Horizon Europe) as push factors to continue their efforts for gender equality.

The question that now arises is how comparable framework conditions can be established outside an EU-funded project. We see opportunities for action on three levels that may influence each other, namely the institutional, the national and the European levels.

Institutions which develop a GEP have to meet specific preconditions which go beyond a formal commitment. They should be aware that a GEP process requires:

- a concrete mandate to a change agent to pursue the process and the provision of sufficient resources
- willingness to engage in a longer-term process that challenges existing structures and aims at structural change
- reflection on gender bias in structures, processes, teaching and knowledge production as well as willingness to change existing practices
- willingness to draw on gender and organisational change expertise from within the institution or beyond
- involvement of a variety of stakeholders in the process (establishing a CoP for gender equality) to build gender competence in the organisation with the support of gender experts.

TARGET experiences illustrate the relevance of the national context – i.e. the gender equality discourse in R&I – for the development of institutional gender equality policies. This also shows the following **need for action at national level**:

- formulating gender equality as a priority in national R&I policy (linked to the ERA policy agenda and the GEP requirement formulated in Horizon Europe)
- establishing a discourse about gender equality in R&I with all relevant stakeholders (RPOs, RFOs, policy makers, NGOs) to achieve a common understanding of gender equality challenges and objectives
- highlighting experiences of pioneering institutions with GEP development and implementation
- creating a platform for national stakeholders to exchange experiences with GEP development and implementation (with a specific focus on change agents in institutions)
- Providing concrete support for GEP development to research organisations, where appropriate in form of joint initiatives with other countries.

The Council of the European Union (2021) and the European Commission (2021) call for such activities at national level when implementing the ERA policy agenda (e.g. the development of NAPs). However, instruments like the GEP requirement formulated in Horizon Europe represent a push factor but are not enough to initiate a gender-sensitive culture in R&I. Countries with little experience of gender equality policies in R&I need particular **support from the European level** when developing gender equality policies for the first time. Such support can take the following form:

- providing know-how and good practices regarding gender equality in R&I in general

- and GEPs in particular
- establishing an exchange platform for institutions and change agents regarding gender equality in R&I with a focus on GEP development and implementation. Such a platform should aim at making expertise from experienced countries usable for those which are just starting the journey and support the contextualisation of experiences.
- monitoring GEP implementation in the context of Horizon Europe to avoid a situation where GEPs are available but remain paper tigers and thus do not contribute to structural change.

The implementation of the new ERA policy agenda in combination with the GEP requirement formulated in Horizon Europe provide a window of opportunity to strengthen existing gender equality efforts and motivate institutions and countries to increase their commitment to gender equality in R&I. There is much experience available – including that gained from TARGET implementation – to provide a starting point for institutions interested in starting out on this journey. However, achieving structural change requires a joint and coordinated effort between European, national and institutional stakeholders.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

TARGET (2018a). Gender Equality Audit Tool, Deliverable 3.1. Online available: <http://www.gendertarget.eu/resources/project-deliverables/>

TARGET (2018b). Guidelines to design customised GEPs, Deliverable 3.3. Online available: <http://www.gendertarget.eu/resources/project-deliverables/>

TARGET (2019). Gender equality monitoring tool and guidelines for self-assessment, Deliverable 4.1. Online available: <http://www.gendertarget.eu/resources/project-deliverables/>

TARGET (2021a). Lessons Learned from TARGET – Final Evaluation Report, Deliverable 5.3a. Online available: <http://www.gendertarget.eu/resources/project-deliverables/>

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PROJECT IDENTITY - TARGET

PROJECT NAME	TAKing a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation (TARGET)
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CONSORTIUM	Belgrade University – UB – Belgrade, Serbia Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini – FGB, Rome, Italy Fondazione Regionale per la Ricerca Biomedica – FRRB – Milan, Italy Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy – ELIAMEP –Athens, Greece Institute for Advanced Studies – IHS – Vienna, Austria National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ARACIS – Bucharest, Romania NOTUS – Applied Social Research – Barcelona, Spain Réseau Méditerranéen des Ecoles d'Ingénieurs et de Management – RMEI – Marseille, France Research and Innovation Foundation – RIF – Nicosia, Cyprus Université Hassan II Casablanca – UH2C – Casablanca, Morocco
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WEBSITE	http://www.gendertarget.eu
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FURTHER READING	Wroblewski, Angela (2019) TARGET: Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for Institutional Transformation . The Project Repository Journal PRJ, 2, pp. 94-97. Wroblewski, Angela (2020) The relevance of a community of practice for the successful implementation of a gender equality policy . The Project Repository Journal, 6, pp. 80-83. Wroblewski, Angela; Palmén, Rachel (forthcoming) (eds.) Overcoming the Challenge of Structural Change in Research Organisations: A Reflexive Approach to Gender Equality, Emerald.