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Gender Equality Plans and Institutional Change: Pathways for Substantial and Sustainable Outcomes

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Abbreviations

AC – Associated Country

CAQDAS – Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software

CoP – Community of Practice

CSA – Coordination and Support Actions

EDI – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

EIGE – European Institute for Gender Equality

EP – European Parliament

ERA – European Research Area

EU – European Union

FCF – Feminist Critical Friendship

FP – Framework Programme

FP7 – 7th Framework Programme

FI – Feminist Institutionalism

GE – Gender Equality

GAP – Gender Action Plan

GEP – Gender Equality Plan

GEPI – Gender Equality Plan Implementer

H2020 – Horizon 2020

HE – Higher Education

HEI – Higher Education Institution

KPI – Key Performance Indicator

MS – Member State

NCP – National Contact Point

R&I – Research & Innovation

REA – European Research Executive Agency

RFO – Research Performing Organisation

RPO – Research Funding Organisation

RRI – Responsible Research and Innovation

STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

STI – Science, Technology and Innovation

WP – Work Package

Abstract

In recent decades, the structural change approach has become the primary framework for addressing gender inequality within European Research and Innovation (R&I) policies. To instrumentalise this goal, under the 7th and 8th Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation – FP7 (2007-2013) and Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) – the European Commission allocated specific funds to support the implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and Research Funding Organisations (RFOs). More recently, the Commission has further reinforced its commitment by establishing GEPs as a mandatory requirement for institutions seeking funding under the current Horizon Europe programme (2021-2027).

While funding efforts for GEP implementation have been successful in spreading their presence in academic organisations and generated a wealth of knowledge across Europe on developing interventions to promote institutional change towards gender equality, progress remains uneven and slow, as evidenced by the She Figures report (European Commission, 2021) and various scholarly analyses (O'Connor & White, 2021a; Wroblewski & R. Palmén, 2022).

In light of this, this thesis seeks to offer a critical perspective and empirical insights into the factors contributing to the persistent barriers to progress. Precisely, it aims to analyse institutional change as a process, examining its various stages to determine whether there is a clear, shared definition of the institutional change goal among relevant stakeholders across diverse contexts. Additionally, it explores the factors that either facilitate or hinder the effective implementation of GEPs, as well as those that affect the long-term sustainability of the changes brought about by these plans. These objectives are pursued by addressing three primary research questions: (1) How is institutional change defined in the context of GEP implementation within academic organisations?; (2) What are the key facilitators and barriers to the effective implementation of GEPs within academic organisations?; and (3) What factors influence the long-term sustainability of institutional changes achieved through GEPs?

Feminist institutionalism is employed as the underlying theoretical framework for this research, drawing on the foundations of gender studies, organisational studies, and feminist political science to complement the analysis. By adopting this theoretical lens, the thesis critically examines the gendered dynamics within institutions, exploring how formal and informal institutional norms shape both continuity and change. Additionally,

it investigates the interactions between structure and agency, highlighting the role of power, resistance, and strategic action in the process of institutional transformation.

The analysis is centred on a case study of the GEARING-Roles project, a Horizon 2020-funded project designed to implement GEPs in six European academic organisations. This analysis draws on documentary evidence, in-depth semi-structured interviews with GEP coordinators, and participant observations of project meetings and relevant events. To broaden the scope of the data, in addition to the case study, the research also incorporates insights from representatives of other GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and Horizon 2020, gathered through further in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals who served as either GEP coordinators, technical support partners, or evaluators in these projects.

Initially, to explore how institutional change is defined, the concept of complexity is used as a frame of reference (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). The findings confirm that institutional change is as a non-linear process, influenced by a range of interconnected factors, including organisational culture, stakeholder engagement, and the interplay between formal policies and informal practices. This complexity influences how goals are articulated and pursued, and highlights the challenges in achieving a shared understanding of institutional change across different contexts. Notably, inconsistencies emerged in how the concept of institutional change is interpreted by different stakeholders – both among change agents responsible for GEP implementation and between these agents and the European Commission. These inconsistencies, as this thesis argues, may contribute to fragmented approaches and uneven progress in implementing GEPs.

Further, to investigate the necessary conditions to effective GEP implementation, aspects categorised under "structural, agency, processual, and transversal factors" were considered (adapted from Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019). The research indicates that while certain factors – such as resource allocation, supportive governance frameworks, leadership commitment, and bottom-up participation and buy-in – are critical in shaping the effectiveness of GEP implementation, it is their interaction and alignment across all categories of factors that ultimately proves most crucial for success. Thus, rather than adopting an attribution-based approach, institutional change processes shall be analysed through a contribution-based lens, recognising that multiple interrelated factors collectively enhance the likelihood of meaningful change occurring.

In turn, institutional barriers to change were analysed through the lens of resistance. The findings suggest that resistance to GEP implementation most often manifests in

subtle, implicit forms, such as passive non-compliance or inadequate resource allocation, rather than direct opposition. The most prominent form of resistance is institutional, rooted in deeply embedded norms and power dynamics that reinforce the *status quo*. This type of resistance significantly hinders transformative efforts, as it operates within the fabric of organisational structures and practices, making it more difficult to address. Moreover, the persistence of gendered hierarchies and traditional models of academic excellence, coupled with the undervaluation of gender-related work, further complicates efforts to drive sustainable change. These findings highlight the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses both structural barriers and the underlying power relations that shape institutional resistance, while fostering greater engagement and shared responsibility for GE.

Finally, to consider the conditions for sustaining changes over time, the factors above were analysed in relation to their long-term impact on institutional transformation. The findings suggest that while structural interventions, such as policy reforms and the establishment of dedicated gender equality units, are necessary, they are insufficient on their own for lasting change. Instead, the sustainability of these efforts relies on multi-level conditions. At the institutional level, securing dedicated (internal and external) resources and fostering active engagement across all organisational tiers are essential to cultivating a culture of inclusivity and embedding gender equality into the institution's core values and practices. At the national and European levels, supportive legislation and policies must be reinforced by robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms. This shift requires moving beyond viewing gender equality as a temporary or isolated project, recognising it as an ongoing institutional responsibility. Without these commitments, the transformative potential of GEPs may diminish over time, as has been observed in several cases following the conclusion of European-funded projects.

Key words: gender equality; Gender Equality Plans; institutional change; academia; feminist institutionalism.

INTRODUCTION

Despite decades of efforts to address disparities, gender inequality remains a pervasive issue within academia, where institutional structures and cultures continue to reflect and reproduce gendered power dynamics. These inequalities are not confined to a single aspect of academic life but are embedded in the very structures, processes, and norms that govern the production of knowledge and the allocation of resources (Clavero & Galligan, 2020). From hiring practices to promotion criteria, from research funding to work-life balance policies, the academic system often reinforces traditional gender roles, limiting the full participation and advancement of women and other underrepresented groups (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; O'Connor & White, 2021a).

At the global and European levels, a range of initiatives have sought to address these disparities, with gender equality (GE) increasingly prioritised as a key pillar of institutional reform. The European Union (EU), in particular, has played a pivotal role in promoting GE in Research and Innovation (R&I). Since the establishment of the European Research Area (ERA) in 2000, there has been a growing commitment to GE, with member states and associated countries encouraged to implement measures that transform academia into a more inclusive and diverse sector. Over time, there has been a significant evolution in policy approaches, shifting from a focus on "fixing the numbers" and "fixing the women" to a more systemic approach aimed at "fixing the institutions" and "fixing the knowledge." This shift recognises that achieving GE requires more than just numerical parity; it necessitates a comprehensive transformation of institutional structures, rules, and culture to dismantle both visible and hidden barriers that perpetuate inequality.

Precisely, since 2009, the European Commission has adopted the "structural change" approach as the primary strategy for promoting institutional transformation in academia. To operationalise this approach, during the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP7, 2007–2013) and the 8th Framework Programme, Horizon 2020 (2014–2020), the Commission funded specific projects designed to implement Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and Research Funding Organisations (RFOs). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2016), a GEP is a strategic document that identifies existing gender inequalities, sets targets, and implements measures to correct them, with specific indicators to monitor

progress over time. GEPs contribute to institutional change by embedding gender-sensitive practices into the structures and cultures of academic institutions.

Across FP7 and Horizon 2020, over €72 million were invested in projects aimed at fostering institutional change, with more than 200 institutions implementing GEPs under 30 projects (European Commission, n.d.). More recently, the current framework programme, Horizon Europe (2021–2027), has taken these efforts a step further by introducing a new eligibility criterion that requires all institutions and legal entities seeking EU research funding to have a GEP in place. This policy aims to significantly expand the adoption of GEPs across European academic institutions. Institutional change in this context refers to the long-term transformation of the structures, rules, values, and processes within academic institutions, leading to more equitable gender outcomes.

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

While the EU has positioned itself as a leader in GE policy in R&I globally, empirical data (European Commission, 2021b) and scholarly studies (O'Connor & White, 2021b; Wroblewsky & Palmén, 2022) consistently indicate that achieving equality remains a distant objective. Gender inequality persists across various dimensions of academic life, raising critical questions about the effectiveness and sustainability of current strategies. If structural reforms are being implemented through GEPs, why does gender inequality continue to be so pervasive in academia? What are the underlying factors that hinder the deep, transformative change that policies aim to achieve?

A review of existing literature reveals that, despite the numerous practical initiatives funded by European projects and the wealth of knowledge these initiatives have generated in the format of toolkits and guidelines, there is still a comparatively limited number of in-depth academic studies examining these efforts, as also recently noted by Bustelo (2023). Most studies attribute the slow pace of progress to challenges in implementing GEP actions, while often overlooking that institutional change is a multi-phased process, involving the initial design and planning of GEPs, the execution of actions, and the long-term sustainability of the changes achieved.

This gap in the literature highlights a critical oversight: much of the existing research focuses on operational difficulties rather than examining how institutional change is conceptualised and sustained over time. The processes through which change is theoretically expected to occur via GEPs have, in many cases, been under-explored, and are often only described in technical terms through toolkits and guidelines, rather than

being fully theorised or critically analysed. By neglecting the full scope of institutional change – from conceptualisation to sustainability – existing studies miss an opportunity to understand why progress remains slow, even in the face of numerous initiatives.

This thesis seeks to fill these gaps by providing a more comprehensive examination of institutional change processes in their entirety. Precisely, it investigates how concrete actions are designed, implemented, and sustained over time, while also exploring the factors that either drive or hinder their effectiveness.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Lansu et al. (2019) argue that organisations often scapegoat external processes, perceiving themselves as neutral arenas where gender inequality merely mirrors broader societal or interpersonal dynamics. However, to fully grasp how gender inequality is (re)reproduced within them, it is essential to place institutions themselves at the centre of analysis. This thesis builds on this premise by situating its analysis within feminist institutionalism (FI), a theoretical framework that critically interrogates the gendered nature of institutions and the power dynamics that underpin them, while also examining their potential for transformation, particularly in ways that promote GE (Kenny & Mackay, 2009; Krook & Mackay, 2011).

