

Project_Gender Action Plans in Academia

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Abstract: Research on the implementation of positive actions and gender mainstreaming in academia reveals a fragmented patchwork in adopting strategies and policies. Even when national policies guarantee uniformity in adopting Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), this does not always lead to substantial changes in research and innovation teams and management structures. Our study was inspired by the EU's requirement that research and innovation projects submitted to calls for proposal in the Sixth Framework Program (2002-2006) include a Gender Action Plan (GAP), covering all measures and activities promoting gender equality within each project and explaining gender issues associated with the project's subject matter. Although the requirement has been discontinued in the following Framework Programmes, the idea of a GAP at the project level raised interest in the scientific community. Our article reports on the roadmap and the construction phases to implement a Gender Action Plan at the project level (P-GAP). A new European project funded under the Erasmus+ European Universities initiative has been identified as a case study for its characteristic of involving different institutional areas: teaching, research and third mission. The P-GAP addresses all project activities, thus escaping the boundaries set by the siloed work package structure. By focusing on micro-actions at the project level, the P-GAP mirrors macro-actions at the organisational level. The purpose of the initiative was to understand whether activities inspired by GEPs but implemented at the project level encounter obstacles and resistance similar to those challenging the implementation of GEPs at the institutional level. By stimulating faculty, research, management, and administrative staff to promote gender equality and diversity, it can test challenges and difficulties, leading those involved in the micro-actions to become more assertive and proactive in transferring equality, diversity, and inclusion methods and strategies to institutional GEPs and academia at large. Partners' attitudes toward building the P-GAP were positive: they showed interest in the idea, contributed actively to plan several micro-actions and saw the potential to influence existing or new institutional GEPs indirectly.

Keywords: gender equality plan, Horizon Europe, positive actions, gender mainstreaming, gender action plan, project gender action plan P_GAP

1. Introduction

A Gender Equality Plan (GEP) aims to promote gender equality through institutional and cultural change: it enhances organisations' gender and diversity sensitivity. For public bodies, research organisations and higher education establishments, a GEP is a new eligibility criterion for access to Horizon Europe funding from 2022 (European Commission, 2021).

GEPs required by the EU must meet four mandatory requirements (defined *building blocks*): they must be a public document, have dedicated resources, include arrangements for data collection and monitoring, and be supported by training and capacity-building. For Universities that do not meet these requirements through at least one strategic document, the EU's requirement has accelerated a time-consuming process involving higher spheres, establishing working groups, and funding GEP construction. All the recommended steps in building a GEP are effective in a bottom-up approach. The need to build a GEP in a matter of months favours a top-down approach, at least in the initial construction of the plan. Even more importantly, a GEP requires complex organisations to accept structural change, and islands of resistance may occur.

It is essential to find ways of smoothing out this complex process by involving members at all levels of the organisation and, even, to innovate the policies' evaluation processes (Verge, 2021), since a GEP impacts research and teaching staff, managerial and administrative personnel, and students. GEPs are required by the EU at the institutional level (European Commission, 2012b, 2012a), while schemes like the Athena Swan Award (Xiao et al., 2020) (whose application form includes an action plan) also allow applications at the departmental level. This scaled-down process has enabled departments to proceed at their speed, in some cases anticipating the University's GEP, which requires more significant organisational effort and broader consultation. Nonetheless, the time scales for involving a department in creating a GEP from the ground up are incompatible with the EU current deadline.

This article describes the path towards an action plan implementing a set of micro-actions for gender equality at a project level, a P_Gender Action Plan (P_GAP) currently being developed and tested within a European University Alliance, titled Ulysseus. The model for the initiative was the EU's gender action plan, required for research and innovation projects submitted to the sixth framework program for research and technological development.

The assumption is that the P_GAP will help create and implement the GEP at the institutional level. The P_GAP allows researchers, administrative personnel, and even students involved in an EU-funded project to implement positive actions at the micro-level, introducing project participants to issues and contexts – at partner or Consortium level - similar to those experienced at the macro level within the institutional University GEP.

2. Background and framework

The principle of equality between women and men is laid out in article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty¹. It underpins all European policies and is the basis for European integration. It applies in all areas.

