Gender and Science Policy Briefs: "From Where to Start" to "How to Innovate"

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Introduction

GenPORT is an EU FP7 project with the goal of building an online community for sharing knowledge and inspiring collaborative action on gender and science. The project has been running since 2013 and now enters in its final year, concentrating on a variety of engagement activities to be carried out online. Contrary to other information portals, GenPORT (http://www.genderportal.eu) is a community sourced internet portal, offering an open collaborative environment for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers working on gender equality and excellence in science, technology and innovation (this covers all sciences – natural and social sciences, and humanities).

The GenPORT policy brief series is geared to national level policy makers and institutional science leaders in research performing organisations (RPOs) and research funding organisations (RFOs). It consists of twenty-five policy briefs. Twenty of these policy briefs are grouped around five themes: Recruitment and Promotion, Gender Equality Plans, Gender Dimension in Research Content (RPOs), Gender Dimension in Research Content (RFOs) and Gender Balance in Decision-Making. They are targeted at different country groups according to levels of implementation as reported by research organisations and the presence or absence of measures at the national level.
The other five policy briefs focus on: tackling sexual harassment, intersectionality, securing top-level support for gender equality, building gender competence and knowledge and statistics and methodology –and are not targeted at a specific country group.
The European Research Area (ERA) is at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy and its Innovation Union (IU) policy flagship. One of the five ERA priorities is gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research. The 2012 ERA Communication invites Member states to create a legal and policy environment conducive to gender equality and mainstreaming through:
removing barriers including:
•   legal barriers to the recruitment, retention and career progression of female researchers,
•   addressing gender imbalances in decision making processes
•   strengthening the gender dimension in research programmes
It also invites member states to foster partnerships with research funders, research organisations and universities in order to push for institutional and cultural change on gender through charters, performance agreements and awards whilst ensuring that at least 40% of the under-represented sex participate in committees.
Research stakeholder organisations are invited to carry out "institutional change relating to HR management, funding, decision- making and research programmes through Gender Equality Plans which aim to:
•   Conduct impact assessment / audits of procedures and practices to identify gender bias
•   Implement innovative strategies to correct any bias
•   Set targets and monitor progress via indicators"

Methodology

The European Commission has conducted two surveys (2012/3 and 2014) to measure the level of progress made by research organisations in the EU in implementing the policy priorities of the ERA. The ERA surveys include questions that explore the actions taken by research organisations to promote gender equality.
The country clusters that structure twenty of these policy briefs are based on the classification of countries according to the ERA facts and figures 2014 report. Two variables define the clusters. The first regards self- reported levels of implementation (RPOs and RFOs) per country compared to the EU average - for example the percentage of RPOs that are implementing any recruitment and promotion policies for female researchers in a given country- compared to the EU average. The second variable concerns the presence (or not) of national level policy measures in this field according to the European Commission. On this basis five groups of countries- could be discerned:
•   Implementation above EU average, measures identified
•   Implementation above EU average
•   Implementation below EU average, measures identified
•   Implementation below EU average
•   No implementation
For each of the policy areas: Recruitment and Promotion Measures; Adoption of Gender Equality Plans in RPOs; Gender Dimension in Research Content (RPOs); Gender Dimension in Research Content (RFOs); Gender-Balance in Decision-Making –four country groups have been identified. In all policy areas (except Gender Dimension in Research Content [RFOs]) policy briefs are targeted at those four country groups with implementation above/ below EU average with/ without policy measures. In the case of Gender Dimension in Research Content (RFOs) - we have included the group of countries identified as having 'no implementation'- whilst 'frequent support above EU average' – is absent - as no country forms part of this group.
The policy briefs are structured on the basis of the survey findings despite the limitations of the ERA survey. The limitations of the survey include that it was a self-assessment so - the implementation figures are based on those organisations that reported that they were implementing certain measures. It only concerns those RPOs which answered the ERA survey (they employ 515 000 researchers -around 20% of total EU researchers). The sample for the ERA Survey was not randomly selected and the results have not been weighted due to a lack of substantiated information about the sample frame and the whole population of RPOs. This means producing inferential statistics about the wider population – is not possible.
Despite these limitations, structuring the policy briefs along these lines meant that we were able cover the range of countries from 'proactive' countries to 'inactive' countries.

Results

The policy briefs attempt to provide examples of legislation, policies, initiatives and measures that can be taken at both the national and institutional levels. These policy briefs are designed to be read by national level policy makers and institutional science leaders and will be updated twice during the course of the project to take the findings of new research into account.
Encouraging the Recruitment and Promotion of Female Researchers:
PB1: - Where to start?
PB2: - How to consolidate?
PB3: - How to lead?
PB4: - How to innovate?
Implementing Gender Equality Plans in Research Performing Organisations (RPOs):
PB5: - Where to start?
PB6: - How to consolidate?
PB7: - How to lead?
PB8: - How to innovate?
Integrating the Gender Dimension into Research Content for Research Performing Organisations (RPOs):
PB9: - Where to start?
PB10: - How to consolidate?
PB11: - How to lead?
PB12: - How to innovate?
Integrating the Gender Dimension into Research Content for Research Funding Organisations (RFOs):
PB13: Where to start?
PB14: How to consolidate?
PB15: How to lead?
PB16: How to innovate?
Gender Balance in Decision-Making:
PB17: Where to start?
PB18: How to consolidate?
PB19: How to lead?
PB20: How to innovate?
Thematic Briefs:
PB21: How to Tackle Sexual Harassment in Research and Research Organisations?
PB22: How to Implement an Intersectional Approach in Academia?
PB23: Securing Top-level Support for Gender Equality
PB24: Building Gender Competence and Knowledge for Institutional Transformation
PB25: Statistics and Methodology: Gender and Science

> "Different country clusters can focus on different ways of pursuing gender equality in research organisations. For example, those countries with well developed gender equality legislation along with with a well developed gender mainstreaming framework – could do well to focus on competence building by strengthening training and raising awareness- for effective management practices. A focus on implementation – through effective monitoring and evaluation is also needed. Those countries however with a less developed legislative framework could do well to develop, enact, and enforce gender equality legislative provisions (in research or more broadly) and link gender equality performance with financial incentives."

Conclusions

We ask the GenPORT community to contribute to experiences of policy measures and examples of evaluations to the briefs through adding comments and joining our online discussions – to keep them up-to-date, useful and cutting edge. We hope that they will provide a sound basis for further policy action in the field of gender and science!

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