As an underlying theoretical framework, FI will provide to this thesis a critical lens for examining how gender inequality is embedded in the formal and informal rules, structures, and practices of academic institutions. Recognising that institutions are not neutral but deeply gendered, with power dynamics that both perpetuate and challenge inequality, an FI perspective is particularly relevant to study academia, where gendered norms affect not only organisational structures but also the epistemic culture – how knowledge is produced, valued, and rewarded (Clavero & Galligan, 2020). FI will also enable an exploration of structure and agency—the interplay between institutional forces and individual actors—while addressing the dynamics of continuity and change, both of which are crucial for understanding how gendered power dynamics persist and how transformative change can be achieved.

Complementing the FI approach, this thesis draws on scholarship grounded in gender studies and organisational studies, as well as research that integrates these theoretical perspectives with FI to explore gendered change strategies in academic institutions. These articulations will contribute to the conceptualisation of institutional change, using a complexity approach as a framework for analysis (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019).

Additionally, this scholarship will aid in identifying the necessary conditions for effective GEP implementation, categorised into "structural, agency, processual, and transversal factors" (adapted from Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019), while also shedding light on the resistances that often accompany change processes (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2014; Tildesley et al., 2022). This combined approach will ultimately offer both theoretical contributions to the understanding of institutional change and practical insights for advancing GE in academic settings.

3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis is structured around three overarching objectives:

1. To examine the conceptualisation of institutional change in the context of GEPs within academic institutions;
2. To identify the key facilitators and barriers that influence the implementation of GEP actions;
3. To explore how these factors collectively interact to impact the long-term sustainability of changes.

These objectives are addressed by answering three main research questions, each further explored through corresponding sub-questions:

Research question 1: How is institutional change defined in the context of GEP implementation within academic organisations?

- Is there a common definition of institutional change among partners involved in European-funded GEP-implementing projects?
- Is there alignment in the definition of institutional change between GEP-implementing project consortia and the European Commission?
- How do contextual differences across institutions and countries influence the development of a shared definition of institutional change?

Research question 2: What are the key facilitators and barriers to the effective implementation of GEPs within academic organisations?

- What factors contribute to the effective implementation of GEPs?
- What are the primary institutional barriers that hinder the effective execution of change interventions?
- What strategies have been identified as effective in overcoming these barriers?

Research question 3: What factors influence the long-term sustainability of institutional changes achieved through GEPs?

- How is sustainability planning integrated into GEP processes?
- What factors determine or condition the long-term sustainability of these changes?

4. CASE STUDY

To address the research problem and meet the objectives outlined, this thesis centres on the primary research case of the GEARING-Roles project ("Gender Equality Actions in Research Institutions to traNsform Gender ROLES"). Funded under Horizon 2020 and running from 2019 to 2022, GEARING-Roles was designed to foster institutional transformation through the implementation of GEPs across six academic institutions in Estonia, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye, and the UK. The project was selected for its direct relevance to the study's aims. By providing a rich, real-time example of institutional transformation through GEPs in diverse academic and national contexts, GEARING-Roles offers a unique opportunity to explore how GE initiatives have been pursued in practice within the European academic landscape. Additionally, my role as a member of the project's coordination team provided unparalleled access to the internal workings of the consortium, including formal and informal exchanges. This insider position allowed for a deeper understanding of the challenges, strategies, and micro-political negotiations that shape the institutional change process, making the GEARING-Roles project an ideal case study for this investigation.

Beyond the GEARING-Roles project, this thesis also includes insights from interviews with representatives of other GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and Horizon 2020. This broader scope allowed for a comparative analysis of institutional change processes across multiple contexts, enriching the findings and enhancing their generalisability.

5. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is structured into seven chapters. The chapters are designed to guide the reader from the contextual and theoretical foundations of GE policies to the empirical findings, analysis, and conclusions of the research.

Chapter one establishes the contextual framework for the scope of this study. It begins by addressing the ongoing challenges related to gender inequality within academia, supported by relevant data on the current state of GE across the European R&I sector. The chapter then traces the evolution of the EU's approach to GE, from early efforts focusing on equal opportunities to a more comprehensive gender mainstreaming and inclusion strategy. Special emphasis is placed on the development of EU policies aimed at GE in R&I, with a focus on how these policies have been implemented through the EU's Framework Programmes for R&I. The chapter concludes by discussing the role of GEP-implementing projects in promoting institutional change within this broader policy context.

Chapter two outlines the theoretical framework underpinning this study. It introduces FI as the primary theoretical lens for understanding the gendered nature of institutions and their potential for transformation. The chapter also draws on gender and organisational studies, as well as interdisciplinary scholarship, to explore the complexities of institutional change in academic settings. The discussions are structured into three sections, with the first introducing FI, the second examining how institutional change is defined, and the third identifying the conditions necessary for effective GEP implementation and the barriers that hinder progress.

Having established the theoretical framework, the third chapter focuses on the epistemological, methodological, and ethical considerations that guide this research. It explains the feminist research principles adopted, including situated knowledge and the feminist critical friendship (FCF) approach. The chapter also justifies the qualitative research approach and the case study design, detailing the data collection methods and the analytical approach. The ethical challenges encountered in the research are discussed in the final section of the chapter.

Chapter four presents the GEARING-Roles project as the primary case study for this research. The chapter begins by introducing the project's framework, objectives, and consortium partners, situating GEARING-Roles within the broader landscape of EU-funded GEP projects. A detailed account of the six GEPs developed under GEARING-Roles follows, highlighting their distinct structural features and contextual backgrounds. The chapter also summarises the national and institutional contexts in which these GEPs were implemented, providing a foundation for the empirical analyses in subsequent chapters.

In the fifth chapter, the focus shifts to the empirical analysis of how institutional change is understood and translated into practice within GEPs. The chapter explores how institutional change is framed, both at the policy level and within the case study institutions. It analyses whether a shared understanding of institutional change exists across different contexts and stakeholders, and how intersectionality is (dis)regarded in real-life change initiatives. Drawing on the GEARING-Roles case study and insights from other GEP-implementing projects, this chapter contributes to answering the first research question about the definition of institutional change.

Chapter six investigates the factors that either facilitate or hinder the effective implementation of GEPs, with an ultimate focus on sustaining institutional changes over time. The analysis considers structural, agency, processual, and transversal factors that influence GEP outcomes. The chapter also delves into the challenges encountered during the implementation phase, including forms of resistance and the strategies employed by change agents to overcome these obstacles. The chapter concludes by discussing the sustainability of changes promoted through GEPs, offering practical insights into long-term success.

Finally, the conclusions summarise the key findings and contributions of this research. It revisits the research questions and reflects on how the empirical and theoretical insights gained throughout the thesis contribute to a deeper understanding of institutional change processes. The chapter also outlines the practical implications of this research for future GEP initiatives and suggests areas for further research, particularly concerning the long-term sustainability of GE efforts in academic institutions.

CHAPTER 1. GENDER EQUALITY IN EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

This chapter establishes a contextual framework for the scope of this study. I begin by outlining how gender dynamics operate in the context of academia, presenting relevant data on the current state of GE within the R&I sector across Europe. I then trace the evolution of the EU's approach to GE, moving from an initial focus on equal opportunities to a more comprehensive gender mainstreaming and inclusion strategy. Following this, I delve into the development of EU GE policies specifically in the R&I field, with particular emphasis on how these policies have been instrumentalised through the Framework Programmes for R&I. I conclude this chapter with an explanation of GEP-implementing projects, describing their role and structure within this broader policy context.

1. THE GENDERED ACADEMIA

In their seminal work, Joan Acker (1990) coined the term "gendered institutions", remarking that "organizational structure is not gender neutral; on the contrary, assumptions about gender underlie the documents and contracts used to construct organizations and to provide the common-sense ground for theorizing about them" (p. 139). According to Acker, to say that an organisation is gendered implies that, within it, the distribution of power and the formation of meaning and identity are organised and influenced by biased social norms that grounded on accepted ideals of male and female, masculine and feminine (Acker, 1990). Such norms operate, for instance, "associating masculinity with rationality, power, boundary setting and control, and conversely associating femininity with its opposite – passivity, care, emotion and irrationality" (Waylen, 2014, p. 215). First, these operations are reflected in the division of labour, power, and space, where men often occupy the most privileged positions. Second, they impact how women and men are seen within institutional settings (e.g., how they are expected to behave and clothe). Third, they impact how individuals interact in these contexts (e.g., who is expected to talk, about what topics, and how). Fourth, in how they perceive themselves as institutional actors (e.g., in the choice of appropriate work). Finally, in how individuals are framed and treated by institutional logics and structures (Acker, 1990; O'Connor & White, 2021b).

Analysing academic institutions, Clavero and Galligan (2020) observe that "while the norms of values of organisations are presented as 'gender neutral' (i.e., wrapped in a veil of objectivity and assuming a disembodied and universal worker) they are de facto deeply androcentric" (p. 653). Drawing on Acker's theory, they translate the ways in which gendered norms manifest in institutional settings to the context of academia. Firstly, they explain, they manifest in the unequal distribution of power in academia, where men predominantly hold senior faculty and management positions. Secondly, the use of symbols, language, and imagery within academia reinforces these imbalances, often portraying the ideal academic as a successful white male. Thirdly, they note how gender disparities are also apparent in everyday interactions, with women frequently being interrupted or side-lined in meetings. Fourthly, the norms around work expectations, such as the need for constant, uninterrupted dedication to one's career, disproportionately disadvantage those with caregiving responsibilities, typically women. Lastly, they stress the inherent bias in organisational practices, such as job evaluations that favour uninterrupted research careers over teaching or service roles, further entrenches these gender inequalities (Clavero & Galligan, 2020).

Contributing to the debate, Husu (2021) introduces the concept of "non-events" to describe the subtle, often overlooked forms of discrimination that impact women's careers in academia. These non-events take place even against the presence of formal policies promoting GE. They include experiences such as being excluded from important conversations, not receiving the same level of support or mentorship as male colleagues and being overlooked for opportunities like speaking engagements or collaborative projects. Husu's analysis highlights how these non-events, while seemingly minor or isolated, accumulate over time, shaping academic careers, identities, and organisational cultures in gendered ways. The recognition of these non-events and the cumulative effect of these subtle exclusions and omissions on the professional development of women and other marginalised groups often occurs only in hindsight, thus complicating efforts to address them in real-time (see also O'Connor, 2021; O'Connor & White, 2021b; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012).