Since 1982, the European Community has adopted a series of Action Programmes for Equal Opportunities. The First Community Action Programme (1982-85) developed a global policy for women's employment. The Second (1986-90) introduced a more diversified policy focusing on disadvantaged and socially underprivileged women. The Third Action Programme (1990-1995) sought to improve women's lives by increasing public awareness of gender equality issues, the image of women in mass media and women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas of society. The Fourth Action Programme (1996-2000) concentrated on integrating gender into government policies. The Fifth Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities (2001-2006) aimed to promote equality for men and women, particularly by assisting and supporting the Community framework strategy through the implementation of transnational projects. In the following years, the EU promoted several strategies: A roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010), the Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015. The Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality (2016 – 2019) identified 5 priority areas², and the analysis of the work performed led to the Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025), through which the EU pursues a dual approach of gender mainstreaming combined with targeted actions. Intersectionality is a horizontal principle for its implementation.

Since 1984 the European Community has been funding research in the European Research Area (ERA) through multi-year grant programmes known as Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development (abbreviated as FP1 to FP9; FP8 is known as Horizon2020 and FP9 as Horizon Europe). A few years after the launch of the framework programmes, in 1998, the European Commission introduced gender mainstreaming (European Commission, 2005b), a strategy designed to integrate gender issues into all Community policies and activities and reduce inequalities between men and women (Degraef, 2005; Dratwa, 2009).³ At the same time, the European Council decided to include Community policy on equal opportunities in FP5 (1998-2002). Shortly after that, in 2000, the Commission began promoting studies on the gender impact of each funding programme, laying the foundation for an assessment of gender integration in FP5 (Hoogland, 1999).

Regarding funding for research and innovation, greater emphasis was placed on the gender dimension in FP6 than FP5, which became a priority issue at each stage of the project cycle. FP6 included three closely gender-related objectives for research: increasing the number of female researchers taking part in projects, ensuring women scientists are involved in assessment, consultation and implementation, and redesigning research to ensure it meets the requirements of both women and men. The Commission also raised the percentage of women on various committees, including assessment committees for project calls, aiming to increase the number of women in the database from 18% in FP5 to 40%. Specific reports and a summary of the findings from various spheres were also commissioned (European Commission, 2009).

The FP6 funded Research Performing Organisations - RPOs - and Research Funding Organisations - RFOs – to remove discriminatory barriers for women in their scientific careers and decision-making processes, helping research organisations implement gender action plans and include the issue of gender in their research.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016ME/TXT&from=EN>. Accessed 20 November 2021

² Details on all the programmes and strategies up to 2019 are available at the webpage: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/52696>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/data/document/gendermain_en.pdf. Accessed 20 November 2021.

From FP7 onwards, dedicated programmes for GEPs were implemented: the Science in Society (SIS) programme in FP7 and the Science with and for Society (SwafS) programme in FP8, Horizon 2020, funded respectively Gender Action Plans - GAP (FP7) - and Gender Equality Plans - GEP (Horizon 2020).

GEPs merge positive actions and gender mainstreaming. Specific/positive actions favour particular groups of women, or men, and are “required in addition to gender mainstreaming policies to remove inequalities which have been identified or address particularly resistant problems” (European Commission, 2005a, p. 10).

Gender mainstreaming aims to make “gender equality part of this dominant (mainstream) trend in society so that women and men benefit equally. It means looking at every step of policy – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with the aim of promoting equality between women and men” (European Commission, 2005a, p. 10). Furthermore, “[w]ith gender mainstreaming, came the call for policies that accommodate a diversity of circumstances accepting that age, ethnic origin, disability and sexual orientation, for example, also have implications for a person’s ability to compete equally (European Commission, 2005a, p. 12). This respect for diversity, already identified and clarified when the EU first adopted gender Mainstreaming in the 1990s, is now included very clearly in Horizon Europe, for example via the request to include a perspective of intersectional analysis in research projects.

The EU is not the only source of financing or legislation promoting gender equality and diversity in academia and other public sectors. Some Member States also have initiatives such as charters or mandatory gender action plans at national level. To this end, we will limit our description to two examples.

The Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) Charter was launched in 2005 in the UK to advance the representation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine disciplines (STEMM). In 2015 the Charter was expanded in the UK to facilitate applications from Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law disciplines (AHSSBL); in the same year, the Charter was launched in Ireland.

The Athena SWAN Charter covers all gender identities in academic roles in STEMM and AHSSBL, and professional, managerial and support staff roles, concerning their representation, the progression of students into academia, their journey through career milestones, and their working environment.