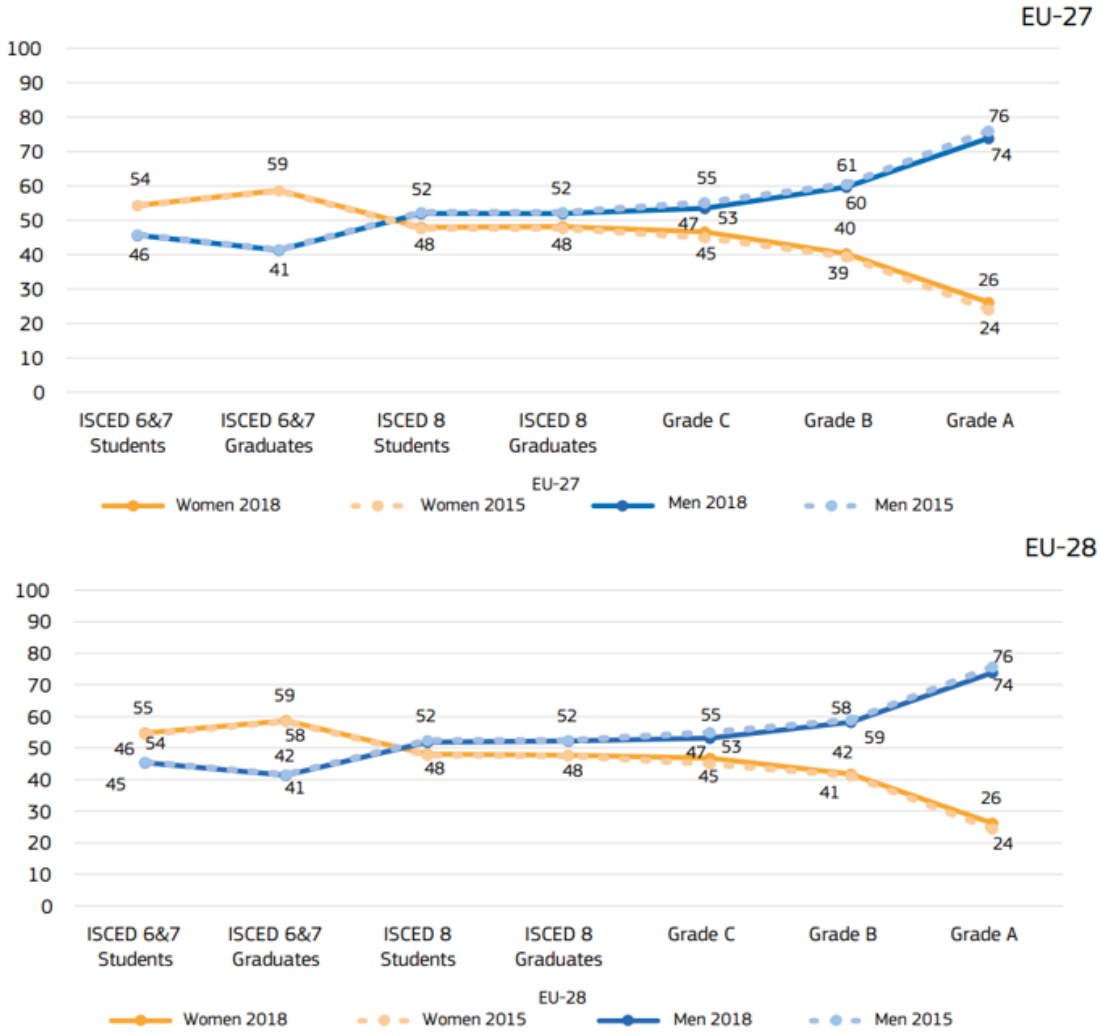
Empirical data substantiates these scholarly discussions. According to the last She Figures report – a publication issued by the European Commission that provides comprehensive data on GE in R&I across European countries – women remain significantly underrepresented in the academic field, particularly in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) fields, where the gap is more pronounced

(O'Connor & White, 2021c). Women academics are less likely to be offered tenure or promoted to full professorship, even when controlling for productivity and research impact. In 2018, while women constituted 40% of academic staff in European institutions, they held only 26% of grade A positions (i.e., senior staff and full professors) in 2018 (European Commission, 2021b).

The underrepresentation of women in the highest academic positions is often explained by the "scissors effect" metaphor, which illustrates the sharp decline in the proportion of women as they advance through the academic career ladder (see Graph 1). This metaphor captures the reality that, despite an increase in the number of women graduates and early-career researchers, this does not translate into proportional representation at the highest academic levels. Notably, the persistence of the "scissors effect" over time underscores the structural and enduring nature of gender inequality in academia. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon. On an individual level, challenges in balancing professional and personal responsibilities, particularly those related to caregiving, often impede women's career progression. Institutionally, the notion of meritocracy in academia, which is often biased and overlooks the additional hurdles faced by women, can further disadvantage them. Structurally, pervasive gender inequality within academic systems reinforces these barriers (O'Connor & White, 2021b).

In addition to their underrepresentation in senior academic positions, women are also less likely to be appointed to leadership roles such as department chairs or deans. In 2019, less than 25% of heads of European academic institutions were women. They made up just over 3 in 10 board members (31.1%), with less than one-quarter serving as board leaders (24.5%) (European Commission, 2021b). This disparity is often attributed to the "glass ceiling" effect, that is, to the invisible systemic obstacles that hinder women's advancement into top managerial and decision-making roles. These obstacles are often obscured by formal organisational policies that ostensibly promote equal opportunities, while informal norms and practices perpetuate discriminatory patterns that create an invisible ceiling. These barriers not only hinder women's progress but also contribute to a narrative that wrongly attributes women's lack of advancement to individual choices or personal failure, rather than recognising the structural obstacles that impede their access to positions of power (Campanini & Pizarro, 2021; Linková et al., 2021).

Graph 1. Scissors graph on the proportion (%) of men and women in a typical academic career, students and academic staff, EU-27 & EU-28, 2015-2018 [2]



Note: Retrieved from "She Figures 2021: Gender in Research and Innovation: Statistics and Indicators", by European Commission, 2021b, Publications Office of the European Union, p. 181. Copyright 2021 by the European Commission.

Furthermore, women in academia are more likely to occupy positions with precarious working conditions, and the gender pay gap remains a major issue (Murgia & Poggio, 2019; Rosa & Clavero, 2020). The last She Figures report indicates that a higher proportion of women in academia hold part-time or temporary contracts compared to their male colleagues, limiting their career progression and financial stability. The situation is particularly challenging for women with caregiving responsibilities; in couples with children, women are more likely to be employed under precarious contracts, reflecting

[2] In Graph 1, ISCED refers to "International Standard Classification of Education". Levels 6 and 7 represent Bachelor's and Master's or equivalent level, while level 8 represents Doctoral level or equivalent.

the intersection of gender and family roles in shaping employment conditions (European Commission, 2021b). Furthermore, even when performing the same roles, women faculty members tend to earn less than their male counterparts (Leythienne & Pérez-Julián, 2021).

This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors. One key reason is the persistence of gender bias in salary negotiations, where men are often perceived as more assertive or deserving of higher pay, leading to better starting salaries and more frequent raises (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Additionally, women may face implicit biases that devalue their work or contributions, which can affect merit-based pay increases, resulting in lower pay for equivalent roles. This is coupled with the historical undervaluation of fields and disciplines where women are more heavily represented, which often translates into lower overall salaries in those areas compared to male-dominated fields (Álvarez, 2020; Uzzi, 2019). Ultimately, these disparities are also perpetuated by a lack of transparency in pay structures, which allows gender-based discrepancies to persist unchecked (Galligan et al., 2021).

Directly connected to the above is the fact that women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of under-recognised and often unpaid labour in academia, such as mentoring, student support, and other vital but undervalued roles – referred to as "academic housework" by Heijstra et al. (2017) (see also Lopes & Santos, 2023). The hierarchical valuation of work in academia, where research is highly rewarded, while teaching, management, and administrative roles are inadequately recognised, exacerbates this issue. This systemic undervaluation of women's contributions not only entrenches their marginalisation within academia, but also hinders their ability to break through the "glass ceiling" and attain senior positions where they could influence the institutional policies and practices that perpetuate gender disparities.

The scenario described above exists within a broader context where contemporary academia is deeply shaped by globalisation and driven by neoliberal principles. These principles – emphasising productivity, individualism, accountability, the privatisation of care, internationalisation, and the marketisation of knowledge – reinforce existing disparities and influence the structure and operation of academic institutions (Bozzon et al., 2018; Heijstra et al., 2017; O'Hagan et al., 2019; Rosa & Clavero, 2021). This dynamic is particularly evident in the idea of academic institutions as "gender-neutral meritocracies", where the concept of "excellence" is often invoked to rationalise the ongoing existence of gender inequality, with suggestions that women either fail to meet

these so-called standards of excellence or do not aspire to such positions, thereby obscuring structural biases (O'Connor & Barnard, 2021; Linková et al., 2021).

In summary, the persistence of gender inequality in academia cannot be understood in isolation from the broader socio-economic forces that shape academic institutions today. The combination of structural barriers detailed in this section illustrates how deeply entrenched gender biases continue to shape the academic landscape. These biases manifest not only in the underrepresentation of women in senior and leadership roles but also in the ways women are systematically devalued, underpaid, and overburdened with responsibilities that are critical yet underappreciated. To address these challenges, it is essential to critically examine and reform the underlying structures and practices that perpetuate these disparities, moving beyond superficial changes towards a more genuinely inclusive and equitable academic environment.

2. EUROPEAN POLICIES ON GENDER EQUALITY

The framework presented above offers an overall depiction of how gender dynamics operate within the academic sphere, particularly in the European setting, which is the primary contextual scope of this thesis. Gender inequality in R&I is a widely acknowledged issue which has received increased attention from European policy domains over the past few decades. While this work does not aim to trace the entire history of gender equality in the EU or offer a critical analysis of EU policymaking processes, understanding the continuity and evolution of policies and programmes on gender equality in R&I offers valuable insights. This perspective enables a more nuanced examination of their implementation and evaluation, grounded in an awareness of the broader processes and contexts that have shaped them.

To achieve this, in the following subsections, I will first provide a brief overview of how the EU's general approach to GE has evolved from equal opportunities to a gender mainstreaming approach. I then explore the development of European policies on GE specifically within the R&I domain, with a particular focus on the Framework Programmes for R&I. Finally, I conclude with a description of GEP-implementing projects, which are the central focus of analysis in this thesis.

2.1 FROM EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND INCLUSION

Established in 1993 by the Maastricht Treaty, the EU expanded the original European Economic Community (EEC) into a broader political and economic union. Whilst it was initially focused primarily on economic integration and the creation of a single European market, over time, its mandate has progressively expanded to include social justice issues, including GE. Currently, provisions on equality and non-discrimination are found in the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, and all MS's national Constitutions. This evolution has been driven by the growing recognition of the importance of social issues in economic development. Although equality and non-discrimination were initially employed to ensure market integration, they eventually evolved into mechanisms for implementing social policies (Gropas, 2020; Woodward, 2012).

GE has primarily been advanced by the Community through a combination of three major approaches: equal treatment, positive or affirmative actions, and gender mainstreaming. In the 1970s, an equal treatment approach was adopted which viewed GE as a women's issue and led to measures addressing topics such as equal pay and equal opportunities (Rees, 2005; Woodward, 2012). As it became clear that "neutral policies had different results" (European Commission, 2005, p. 5) for women and men and that treating women and men equally in a society built by and for men would not lead to equality but rather perpetuate discrimination, the approach in the 1980s shifted towards positive or affirmative actions. These were mainly framed as education, training, and mentoring to support women in their specific needs (Rees, 2005). While positive or affirmative actions helped address GE to some extent, like the equal opportunities approach, they demonstrated to be a partial solution, as "they prepared women for operating in a male dominated culture but did not challenge it" (European Commission, 2005, p. 5).

The 1990s were marked by the 1995 United Nations fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), where gender mainstreaming was established as the key strategy for pursuing GE. In response to the international movement, the European Commission issued the 1996 communication "Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities", recognising gender

inequality as a systematic, structural problem, and endorsing gender mainstreaming as the main strategic approach to pursue GE in the EU (European Commission, 1996).

In 1998, the Council of Europe provided a widely adopted definition to gender mainstreaming as "the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies, at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking" (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 15). This definition has been widely adopted by EU institutions to implement gender mainstreaming in policy processes across various domains.

Among scholars, its adoption was seen as a significant step forward, representing a shift from isolated policy actions to a more comprehensive and systemic approach. Rees explains that gender mainstreaming differs from equal treatment strategies and positive or affirmative initiatives in that it "turns the focus away from individuals and their rights to equal treatment, and from groups and ameliorating their historical disadvantage, to address the ways in which systems and structures infringe those rights and cause that disadvantage in the first place" (Rees, 2005, p. 558). In a similar vein, Verloo (2005) states that "by reorganising policy processes so that the regular policy makers will be obliged and capable to incorporate a perspective of gender equality in their policies, this strategy aims at a fundamental transformation, by eliminating gender biases, and redirecting policies so that they can contribute towards the goal of gender equality" (Verloo, 2005, p. 23) (see also Walby, 2005; Woodward, 2004).

While gender mainstreaming has been a pivotal strategy for advancing GE within the EU, its implementation has been fraught with significant challenges and criticisms. One of the key critiques is that, as gender mainstreaming has been integrated into broader policy frameworks, its original feminist political objectives have been diluted. This depoliticisation occurs because GE measures, when embedded within wider policy agendas, often lose their distinct focus and urgency. As a result, GE issues can become marginalised, competing with other policy priorities within a crowded and complex agenda (Stratigaki, 2005; Vida, 2020). Another critique is that the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming has been undermined by a technocratic approach to its implementation, reducing it to a procedural exercise that frequently fails to address or challenge underlying structural inequalities. Critics contend that this approach often turns gender mainstreaming into a box-ticking exercise, where gender considerations are superficially included in policy documents without leading to meaningful changes in outcomes (Milward et al., 2015; Verloo, 2005). Finally, scholars further critique the broad and

somewhat vague nature of the gender mainstreaming mandate, which has led to varying interpretations and implementations across different EU institutions and MS, resulting in uneven progress and inconsistent outcomes (Verloo, 2005; Walby, 2005).

Despite criticisms, gender mainstreaming remains a key strategy for advancing GE within the EU. It reflects the EU's commitment to addressing gender inequality not as a peripheral issue but as a central concern that cuts across all policy areas. While it can be seen as the major approach through which the EU currently pursues GE in its policy domains, specific policy goals and initiatives based on equal treatment and positive or affirmative actions are still present in strategic documents such as the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (Bencivenga et al., 2021a). Thus, to a less or greater extent, the three approaches – equal opportunities, positive actions, and gender mainstreaming – currently co-exist in European policy strategies (Mergaert & Minto, 2021; Walby, 2005).

2.2 GENDER EQUALITY IN EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION: FROM FP5 TO HORIZON EUROPE

The European Union's focus on research and innovation can be traced back to the foundational treaties of 1957, including the Treaty of Rome and the Euratom Treaty, which laid the groundwork for the Community's engagement in research, particularly in the nuclear sector. In 1983, Resolution C 208/1 of the Council of the European Communities launched the Framework Programmes to coordinate and fund research across Member States (MS).[3] However, it was not until the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty that research policy was officially included in the EU's mandate (Rees, 2005). This Treaty marked a significant advancement for GE, as it incorporated it as a specific task of the Community and an objective to be pursued across all its policy domains, including research and innovation (Article 8 TFEU, previously Article 3(2) TEC). Since then, significant steps have been taken to address discrimination in the R&I field.

The first significant document stating the scope of gender issues in the European R&I sector was the 1999 Commission Communication "Women and Science: Mobilising Women to Enrich European Research" (COM (1999) 76 final) (European Commission, 1999). Although the communication was mainly aimed at promoting equal opportunities to expand the workforce in the scientific field, it also "defined its understanding of

[3] FPI (1984-1987); FP2 (1987-1991); FP3 (1990-1994); FP4 (1994-1998); FP5 (1998-2002); FP6 (2002-2006); FP7 (2007-2013); FP8/Horizon 2020 (2014-2020); FP9/Horizon Europe (2021-2027).

promoting equal opportunities as research by, for and on women" (Linková & Mergaert, 2021b, p. 318). The communication presented an action plan with specific measures for stakeholders to integrate the gender dimension into R&I policy, focusing on three main priorities: increasing women's participation in research (research *by* women), embedding the gender perspective into the research agenda (research *for* women), and promoting gender-specific research (research *on* women). This 1999 Communication was the first explicit EC commitment to gender mainstreaming in research policy.

Within the European Commission, the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD)[4] is responsible for managing research as a policy area, while the Council and the European Parliament also participate in the decision-making process, as the European Commission's proposals for funding research are adopted through a co-decision procedure (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014).

In order to put their policy commitments in practice, also in 1999, the Commission established the Gender Sector within the DG RTD and the Helsinki Group, as structures to institutionalise gender mainstreaming in the research sector. Currently, the Gender Sector plays a role in promoting GE in R&I policies across the EU, ensuring that a gender perspective is integrated into all R&I activities funded by the European Commission. The Helsinki Group, in turn, was composed by representatives of MS and associated countries (AC) and was set up as an advisory group to provide expert guidance on addressing GE issues in R&I. It was active from 1999 to 2017, when it was replaced by the current Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation under European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC SWG GRI).

Soon after the 1999 Communication, the European Commission launched the ERA in 2000, with the aim of creating a single market for research in Europe and promoting cooperation and coordination across MS (COM(2000) 6 final). It represented a significant EU research policy initiative as it was the first to couple economic and social objectives and recognised the importance of women in research. The ERA has since played a crucial

[4] The term "Research and Technological Development" (RTD) was traditionally used in EU research policy. With the launch of the Horizon 2020 programme, the terminology shifted to "Research and Innovation" (R&I), reflecting a broader focus that includes innovation alongside technological development. This shift also had positive implications for GE, as it more markedly opened up new opportunities for integrating considerations on societal challenges into research and innovation processes.

role in advancing GE in R&I by encouraging the integration of the gender dimension across all aspects of research policy and practice.[5]

The primary financial instrument through which R&I policies are implemented are the Framework Programmes (FP). These multi-year funding programmes allocate funds to national organisations to implement projects on prioritised areas established in the programme schemes. Looking back at how GE has been considered into the FPs since their inception in 1984, significant progress is evident. Nevertheless, as noted by Cavaghan (2012), Mergaert (2012), Mergaert and Lombardo (2014), Linková and Mergaert (2021b), and Rees (2005), progress in this area has not followed a linear path of increasing complexity informed by growing knowledge about the issue.

While the FPs were launched in 1984, it was only in FP5 (1998-2002) that an objective to increase the participation of women in R&I was included. Since then, provisions on GE under the FPs progressed unevenly (Bencivenga e al., 2021b; Linková & Mergaert, 2021b). Within FP5, the Commission established a Gender Watch System to monitor the inclusion of the gender dimension in the programme and the representation of women in evaluation panels and advisory groups (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014; Bencivenga et al., 2021a). In this context, Gender Impact Assessment studies of FP5 specific programmes were produced and informed the subsequent programme (European Commission, 2001).

Under FP6 (2002-2006), gender mainstreaming was officially introduced in the programme plans, with measures targeting project proposers, expert evaluators, and Commission officers (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006). Project proposers under the so-called Integrated Projects and Networks of Excellence (the largest projects in FP6) were required to present a Gender Action Plan (GAP) explaining how gender was considered in their projects and the representation of women in research teams.[6] Expert evaluators received guides to assess proposals taking into account the extent to which they mainstreamed gender, and DG RTD Project Officers received a *Vademecum* on the importance of introducing a gender perspective in research content

[5] As of 2024, the ERA includes 44 countries. This comprises all 27 MS of the EU and 17 associated or third countries that participate in the ERA. These associated countries include those within the European Free Trade Association, such as Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein, as well as other non-EU countries that have agreements to participate in European research programmes.

[6] For a thorough analysis of GAPs under FP6, see Mergaert, 2012.

and increasing women's representation in project activities (Bencivenga et al., 2021a; Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014).

Additionally, specific funding was allocated for GE under FP6's Women and Science calls for proposals. Topics were centred on issues such as empowering women scientists, promoting women as ambassadors for science, experimenting with new research areas and improving the Gender Watch System, conducting comparative research to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of measures, and measuring and evaluating scientific excellence (Bencivenga et al., 2021a). Following up on the idea of the FP5 Gender Impact Assessment studies, six Gender Monitoring Studies were commissioned for FP6, covering different areas of activity and informing the next programme.

While these studies identified an important progress in GE from FP5 to FP6 (European Commission, 2009), the advances achieved in FP6 were not linearly carried over into FP7 (2007-2013). During the negotiations for FP7, although experts supported the maintenance of GAPs as a mandatory instrument for project proposals, the requirement was dropped for reasons of "simplification" of proposals evaluation, yet "without clear justification" (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014, p. 14). In an attempt to establish the reasons for this backlash, Mergaert and Lombardo (2014) conducted a study in which they analysed the Commission's policy documents, conducted interviews with Commission's officers, and observed project activities in that period. The authors discussed how gender mainstreaming was resisted at different levels within DG RTD, and concluded that although significant advances had been reached at the policy level, there was an important gap in the assignation of resources and training of the Commission staff on how to effectively apply it in practice.

Given this pushback, during the early stages of FP7, projects were focused on a "fixing the women" approach and primarily centred on initiatives such as mentoring for women scientists (Linková & Mergaert, 2021b). However, as the limited long-term impact of these actions alone became apparent, the Commission finally recognised the need to take a step forward and support actions to implement change at a structural level (Marchetti & Raudma, 2010). It was in this context that the "structural change" approach was launched in 2009, under FP7 Science in Society calls. The measure was a significant milestone in acknowledging the crucial role of institutions in perpetuating gender inequalities in R&I,

marking the beginning of the allocation of specific funding to projects that implemented GEPs at the institutional level of RPOs and RFOs.[7]

Within this framework, still during the implementation period of FP7, the European Commission established the Expert Group on Structural Change in 2011. The primary objective of this group was to assist the Commission in identifying the most effective strategies for enhancing collaborative structural change initiatives with MS and AC. The group conducted a comprehensive study which provided recommendations to the European Commission, national governments, and stakeholder organisations with proposed measures to foster practical implementation of structural change (European Commission, 2011). It identified five primary challenges for attaining GE in R&I at the institutional level: "opaqueness in decision-making processes; institutional practices inhibiting career opportunities; unconscious bias in assessing excellence; wasted opportunities and cognitive errors in knowledge, technology and innovation; and employment policies and practices" (European Commission, 2011, pp. 19-25).

This study was followed by the 2012 EC Communication "A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth" (COM(2012) 392 final)", which benchmarked the recognition of GE and gender mainstreaming as the fourth of the five ERA priorities. The Communication was reaffirmed by the Council Conclusions (17649/12) and called on national states and research stakeholder organisations to promote GE through an institutional change approach, among others, through the implementation of GEPs. Three main objectives were set to foster institutional change: GE in careers at all levels; gender balance in decision making; and integration of the gender dimension into the content of R&I.