The Athena SWAN (AS) award is open to universities, departments and research institutes. The data needed for the award applications are collated and analysed by Self Assessment Teams (SATs), comprised of staff members from the institution/School/Department. The application includes an action plan, defining for each action the issues identified in the application, the success/outcome measure, the persons (or positions) responsible for the action, and a timescale.

In Italy, Equal Opportunities Committees (Comitati per le Pari Opportunità - CPOs) have been active in each public sector institution since 1988 (i.e., regional, provincial, municipal administrations, universities, local units of the national health system). In 2010, under Law No. 183, the CPOs were merged with the Committees for Protection against ‘Harassment in the Workplace’ to become “Comitato Unico di Garanzia per le pari opportunità, la valorizzazione del benessere di chi lavora e contro le discriminazioni” (CUG_Committee for the Rights of Employees), still mandatory in all Italian public sector organisations. The CUG’s areas of concern were extended to include discrimination based on gender, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin, disability, religion, and language. They provide a tool against discrimination in the workplace, covering the areas of economic treatment, career advancement, security, and access to work. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) website page covering gender equality in Italy states that “By Law, Public Administrations – including all Public research organisations including Universities – must have a gender equality plan (also called Positive Actions Plan and referred to hereafter as PAP). Therefore, all 96 Italian universities have a PAP.” This overlap between Italian PAPs and GEPs requires adjustments to PAPs, as the requirements for Horizon Europe describe an internal structure for GEP that differs from a PAP in some respects.

Implementing positive actions and gender mainstreaming in academia creates a fragmented patchwork in adopting strategies and policies. Even when national policies guarantee uniformity in adopting GEPs, substantial changes to research and innovation teams and management structures do not always occur. Other initiatives may be needed to bridge the gap between structural change at institutional level and the contributions of individuals working and studying in higher education, starting with dedicated actions at project level, for

example. In the following pages, we highlight the first steps in a strategy promoting micro-actions at project level that mirrors the macro-actions of GEPs.

3. The case study

3.1 The context

Since 2019, the European Commission has financed “European universities”, transnational alliances promoting European values, and working to transform the quality and competitiveness of European higher education towards a common European Education Area (EEA). Today, 41 European University Alliances (EUAs) involving 279 institutions are becoming the universities of the future, creating internationally competitive degrees that combine study programmes in different European countries⁴.

Ulysseus is a European University coordinated by the University of Seville, Spain⁵. Five Partners complete the Consortium: University of Côte D’Azur (France), University of Genoa (Italy), Technical University of Košice (Slovakia), MCI_The Entrepreneurial School (Austria), Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (Finland). Ulysseus embraces a total of over 160,000 students and more than 28,000 staff across six countries from all the European areas. The project initiatives include six research and development challenges prioritised by the regions and cities represented in the partnership: Ageing and Wellbeing; Energy; Transport, Mobility and Smart Cities; Tourism, Arts and Heritage; Digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence and Food; Biotechnology and the Circular Economy. For each challenge, the partners create an Innovation Hub, considered the centre of gravity for the partners involved. The Hubs are co-created and aim at transdisciplinary and challenge-driven education, intertwined with research and knowledge transfer and the promotion of citizen involvement and European values.

A work package, entitled Social Responsibility and Citizen Engagement (WP5), dedicates specific activities to different target groups: people with special needs, disadvantaged groups, and older people. Two other tasks aim to engage citizens in Ulysseus activities and promote gender equality in the project’s activities. In the latter task, the task force participants produced a Gender Equality Agenda designed to fertilise the project activities. The Gender Equality Agenda also forms the basis for the project’s general Action Plan. While developing the Gender Equality Agenda, the idea to shape future initiatives as a Project_Gender Action Plan emerged: it will impact Ulysseus activities in their entirety, the Innovation Hubs and ultimately, thanks to its resemblance to a Gender Equality Plan, the Partners’ universities.

The P_GAP was inspired by an EU initiative in the 6th FP. In the following paragraphs we provide information on the initiative and go on to describe the methodology we followed.

3.2 The EU initiative in FP6

The gender dimension of the EU Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP6) became a priority at each stage of the project cycle. As mentioned above, FP6 included three closely gender-related objectives for research: increasing the number of female researchers taking part in projects, ensuring women scientists are involved in the assessment, consultation and implementation processes, and redesigning research to ensure it meets the requirements of both women and men. To achieve these objectives, the European Commission asked the scientific community to include a gender action plan (GAP) in research proposals for Integrated Projects and Networks of Excellence, funding instruments that were bigger both in scale and budget than any of their predecessors⁶.