Aimed at further consolidating the structural change approach, the Commission supported the "Structural Change: Promoting Gender Equality Research Organisations" conference held in Lithuania in 2013.[8] The conference served as a platform for fostering dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders involved in policy-making and the scientific community. As an outcome, the conference produced the "Vilnius

[7] Over the years, projects have used various terms such as Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), Gender Action Plans (GAPs), or Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAPs) to describe similar initiatives. While these terms may differ slightly, there has been no explicit differentiation between them in most discussions.

[8] The conference was organised by the SAPGERIC project, funded under FP7 (Grant Agreement n. 620745). https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/620745/de

Recommendations", which encompassed several key elements. Firstly, it called upon the Council of the European Union to actively engage MS in eliminating barriers that hinder GE and to offer incentives for implementing structural change within research organisations, including universities. Secondly, it urged the European Commission to adopt a comprehensive recommendation addressing structural change. Lastly, it entreated the European Parliament to regularly monitor and evaluate the progress made in promoting structural change.[9]

In 2015, the Council further reinforced its commitment to advancing GE in the ERA through its Conclusions on "Advancing Gender Equality in the European Research Area" (14846/15). It called on MS to prioritise institutional change as a crucial element of their national R&I policy framework, and invited MS and RFOs to create incentives for RPOs to develop or revise gender mainstreaming strategies and GEPs, and allocate resources for their realisation. Within this framework, in 2016, National Action Plans were formulated by MS to implement the ERA Roadmap, with concrete measures and initiatives aimed at advancing GE in R&I at national level (Council of the European Union, 2015).

Also in 2016, a significant advancement was made with the launch of the GEAR (Gender Equality in Academia & Research) tool, commissioned by EIGE and DG RTD (EIGE, 2016). Developed by gender experts deeply involved in structural change projects, it aids universities and research organisations in all stages of institutional change processes, from the design and implementation of GEPs to monitoring and evaluation of actions. Since its release, all GEP-implementing projects were required to use the GEAR tool as a point of reference. By offering step-by-step instructions, resources, and best practices, the GEAR tool quickly became an essential resource for institutions aiming to promote GE in research and academia, helping to standardise and enhance efforts across Europe.[10]

The FP framed under this period was Horizon 2020 (H2020), which ran from 2014-2020. In addition to having GE as a specific objective, H2020 was the first programme to prioritise gender as a crosscutting issue across all areas, requiring applicants to demonstrate how they considered the gender dimension in their proposals. This

[9] http://www.sapgeric.eu2013.vu.lt/recommendations/

[10] In 2022, the GEAR tool was reviewed and updated, incorporating insights from various gender experts and reflecting the latest developments in GEP practices (see EIGE, 2022).

commitment was embedded in the programme's regulation, which included legal provisions for GE in Articles 14 and 16 (European Parliament and the Council, 2013). Under H2020, the funding for projects aimed at implementing GEPs in RPOs and RFOs also saw a substantial increase. This was evident not only in the rise in funding of GEP-implementing projects but also in the growing recognition of these projects as catalysts for change at national level (Elizondo et al., 2022).

More recently, 20 years after the launch of ERA, the European Commission proposed "A New ERA for Research and Innovation" in 2020, with a new set of objectives and priorities (COM(2020) 628 final), reaffirmed by the Council Conclusions (14308/ 21). Under the new ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024, GEPs are recognised as the primary instrument for achieving GE and special attention is given to promoting inclusive GE through the implementation of inclusive GEPs. Currently, the GE "approach for ERA is dual: gender equality is an independent, self-standing agenda; concurrently, it is a cross-cutting issue to be mainstreamed in other priorities and policies" (Linková & Mergaert, 2021b, p. 316).

Also within this period, in 2021, the Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation further reinforced these efforts, emphasising the importance of a coordinated approach across the ERA to address persistent gender inequalities. Building on the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (European Commission, 2020a), the declaration emphasises the need for the systematic integration of gender perspectives in research content and design, the promotion of diversity within research teams, and the development of GEPs by institutions. Additionally, the declaration advocates for improved monitoring and accountability mechanisms, alongside fostering international cooperation to address gender disparities in R&I globally.

These developments are evidenced in the current FP, Horizon Europe (2021-2027). The major novelty of the programme regarding GE is that all public bodies, higher education institutions (HEIs) and research organisations from MS and AC must have a GEP in place that meets a set of mandatory requirements in order to be eligible for funding (European Commission, 2021a). Integrating the gender dimension in project proposals is now a requirement by default evaluated under the excellence criterion, and research teams are expected to achieve gender balance. Finally, the programme prioritises a diversity approach by allocating specific funding for the inclusion of an intersectional perspective in R&I, as well as promoting geographical and sectorial inclusiveness, fostering the representation of all countries and the inclusion of the private sector in innovation,

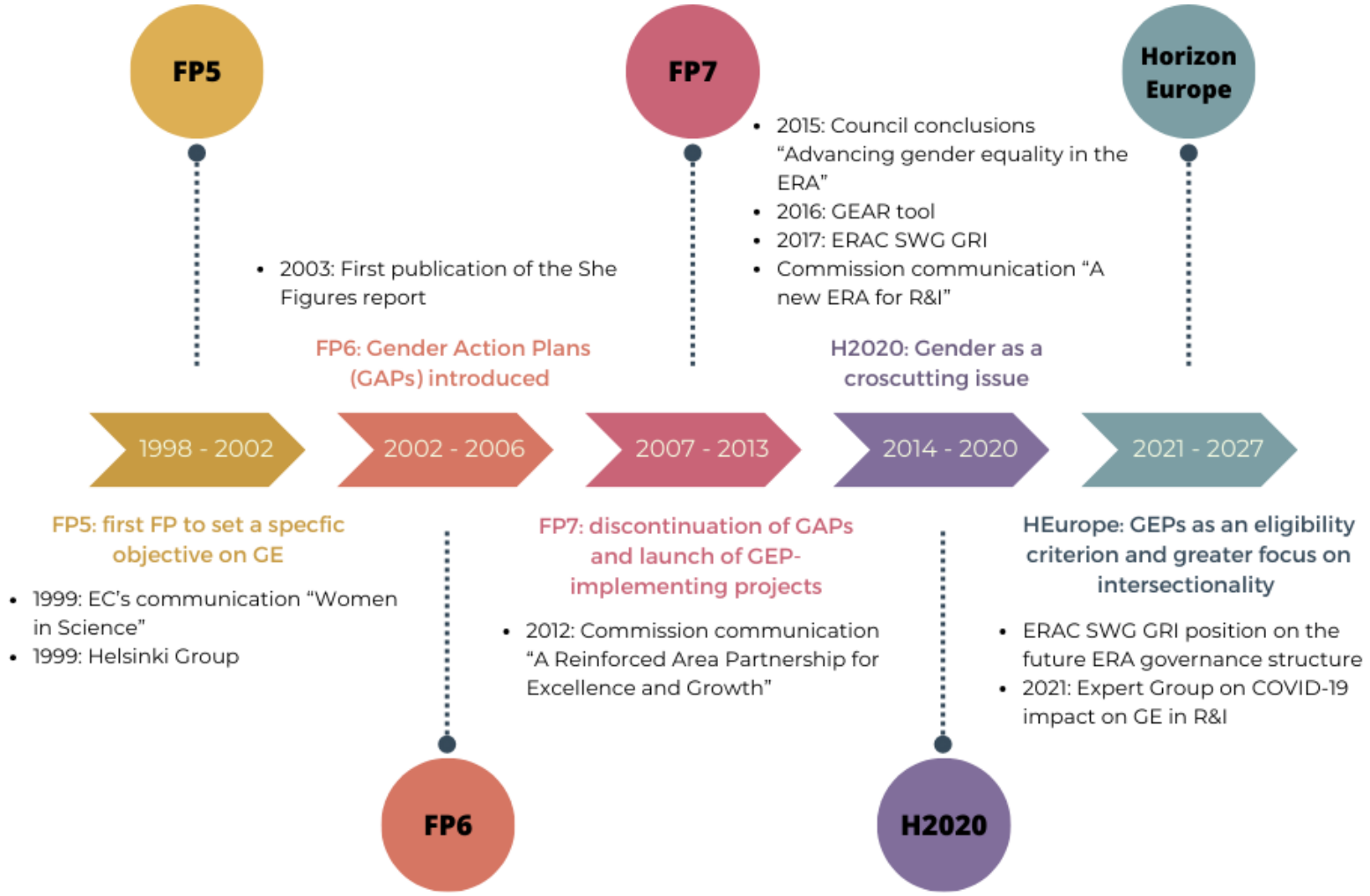
through policy coordination and the implementation of inclusive GEPs (European Commission, 2023).

Horizon Europe's recent advancements represent important steps towards expanding the scope of GEPs across national institutions. The recent study commissioned by the European Commission on the impact of GEPs across ERA reveals that, together with national policies, the introduction of the GEP eligibility criterion has been instrumental in legitimising and driving GE efforts at the institutional level. In addition to prompting widespread adoption, having GEPs as a funding condition has fostered access to tools, capacity-building initiatives, and mutual learning opportunities, facilitating an increasingly harmonised understanding across MS and AC. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring these measures do not devolve into mere formalities but lead to substantial institutional and cultural transformations. The study underscores the importance of robust monitoring frameworks, intersectional approaches, and sustained leadership commitment to achieving meaningful and lasting gender equality in R&I (European Commission, 2024).

In retrospect, it is clear that the extensive knowledge accumulated from over a decade of implemented projects has aptly informed policy advancement in the field (see Figure 1 below). Notably, the cyclical evaluations of the FPs, bolstered by expert input and academic insights from these projects, have played a crucial role in refining strategies to address gender disparities in the European R&I sector. This policy evolution is representative of the transition from strategies centred on "fixing the numbers" and "fixing the women" to a more encompassing focus on "fixing the institution" and "fixing the knowledge" approach, catering on challenging systemic dynamics that (re)produce inequality.

Importantly, the transition from these initial strategies to a more structural focus has not resulted in the abandonment of earlier approaches. Instead, these measures coexist in an evolutionary continuum, often overlapping and complementing one another in practice (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). This integration of approaches within the policy landscape underscores the recognition that addressing gender inequality in R&I requires a multifaceted strategy – one that simultaneously tackles immediate disparities while also working to reform the underlying institutional and knowledge systems that (re)produce inequality.

Figure 1. Timeline of European policy evolutions on gender equality in R&I, 1998-2023



Note: self-elaborated.

2.3 GEP-IMPLEMENTING PROJECTS

I now delve into more details on what is the main focus of this research: GEP-implementing projects. As the initiative to fund projects implementing change-oriented actions at the institutional level of RPOs and RFOs commenced in FP7 through projects that piloted the development of actions centred on specific areas, such as female empowerment in academia, career progression of women researchers, women leadership and decision-making, and gender dimension in research content. Over time, these pilot-based initiatives developed into more coordinated efforts, eventually taking the form of fully structured GEPs that followed the methodology prescribed in the GEAR tool (EIGE, 2016). This standardisation resulted in a closely connected community of sister projects, which actively collaborated in generating expert knowledge.

A GEP is defined as a collection of actions aimed at identifying gender inequalities and biases, implementing corrective measures, and setting targets to monitor progress through specific indicators (EIGE, 2016). Put simply, it refers to a strategic approach to institutional change that translates the broader goal of GE into tangible, practical steps.

> The strategic goal of introducing a GEP is to integrate gender equality into the regular rules, procedures and practices of a research organisation. Successful implementation of a GEP will lead to the transformation of an institution, thus also affecting the organisational culture. It will become part of ongoing procedures and will have an impact on the entire organisational system and culture. A GEP is therefore a strategy whose ultimate aim is to become dispensable and become part of the regular rules that gender-equal research organisations follow (EIGE, 2022, p. 27)

Sansonetti et al. (2017) describe GEPs as "strategic and tailored initiatives meant to define the legal framework and the operational conditions for implementing gender mainstreaming in practice at the workplace" (p. 10). The core objective of GEPs is to promote GE within a defined timeframe by addressing gender biases and inequalities identified through institutional audits. Effective GEPs include measurable indicators for success and often involve specific training to build gender competences within the organisation. The development and implementation of GEPs follow a multi-phase process – analysis, planning, implementation, and monitoring – where the success of these plans is closely tied to a participative approach that actively involves all relevant stakeholders.

Under FP7 and H2020, GEP-implementing projects were funded as Coordination and Support Actions (CSA) – projects that involving activities such as standardisation, dissemination, awareness-raising, networking, policy dialogue, and mutual learning, rather than direct research and innovation activities. Spanning three to four years, these

projects were primarily focused on the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of GEPs within participating institutions. They involved institutions from both MS and AC, including universities, research centres, RFOs, national public bodies responsible for research policy, and consulting agencies specialising in gender, institutional change, and other research-related activities.

Project consortia were typically composed of GEP-implementing partners, a coordinating partner, a technical support partner, a partner responsible for project dissemination, and an evaluator. The technical support partner provided specialised expertise and resources to assist the implementing institutions in achieving their goals, offering guidance on best practices, tools, and methodologies. Evaluators played a crucial role in monitoring and assessing the project's progress and outcomes, including those of the GEPs, ensuring that the objectives were met and contributing to continuous improvement throughout the project's lifecycle.

In terms of structure, reporting, and monitoring, GEP-implementing projects adhered to a framework similar to other EU-funded initiatives, being organised into Work Packages (WPs) and subject to continuous monitoring and evaluation by the European Commission. This process was guided by the specific objectives, milestones, and key performance indicators outlined in the grant agreements and was documented through periodic reports, deliverables, and review meetings.

In terms of content, each project had its specific objectives, but all were fundamentally focused on promoting structural changes within the participating institutions through the implementation of GEPs. GEPs were customised to the unique needs and capacities of each institution, however, the European Commission mandated that all GEPs during H2020 address, at a minimum, certain key dimensions of intervention, as outlined in the GEAR tool: work-life balance and organisational culture; gender balance in leadership and decision-making; GE in recruitment and career progression; integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content; and measures to combat gender-based violence, including sexual harassment (EIGE, 2016). The projects had to be endorsed by the highest governing bodies of implementing institutions, thus making the development of GEPs a priority for the entire institution and attributing institutional responsibility for the promotion of GE.

CHAPTER 2. ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS, GENDER, AND CHANGE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My aim with this thesis is to elucidate the factors contributing to the varying degrees of success achieved by initiatives designed to promote GE in academic organisations, particularly through the implementation of GEPs. To achieve this, I examine the different phases of change processes: from defining change initiatives to implementing actions and ensuring their sustainability over time.

In this chapter, I establish the theoretical foundation for this analysis. I propose a theoretical framework that recognises not only the gendered nature of institutions but also acknowledges their inherent potential for positive transformation. To do so, I draw from diverse scholarly disciplines that explore the intersections of institutions, gender, and change. These include advancements in gender studies, organisational studies, and political science, more specifically feminist institutionalist (FI) theory.

The chapter is structured into three parts: the first introduces FI as a foundational theoretical framework for analysing institutional change in academia. The following parts explore scholarly debates specifically centred on the different implementation phases of institutional change projects in academic organisations. Precisely, Part II focuses on how institutional change is defined at both the policy and practical levels. Finally, Part III explores the essential conditions for promoting change, and the factors hindering the success of change interventions, with a focus on sustaining progress beyond the GEP cycle.

PART I. THEORISING INSTITUTIONS, GENDER, AND CHANGE IN ACADEMIA: A FEMINIST INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH

The gendered nature of academia and its implications for broader social and political life have long been under scrutiny in gender studies and organisational theory (see, for instance, Erickson, 2012; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Lester et al., 2017; Sallee, 2012). More recently, scholars have increasingly drawn from political science theories to investigate the complex interplay between gender and institutional change in academia, particularly using FI theory. This theoretical perspective seeks to uncover the gendered nature of institutions and understand the ways gender-related dynamics shape both institutional continuity and change (Krook & Mackay, 2011).

From an FI standpoint, "constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily culture or 'logic' of political institutions, rather than 'existing out in society or fixed within individuals which they then bring whole to the institution' (Kenney 1996: 456)" (Krook & Mackay, 2011, p. 6). In this context, institutions and processes of institutional change both shape and are shaped by gender relations, which implies that a comprehensive understanding of institutional dynamics and change can only be attained when examined through a gender lens.

While FI-informed studies have predominantly focused on conventional political settings such as electoral systems and political representation (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2016; Kenny & Verge, 2016; Krook, 2010), national parliaments (Childs, 2023; Kantola & Lombardo, 2023), and court systems (Chappell, 2014, 2016), some scholars have extended its application as a theoretical framework to analyse broader contexts. These include the third sector (Sanders, 2022), the construction industry (Galea et al., 2020), the forestry sector (Wagle et al., 2020), peacekeeping (Holmes, 2020), and the academia (Bencivenga, 2019; Cannito et al., 2023; Clavero & Galligan, 2020; O'Connor & White, 2021a; O'Mullane, 2021; Tildesley et al., 2022).

Similar to other political institutions, academic organisations "sit in the crossroads of social, cultural and economic pressures" (Weimer and Terhi, 2020, p. 1). As such, they fall into the systematics of institutional norms affected by gender (Lowndes, 2014). That being so, studying institutional change in academia through an FI perspective is not only appropriate but also aligns with feminist claims for expanding the scope of what is investigated within the political realm. This expansion holds significance not only for advancing knowledge about academia but also for enriching political theory as a collective body of knowledge.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that the application of FI concepts borrowed from studies centred on conventional political institutions should not be seamlessly transposed to research in academia. As Clavero and Galligan (2020) contend, academia holds its own set of characteristics, and "an isomorphism with political institutions cannot be assumed" (p. 662). Consequently, research investigating institutional change in academia must pay attention when incorporating FI concepts and adapting them to this unique context. This is precisely the focus of the following discussions.

1.1 INTRODUCING FEMINIST INSTITUTIONALISM

FI builds upon earlier theoretical and empirical works that have focused on the interplay between gender and institutions across various scholarly disciplines, most notably organisational studies and sociology (Acker, 1990, 1992; Cockburn, 1983, 1985; Connell, 1987, 2002) and feminist political science (Beckwith, 2005; Childs & Krook, 2006; Fraser, 1989; Hawkesworth, 2005; Lovenduski, 1998). These works have paved the way for a more profound understanding of the gendered nature of organisations (Acker, 1990, 1992) and the gender regimes (Connell, 1987, 2002) that shape institutional processes, practices, and rules. Nevertheless, while such contributions account for the persistent gender disparities in institutional settings, they do not fully reveal the underlying mechanisms that drive change (Clavero & Galligan, 2020; Krook & Mackay, 2011).

Scholars in the field of gender and politics interested in understanding how gender dynamics shape institutional continuity and change have thus increasingly turned to new institutionalist theory. They have engaged with "mainstream" new institutionalist concepts in dialogue with feminist political science, exploring the intersections between institutional structures and gendered power dynamics (Mackay et al., 2010; Krook & Mackay, 2011). In the development of FI, while some scholars have focused on historical, sociological, and discursive institutionalism (see Clavero & Galligan, 2020), FI can also be understood as a pluralist approach or a "'border-crossing' approach that draws from all variants of new institutionalism" (Annesley et al., 2019, p. 26). This approach seeks to identify shared aspects among these mainstream variants, viewing them as complementary rather than conflicting (see Annesley et al., 2019; Beyeler & Annesley, 2011; Bogaards, 2022; Contreras & Arellano, 2022).

FI integrates a gender lens into fundamental concepts of mainstream new institutionalist, most notably: formal and informal institutional rules, institutional change and continuity, structure and agency, and institutional power (Mackay et al., 2010). In the upcoming subsections, I will delve into these concepts, reflecting on their application within the realm of academia.

1.1.1 Formal and informal gendered institutional rules

As mainstream new institutionalism, FI holds institutions at the core of analytical debates. Within this framework, the idea of "institutions" goes beyond static definitions;

they are viewed as dynamic social constructs encompassing both *formal and informal institutional rules*, which wield significant influence over individual behaviours, societal interactions, and power relations (Lowndes, 2020; Krook & Mackay, 2011). In essence, institutional rules are the explicit and implicit "rules of the game in a society or… the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction" (North, 1990, p. 3). For FI, formal and informal rules carry gendered implications and "prescribe (as well as proscribe) 'acceptable' masculine and feminine forms of behavior, rules, and values for men and women within institutions" (Chappell, 2006, p. 226).

Formal institutional rules are those that "set out what behaviours are officially required, permitted or prohibited (for which actors) within a particular setting" (Lowndes, 2020, p. 552). These rules are often written regulations enforced through defined procedures and associated sanctions, as seen, for instance, through national laws mandating GEPs in universities and internal institutional policies. In contrast, informal norms are "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727), often materialised through customs and socially shared values (Waylen, 2014). A clear example of how informal rules manifest in academia is the influence of subjective ideals of academic excellence and meritocracy, which shape value and success on a supposedly gender-neutral basis (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; O'Connor & Barnard, 2021).

According to Lowndes and Roberts (2013), formal and informal rules can be gendered in three ways. Firstly, rules explicitly addressing gender may exist in both formal and informal forms, delineating behaviours and norms specific to individuals of different genders (e.g., gender quotas). Secondly, both formal and informal rules that do not overtly regard gender can still generate gender-biased outcomes, since they interact with wider rule frameworks. For example, establishing long working hours without accommodating flexible schedules, disproportionately disadvantaging women, who often bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities. Finally, institutional actors themselves are gendered, as they embody distinct notions of masculinity and femininity that influence their approach to institutional rules.

FI scholars focus on both formal and informal rules to explore the dynamics of institutional continuity and change. What sets it apart from other new institutionalist analyses is its deliberate emphasis on not favouring formal rules over informal ones in empirical research (Mackay et al., 2010). Formal and informal rules are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, shaping institutional practices and outcomes in complex ways

(Waylen, 2014). While the explicit content of formal policies is easily identifiable, the implicit informal norms that influence of policy outcomes are less obvious, adding complexity to efforts aimed at addressing them. Informal rules are often harder to discern as they are deeply rooted in historical, social, and cultural contexts, rendering them implicit and subject to interpretation.