GAPs were supposed to contain three key elements: 1) analysis of the situation regarding female participation within the project and gender aspects of the research field, 2) proposed new actions based on the analysis, 3) and concrete information as to how the gender dimension would be integrated into the research content during the project. GAPs were not included in the following Framework Programme (FP7): Mergaert and Lombardo

⁴ Factsheets for each EUA are published on: https://ec.europa.eu/education/european-universities-factsheets_en.

⁵ www.ulyseus.eu

⁶ Examples of the GAPs are available online: https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/Gender-action-plan_Eng.pdf; <http://www.esonet-noe.org/content/download/20923/302503/file/DoW-1july2009.pdf>; http://www.it.uu.se/research/group/core/publications/WISENET/UU_WISENET_komplett.pdf

(2014) examined the Commission's documents and reports to understand the reasons for this choice but did not find an adequate response.

4. Methodology

When the obligation of providing a GEP to qualify for funding under Horizon Europe was announced, the Taskforce from the WP5 Task aimed at creating a Project Gender Equality Agenda debated whether and how to integrate the request into its working plan. Not all Ulysseus Universities had a GEP at this stage, and Taskforce participants felt that reciprocal support was needed to reach this goal. The work to be done to promote gender equality, diversity, and inclusion in Ulysseus was therefore reshaped so that it could be integrated, where possible, into future GEPs. Since the activities were to be implemented at project rather than organisational level, as in the case of FP6, the GAP model was considered more appropriate to the scale of the work within Ulysseus. The focus had to be on actions that were realistic at project level.

The Gender Equality Agenda is transversal to the entire project and may therefore influence all its activities. Therefore, the fertilisation of all project areas begins not with the central structure of the project, coordination, and management, but with a work package on social inclusion, based on a bottom up rather than a top-down approach. Actions may be implemented by the Consortium (all partners), as in the case of training actions, or by individual partners, for example micro-actions regarding language.

The work took place over ten months, in four stages:

State of play: gathering and sharing information on the situation in each university as regards Gender equality, diversity, and inclusion.

GEPs: gathering and sharing information on GEPs or similar initiatives where they were not yet implemented

Identifying good practices: based on their knowledge and what they had gathered and observed in previous stages, the partners identified good practices that could be applied to their work. Good practices were pinpointed within individual universities, including the partner university, and at regional, national, or international level.

P_GAP: using tables similar to those for GEPs, the partners drew up a list of the micro-actions they intended to complete within a year. The results from the first year will be used to establish a second set of activities that will be implemented in the final stage of the project, laying the foundation for actions that last beyond the project's funded pathway.

For the sake of brevity, we will concentrate on the last phase, the P_GAP development.

While the first stage was being carried out, in February 2021, the news that GEPs were to become an eligibility criterion for both public and private higher education establishments led to our decision to link the work to the Partners' GEPs. Therefore, to help widen micro-actions to the partner organisations' GEPs (current or under construction), micro-action was described following the general recommendations applied when writing a GEP. The template adopted was inspired by the SAGE project funded in H2020 (Drew, 2020), which provided a detailed scheme for creating a GEP; it was simplified to facilitate the Partners' work.

The taskforce participants chose the micro-actions from an initial list of possible actions provided by the Task leader, adding others that were deemed relevant at local level or significant at consortium level.

The activities aimed at EDI themes had to meet the European Commission's requirements for all projects funded under the European Union framework programs for research and innovation.

In particular, we followed the three major strategic approaches to gender equality in science research, policy, and practice adopted by governments and universities over the past several decades, as described and recommended by Prof. Londa Schiebinger (<https://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/what-is-gendered-innovations.html>), adapting them to the European University Alliance:

Table 1: EU recommendations and micro-actions in the EUA

EU recommendations	Micro-actions in the EUA
Fix the Numbers: focuses on increasing women's and other under-represented groups' participation.	To reach a gender balance (40/60) in Ulysseus and to increase women's and other under-represented groups' participation to workgroups, project commissions, committees, events, etc. in case of an unjustified imbalance.
Fix the Institutions: promotes inclusive equality in careers through structural change in research organizations.	Structural change to institutional aspects of Ulysseus to promote the achievement of inclusive equality: how the project "speaks" to the outside, how it establishes new connections and new collaborations with other organisations respecting inclusive approaches.
Fix the Knowledge (or "gendered innovations"): stimulates excellence in science and technology by integrating sex, gender and intersectional analysis into research.	To introduce attention to EDI in performing research and organising teaching activities. Micro-actions may monitor that the new research projects and new teaching paths that will arise from Ulysseus include appropriate references to the themes of equality, diversity and inclusion. Another possibility is to guide Ulysseus partners in identifying new partners already active in implementing inclusivity or interested in including activities to promote EDI in new proposals

All micro actions, and their measures of success, will be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) (Doran, 1981) following the EIGE recommendations to facilitate the successful implementation of objectives, targets and measures for Gender Equality Plans. The four mandatory process-related requirements (building blocks) and the five recommended thematic areas were considered, when possible, in choosing the micro-actions.

The P_GAP mirrors a GEP in the following aspects: it is a formal document agreed upon and shared by the partners, actively communicated within the project; it demonstrates a commitment to gender equality and diversity in project activities and consequent outcomes and outputs; it sets clear goals and detailed actions and measures to achieve them. It addresses where possible the five thematic areas, including actions at project level.

5. Results

When constructing the P_GEP, we considered the literature on the critical problems linked to implementing positive actions and gender mainstreaming, as adopted by national programmes, and to creating GEPs through EU funding within FP7 and Horizon2020. The knowledge pathway involved analysing the EU's progress in promoting gender equality in academia, and an understanding of how patchy the results are to date, with some areas often left uncovered (first of all engendering knowledge). In this section we provide a brief description of how we took account of the critical problems, including some examples of micro-actions.

The differences between gender mainstreaming policies and positive action policies (Stratigaki 2005) and the ambivalence surrounding the European Commission's adoption of gender mainstreaming (Lombardo & Forest, 2014; Lombardo & Meier, 2006; Meier, 2018) have been extensively debated. The two strategies are still needed and linked to the organisations' social and cultural aspects. Gender mainstreaming requires a preparatory phase that may also consist of positive actions; however, the latter alone are not strong enough to restructure the dominant thought. The latter may occur particularly where there is no intention to open decision-making and programmatic spaces to new visions, to the inclusion of "actors" seldom or never included in decision processes in the past. The co-presence of these two strategies might reinforce the image of a GEP as a tool aimed solely or primarily at women; positive actions are often more easily understood by non-experts in gender issues, they are more visible and simpler to implement than gender mainstreaming, and often trigger less resistance to change. Therefore, in the P_GEP, we focused on positive actions and specified which aspect each micro-action is designed to fix: numbers (balance or representation), the project considered as an organisation (its visibility, its narrative), and knowledge (research, education).

The EU's framework programmes have provided significant support for gender issues, funding gender equality initiatives within the research field for many years, from individual projects to wider actions involving the entire scientific community, RPOs and RFOs. A key feature of the initiatives is the importance not only of redressing

the numbers of men and women taking part in research and development, but also of including different perspectives within scientific contexts. The latter has yet to find exhaustive responses: particularly in high-tech sectors and STEM disciplines, it requires educators to apply gender perspectives to educational pathways – still mostly overlooked in the scientific world – and asks researchers to review and expand their knowledge and competences to include a gender perspective in each step of the research process. In addition, Horizon Europe proposals must address the gender dimension in the entire research and innovation process at project level. The P_GEP therefore includes information actions and information on the gender dimension, on engendering knowledge and gendered innovations, as well as support actions for future projects inspired by the partners' work within Ulysses.

Projects funded by the Science in Society (SIS) and the Science with and for Society (SwafS) programmes did produce useful material on plans to promote gender equality at institutional level: the published reports and articles are now available to everyone thanks to the Open Access policy which applies to EU-funded projects. Therefore we have access to valuable material covering various scientific disciplines, a useful way of introducing a "sex/gender" perspective (Degraef, 2005; European Commission. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2013, 2020; Tannenbaum et al., 2016, 2019) in research or creating GEPs following the guidelines issued by the EIGE⁷. This leads us to the notion of sustainability, another requirement for GEPs. The sustainability of the P_GAP does not go beyond the duration of the project, as it is strictly related to the project's activities, outcomes and outputs. We envisage a different form of sustainability, that the actions implemented in the project will become part of the normal routine for other projects and the Universities' GEPs. In this sense, the P_GAP might contribute to the sustainability of gender equality actions as described and recommended by EIGE, facilitating the embedding of practices "in the normal routines, policies and procedures of the organization"⁸.