The study developed by O'Connor and Fauve-Chamoux (2016) helps us understand the interplay of formal and informal rules in the academic context. Developing a case study of a project involving Nordic European countries which was aimed at allocating research funding, the authors reveal that, even in contexts where national and institutional policies endorse GE and diversity, "discriminatory gender attitudes (that is, gender bias) persist at the interactional and/or individual level in terms of the normalisation of processes and attitudes which effectively perpetuate gender inequality" (p. 629). The study reveals an unequal distribution of funding among different countries, with certain locations consistently receiving a disproportionate share of the allocations. Furthermore, it underscores that most decisions disregarded gender-related considerations, with some actually perpetuating gender discrimination through implicit individual interpretations and subjective selection criteria. By describing how subjective individual interpretations based on gendered implicit values (informal rules) interact with the practical implementation of formal policies, O'Connor and Fauve-Chamoux shed light on the tangible influence of both formal and informal rules in policy outcomes.

Recognising institutional rules as gendered reveals that behaviours considered appropriate are often rooted in masculine ideals. This, in turn, enables a critical examination of the purported neutrality in policy design, implementation, and outcomes.

1.1.2 Institutional continuity and change

As a problem-driven approach committed to a transformative agenda, FI is not only concerned with revealing the gendered nature of institutions; it also seeks to understand their capacity to transform and their role in instigating change towards GE within institutional settings and beyond (Mackay et al., 2010). As asserted by Bogaards (2022) in their review of FI developments, "the approach to change in feminist institutionalism is purposeful. Gender equality is not just a topic of interest but an aim, an ambition" (p. 425).

Mahoney and Thelen (2010) explain that "nearly all definitions of institutions assume that they are relatively enduring features of political and social life (rules, norms and

procedures) that structure behaviour and cannot be changed easily or instantaneously" (p. 4). Indeed, research indicates that regardless of evident shifts in background conditions (social, political, economic) and internal institutional endeavours to foster change, institutions tend towards stability and the maintenance of certain established patterns such as gendered norms (Chappell, 2006; Mackay et al., 2010). However, this does not imply that institutions are not passive to change. Institutional norms, including those tied to gender, are not static, as "what is considered appropriate can alter over time" (Chappell, 2006, p. 230). As Kenny (2007) states, "gender is not something people *have*, it is something they *do*" (p. 93, emphasis in original). Following this logic, institutions are not inherently gendered, but they can indeed *be gendered* – thus opening possibilities for "re-gendering" them, including in ways that favour GE (Kenny & Mackay, 2009).

FI scholars understand that change results from a "combination of external and internal forces, where ongoing political contestation (as opposed to a more abrupt 'critical juncture') is also a driver of institutional change" (Majic, 2014, p. 13; see also Mackay et al., 2010; Waylen 2014). External and more abrupt shifts can create critical junctures, offering a window of opportunity for gender-related issues to gain prominence and trigger significant changes at the institutional level. Established patterns may be temporarily disrupted during these moments, allowing for the introduction of new ideas and practices that challenge traditional gender norms, with external pressure crucially compelling institutions to embrace new measures. A pertinent example of this dynamic is the GEP eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe (external force), which currently propels institutions to adopt GEPs to secure European funds for R&I.

Yet, since change processes are influenced by the interaction between formal and informal rules, "even if some formal rules are radically changed, the outcome will not necessarily be as radical, since many other – formal and often informal – rules still persist" (Beyeler & Annesley, 2011, p. 81). Following the example of Horizon Europe's GEP eligibility criterion, as Bencivenga et al. (2021b) aptly cautioned, formal obligations to adopt GE measures under the programme do act as catalysts for change, yet there is a risk that they may devolve into superficial "box-ticking" exercises, put in place solely to fulfil legal obligations without challenging the institutional *status quo*. Against this scenario, the role of internal forces remains crucial for seeking genuinely inclusive practices over the long haul. It is this continuous back-and-forth, rather than a single defining moment, that propels gradual but impactful transformations in institutional practices, culture, and policies.

FI scholars thus view institutional change not as a sudden and rapid shift, but a gradual, incremental process. Changes in institutions, particularly in the context of gender reform, unfold over time through small steps and cumulative adjustments. These small changes build upon one another, accumulating momentum and influencing the overall institutional landscape. While deeply rooted norms, values, and power structures within institutions often resist immediate transformations, continuous efforts that lead to a sequence of small shifts have the capacity to gradually remodel institutions in ways that promote GE (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Mackay et al., 2010).

Although norms and structures typically uphold the institutional status quo, institutions are not monolithic; they are characterised by contradictions and competing interests that create opportunities for change. Those advocating for change within institutions can leverage these inconsistencies to weaken existing norms. According to Raymond et al. (2014), this involves outlining how a norm is unreasonable, harmful, inconsistent with other norms, or inappropriately applied. Once a norm is weakened, advocates can either "reframe" the issue in terms of an alternative norm that better fits the context, or they can engage in "normative innovation", creating and promoting an entirely new standard of behaviour through a collective and deliberative process. This underscores the crucial role of internal actors in advocating for change while also navigating institutional structures.

1.1.3 Structure and agency

In FI theory, structure refers to the enduring, systemic patterns and norms that shape social and political life. These structures include both formal and informal institutional rules. Agency in this context refers to the capacity of individuals or groups to act independently, make choices, and enact change within the constraints of existing structures. The relationship between structure and agency is one of mutual influence: while structures shape the possibilities for agency, but agency can also transform structures (Mackay et al., 2010). This dynamic interaction is central to understanding how gendered power relations are reproduced and contested over time.

FI's discussions on structure and agency closely align with the developments of Giddens (1984) and Stones (2005, 2017) on "structuration theory", which offers a dynamic understanding of social structures by embedding agency as a core element of its conceptual foundation. This theory posits that a "structural inheritance provides the enabling conditions that are drawn on by individual or collective actors in pursuing their projects (…) who then either reproduce the structures or change them through the very

process of acting" (Stones, 2017, p. 1). Similarly to FI, structuration theory emphasises the duality of the structure-agency relationship: agents rely on structures to inform their actions, and these actions, in turn, either reinforce or transform those structures. In this way, "structures are both the *medium* and the *outcome* of agency" (Stones, 2017, p. 1).

In their study of change initiatives in academic organisations, Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) refer to structures as "the general framework and circumstances where the action plan took place and, from an even more practical point of view, the specific set of opportunities and obstacles which were expected to come to the surface when the action plan was implemented, influencing and constraining it" (p. 325). Agency, in turn, is represented by "the different players' capacity and willingness to take action, highlighting above all explicit support (but also conflict) aroused by the implementation of the action plan" (p. 325).

From an FI perspective, discussions around the interplay between structure and agency are centred on ideas of bounded agency, where agency operates within the boundaries of both the existing institutional structures and the potential for change within institutions. Mackay (2014) introduces the notion of "nested newness" to explain how change unfolds through the assimilation of innovative practices and meanings within pre-existing institutional frameworks. In this context, rather than attempting to overturn the existing order, feminist agency often leverages the current institutional machinery to implement change, embedding new ideas within familiar contexts.

For FI scholars, agency involves "strategic, creative and intuitive action as well as calculating self-interest" (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 583; see also, Lowndes, 2005). Change agents are driven by a commitment to GE and a willingness to strategically navigate institutional dynamics and leverage their influence to effect meaningful change. Their efforts disrupt the inertia of institutional continuity, often introducing new approaches and practices that gradually reshape institutional landscapes in favour of GE. In the context of this thesis, these actors are typically academics working within their institutions to advance GE in the academic sector.

Scholars have highlighted numerous examples of feminist agency within academia. For instance, Mackay (2021) adopts an autoethnographic approach to delve into the dilemmas faced by feminist scholars in managerial roles. Mackay explores the complex task of reconciling their commitment to feminist principles with the demands of institutional authority as a faculty dean, exploring the tension between maintaining oppositional knowledge and enacting change within the confines of neoliberal academia.

Another compelling example is O'Connor's (2019) autoethnographic account, which charts pragmatic inclusionary strategies and tactics employed by the author while serving as a professor and dean at an Irish university. O'Connor describes various tactics to promote gender parity at full professorial level, ranging from "provocative misbehaviour" (p. 831) to "activating latent social movement ties to change national policy" (p. 834).

Insightful accounts of collective feminist agency are also available. Tildesley et al. (2023) explore the strategies employed by groups of feminist insiders to harness regional and national legislation for catalysing transformative shifts within Spanish universities. They elucidate how change agents employ discursive strategies and forge coalitions to reinterpret legislation, thereby fostering institutional commitment to GE beyond legal mandates. Similarly, Zippel (2021) reminds us of the potential of institutional feminist agency in mobilising external support to create momentum for change. Focusing on addressing sexual harassment, the author explores the often-overlooked potential of professional associations to contribute as influential channels in devising institutional strategies in academia.

These works remind us that change processes are a continuum of negotiation strategies between gender advocates and institutional structures and stakeholders. In the context of GEP implementation in academia, such negotiations occur through the enactment of what Linková and Mergaert (2021a) refer to as "trading zones".[11] These are sites where symbols, norms, practices and behaviours are negotiated under the constraints of institutional structures. As the authors explain, trading zones emerge when there is a problem communicating and agreeing upon a common understanding between different stakeholders. In this context, they argue, "issues of who gets access to such spaces of negotiation, whose values and aspirations are represented and for whom they open up or close down possibilities are thus essential" (p. 300).

Acknowledging the dynamism of institutions and the potential for feminist insiders to reshape gender foundations does not guarantee uninterrupted success, particularly in the face of resistance (Chappell, 2006). Nevertheless, through a more nuanced perspective, institutions can be seen not solely as constraints but also as strategic assets for feminist activism (Mackay et al., 2010). The balance between transformative action and resisting forces shape the trajectory of change, which invites those engaged in the analysis of

[11] The concept of "trading zone" was originally discussed by Peter Galison, in the field of Science and Technology Studies.

institutional reform to attain a more refined understanding of the structure-agency interaction, as well as the gendered power dynamics inherent in this relationship. As O'Connor (2019) argues, "in a context where gendered power is ubiquitous, feminist agency may be reflected in tactics, which may or may not shift power, but which in any event create space and maintain hope" (p. 827).

1.1.4 Gendered institutional power

The fourth core concept within FI-informed analysis is power. Dynamics of institutional continuity and change, as well as structure and agency, have been intricately linked to the operation of gendered relations of power since the inception of FI (see Kenny, 2007). While mainstream new institutionalist analyses typically rely on distributional models to address the issue of power, highlighting existing power structures and how influential actors secure and maintain their privileged positions within institutions, FI scholars advocate for a more nuanced exploration of power dynamics (Mackay et al., 2010). FI prompts us to understand how institutionalised gender power dynamics operate in the specific context of study through careful consideration of how these dynamics both reinforce inequality *and* offer opportunities for challenging existing structures and advancing GE (Lowndes, 2005; Mackay et al., 2010).