Our analysis of the institutional instruments for promoting gender equality in academia, such as the Athena Swan Charter in UK and Ireland and the Italian PAPs, defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) as equivalent instruments to GEPs, revealed a number of common critical problems: primarily, the tendency to overload members of the organisations - particularly women - with work, designing, planning and implementation responsibilities, (Caffrey et al., 2016; Bencivenga, 2019) and to concentrate on the work-life balance (Galizzi and Siboni, 2016). While this is a key prerequisite, it alone will not bring about the structural change needed to achieve gender mainstreaming. The P_GAP will be implemented by people involved in a project that is not centred on gender and diversity. The partner universities are represented in the project by researchers, teaching and administrative staff and students of different genders, covering widely varying issues, with the focus on aspects of technology. The workload for the P_GAP can easily be shared between male and female participants. Attention to work-life balance in the project activities is included but does not dominate. Therefore, the P_GAP narrows the traditional gap between those who create and implement GEPs, and those who benefit from the Plan, providing access to funding that would otherwise be precluded, but are not involved in its construction. The gap leads to a lack of reflection and analysis of the current problems and prevents acquisition of the knowledge needed to reorganise the structure of the organisations. In the P_GAP, the implementation of micro-actions will involve the same people who work on the project tasks, helping them understand the changes enacted by the micro-actions.

To give a more concrete idea of the P_GAP currently in place, we will conclude this section by highlighting some of its features.

The micro-actions have a short duration; in some cases, they are individual actions (for example, revising a text or a conference paper to include references to gender equality and diversity), in others they are repeated several times depending on the progress of the project to which the P_GAP is linked (for example, providing emerging HUBs with indications and consultancy on gender equality or engendering knowledge related to each HUB).

A basic principle adopted in the partnership is to avoid creating new material. The pathway towards gender equality undertaken by universities thanks to the EU has produced numerous reports, toolkits, videos, strategies, policies and recommendations, all available online. The micro-actions, whenever possible, start from existing material, thus contributing to the initiative's sustainability. Another positive consequence is the effort to build

⁷ <https://eige.europa.eu>

⁸ ROADMAP TO GENDER EQUALITY PLANS in research and higher education institutions
https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/gear_roadmap_01_shortguide.pdf

a network of researchers and organisations beyond the Consortium and to involve them in a mutual exchange of experiences.

The P_GAP helps restructure parts of the project to achieve gender balance within the leadership and decision-making processes, and to achieve gender equality in involving the Partners' current and future staff, and in their career pathways, for example by promoting coordinating roles for Tasks or Workpackages within the project. The P_GAP also includes micro-actions designed to integrate the gender dimension into research and educational content inspired by the project: support in identifying and choosing partners outside of the consortium for future projects, or support in adding the gender dimension to projects applications to UE calls in the future. Regarding the educational content, this covers support in including references to research that addresses sex/gender and, where possible, intersectional perspectives for the project disciplines

6. Conclusions

In this exploratory paper, we describe an attempt to help academic staff and students create and adopt gender equality plans (GEPs). The European Union's requirement that GEPs be adopted as early as 2022 has accelerated an undoubtedly positive and desirable process, although doubts and forms of resistance remain. Referring to the EU's requirement that a gender action plan (GAP) be included in research proposals in FP6, we created a project-gender action plan (P-GAP) in a European University.

The paper describes the path leading to the P_GAP, and the reflections leading to this choice. The P_GAP will be implemented in 2022; it is too early to know whether the micro-actions that mirror typical GEP macro-actions will have the desired effect. Obstacles hindering the GEP's implementation, well documented in the literature, might also occur at project level: resistance to change, excessive workload on female staff, difficulties interacting with partners with saturated working schedules, and project work packages that are too defined to allow changes.

Collecting data, monitoring activities, and evaluating the results will show whether the adopted strategy has been effective and can be replicated in other projects to familiarise more teaching, research and administrative staff and students with gender equality and diversity in Academia. This will also favour the sustainability of GEPs after Horizon Europe, should they no longer be mandatory for funding in the next EU research and innovation programme.

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