Fundamentally, the focus on power within FI is grounded on the recognition that institutions are not neutral but rather shaped by gendered dynamics of power. As Mackay et al. (2010) assert, gender is "a primary way of signifying (and naturalizing) relationships of power and hierarchy" (p. 580). Looking at the academic context, O'Connor and White (2021c) explain that "power is overt and comes into play when there are clearly opposing views, with the will of the most powerful person prevailing. However, the enactment of power is typically more subtle" (pp. 190-191). They contend that academia operates in a manner that conceals the presence of gendered institutional power, frequently by legitimating discourses that perpetuate and normalise inequality. These discourses often revolve around ideas of excellence and personal choice, used to justify the underrepresentation of women in decision-making and higher academic positions. Furthermore, in specific contexts, they may involve the resurgence of essentialist arguments regarding sex differences, a politically neutral approach to intersectionality, and a gender-neutral discourse that masks gender-related power dynamics (see also Linková et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2023).

Empirical studies focusing on change strategies in the academic sector have explored the issue of power from varying yet interconnecting perspectives. Clavero and Galligan (2021) discuss the idea of "academic power" in their study on advancing gender justice in academia through GEPs. They draw upon Bourdieu's (1986, 1988, 1993) conceptualisations of power as economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Economic capital refers to the financial resources individuals or institutions possess, which can influence academic outcomes through investments in education, research, or facilities. In turn, social capital involves the networks and relationships individuals hold, enabling access to valuable information, opportunities, and collaborations within the academic sphere. Cultural capital pertains to one's cultural knowledge, skills, and educational background, which can affect academic success by influencing one's ability to navigate academic norms and expectations. Finally, symbolic capital emerges as the most substantial form of power in academia, being evident through the prestige, recognition, and reputation acquired by individuals, often propelled by factors such as their research impact (i.e., publications and citations) and their academic position levels, ultimately enhancing their authority and influence. Clavero and Galligan (2021) emphasise that exploring these forms of capital in institutions lays a strong foundation for advancing GE efforts.

In a slightly different vein, Kalpazidou Schnmidt and Cacace (2019) suggest the adoption of a "multidimensional notion of power" when planning change-oriented strategies. They identify four interacting dimensions of power: interpretive, symbolic, institutional, and operational. The interpretive dimension regards how meaning, identities, and norms related to gender are constructed and interpreted within an institution; it is how individuals understand and interpret gender roles, stereotypes, and expectations (e.g., the unequal gender division of labour and the association of women with care responsibilities). The symbolic dimension deals with the symbols, images, and representations that convey and reinforce gendered meanings and hierarchies (e.g., the masculine image of the ideal scientist). The institutional dimension focuses on the formal structures, policies, and practices that shape and maintain gendered power relations, that is, organisational structures and rules that may systematically favour or disadvantage individuals based on their gender (e.g., non-transparent recruitment processes and decision-making). Lastly, the operational dimension refers to the day-to-day practises and interactions within the institution that contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities. Kalpazidou Schmidt's and Cacace's (2019) emphasis on the multi-layered

nature of power dynamics illustrates how change agents engage in ongoing negotiations related to interpretations, symbols, institutional rules, and the practical functioning of new arrangements throughout the entire change process.

Finally, Tildesley, et al. (2022) explicitly employ FI to analyse the power struggles involved in the implementation of GE strategies. They argue for a "multifaceted feminist concept of power (Allen, 1998) that encompasses both domination (*power over*) as well as individual (*power to*) and collective (*power with*) counter-resistance" (Tildesley et al, 2022, p. 880, emphasis in original). They explain "power over" as the resistance against change towards GE, while "power to" and "power with" relate to counteract movement made by feminist insiders, individually and collectively, to pursue change. Examining the cases of five Spanish universities, the authors identify forms of resistance from those in dominant positions, but also counter-resistance by gender advocates through the lens of power. Their analysis highlight ways in which power can be used both for and against GE, where "domination and feminist empowerment are co-dependent and dynamic processes, with specific enabling factors in a given institutional context" (Tildesley et al., 2022, p. 906).

Regardless of whether they explicitly adopt FI as a theoretical approach, all the discussed works align with FI's call for a more dynamic examination of power. Clavero and Galligan contribute by identifying the different dimensions in which gendered power relations operate in the academic context, while Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace's proposal for a multidimensional notion of power lays the ground for translating these ideas into concrete strategies. Tildesley and colleagues' work contribute by scrutinising the operation of power in both resisting and promoting GE. All of the pieces underscore a critical condition for achieving GE in academia: the recognition that efforts to address gender inequalities must be firmly rooted in an understanding of the gender power dynamics at play within the academic sphere and the multifaceted ways in which these dynamics manifest.

In essence, comprehending the role of power is crucial for understanding how institutions both perpetuate themselves and undergo transformation over time. Analysing institutional continuity and change with attention directed to gendered power dynamics can provide insights into why gender inequalities persist despite efforts to address them (Clavero & Galligan, 2021). If institutional analysis acknowledges the gendered nature of institutions and attends to the manifestations of power dynamics in a given context, it may not only contribute to academic knowledge but also strike tangible ways to advance

GE in "real-world" academia. As van den Brink and Benschop (2012) claim, "it is not so much gender *per se* that needs to be undone as it is the hierarchical power relation tied to it, at least when it comes to changing organizations" (p. 73).

1.1.5 Context sensitivity

Employing FI in empirical research calls for a focus on broader social and cultural factors that shape gendered experiences and political outcomes within specific contexts (Chappell & Mackay, 2021; Krook & Mackay, 2011). The concepts discussed in the sections above are thus to be applied through a context-sensitive approach, acknowledging that gender norms and power dynamics can vary across societies and institutional settings.

In the specific context of GEP implementation, scholars such as Ní Laoire and colleagues (2021) and Anagnostou (2022) contend that contextual variations impacting policy implementation in academic institutions are not limited to national legal frameworks but extend to cultural and social patterns, as well as to organisational governance logics. As Ní Laoire et al. (2021) explain, "the organizational context, in terms of governance structures, power relations, and cultural norms, presents particular conditions that enable or constrain translation of policy ideas into organizational change (even while appearing to endorse it)" (p. 586).

This becomes particularly pertinent in the context of this research for two main reasons. Firstly, GEP-implementing institutions operate within vastly different national contexts, meaning that the concept of GE may vary significantly in terms of cultural interpretations and policy implementation. While all the institutions examined in this study are situated within the European framework and adhere to European policies on GEPs in the R&I sector, their needs and capacities exhibit notable variations. Secondly, these variations are not only present between different national and organisational contexts but also between academic institutions of varying types (e.g., universities and RFOs) and disciplinary areas (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Clavero & Galligan, 2020).

Given time and length constraints, my aim in this thesis is not to conduct a systematic comparative analysis with exhaustive coverage of all contextual aspects within each observed institution. Instead, I will identify and analyse common elements of change processes that emerge across institutions in different contexts. Specific contextual aspects will be addressed when feasible and relevant to the specific objectives of the discussions

at hand. In doing so, I intend to capture the nuances of institutional change in academia through the analysis of specific cases while also maintaining its applicability and replicability in diverse settings.

1.1.6 Final remarks on a feminist institutionalist framework

Together, the preceding discussions provide the analytical foundation for the study of institutional change in academic institutions through an FI perspective, contributing to the construction of a comprehensive yet focused framework for understanding the complexity of change processes.

In an attempt to summarise these discussions, the following figure presents the main concepts used to build an FI-informed analytical foundation for this thesis.

Figure 2. Feminist institutionalism: Conceptual map

Note: self-authored.

PART II. INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: TRANSLATIONS FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

Following the official adoption of the "structural change" approach in the European R&I policy framework and the subsequent rise of GEPs as primary drivers for advancing GE in the scientific domain, numerous studies have sought to uncover the factors influencing the effective implementation of change-oriented initiatives.

Existing literature often attributes the gap between policy and practice to institutional factors such as lacking essential conditions for change and resistance to change (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013), and external factors like the emergence of far-right movements and the rise of neoliberal management models (Göker & Polatdemir, 2022; Rosa & Clavero, 2020). In this thesis, I suggest that, in addition to these factors, a potential explanation for this gap might stem from inconsistencies in how institutional change is framed at the policy level and subsequently interpreted and translated for practical implementation in specific circumstances. Paraphrasing Lombardo et al. (2012, p. 18), I posit that, as it happens with the broader notion of gender mainstreaming, competing definitions and multiple meanings of institutional change co-exist, which means that the way in which it is achieved in practice is far from clear and that it is more difficult to assess what it is that is actually implemented.

With this in mind, this part of the theoretical chapter is dedicated to the framing of institutional change. I start by exploring how institutional change is presented in European policies and guidelines, as these documents serve as the primary basis upon which initiatives like GEPs are defined at the institutional level. Subsequently, I shed light on theoretical discussions surrounding the translation of policy ideas into practice, recalling its complexity and the absence of a universally established definition of institutional change.

2.1 FRAMING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Before we initiate our explorations on the framing of institutional change, it is important to clarify that while I start these discussions by scrutinising how the notion is articulated at the European policy level, my focus in this thesis is not on the policymaking process (i.e., on the negotiations at European level for policy adoption). Instead, my aim is to understand how policy ideas are interpreted and translated into concrete actions at

the institutional level of GEP-implementing organisations. Theoretically, this policy phase is conceptualised as the policy implementation phase (Lombardo et al., 2012). In the context of GEPs, this phase involves two main steps: first, the strategic planning and design of concrete initiatives and tailoring of objectives to specific contexts (i.e., formulating and approving GEPs); and second, the actual implementation (operationalisation) of actions (i.e., implementing GEP actions).

Tracing this distinction between the planning and actual implementation stages within the broader policy implementation process is crucial for understanding how policies are construed and adapted in specific contexts before being enacted through concrete actions. As we saw, although both stages are part of the broader policy implementation process, a distinction exists between the planning of initiatives and their actual execution (Mergaert, 2012). In the planning and design phase, those responsible for devising strategic actions (e.g., change agents and other institutional actors involved in GEP creation) interpret and adjust general policy frameworks (such as EU policies) to design initiatives that suit the specific institutional context. Subsequently, the framings agreed upon during this planning stage undergo reinterpretation when received by the wider institutional community during the actual implementation of actions.

Given that gendered dynamics may manifest differently across the two subphases, although existing literature on GEPs has primarily focused on issues arising during the actual implementation stage, it is equally essential to investigate potential gaps in the initial planning and design process of initiatives. Such an exploration acknowledges that policy implementation, across all its stages, is inherently political and thus subject to all mechanisms of political processes (Verloo, 2005).

2.1.1 European policy articulations on institutional change

Conceptually, upon retrospective examination of European documents and academic publications, the term “institutional change” was initially conceived as “structural change”, often mentioned interchangeably with “structural and cultural change” and “organisational change” (e.g., European Commission, 2015). Over time, albeit without explicit clarification, a shift in terminology became noticeable in official documents such as EC communications and EU Council conclusions, moving from “structural change” to the adoption of the term “institutional change” (e.g., European Commission, 2017, 2020b).

This transition has faced some scrutiny among scholars and practitioners involved in structural change projects. For instance, a policy brief released by the H2020 project "GENDer equality in the ERA Community To Innovate policy implementation" (GENDERACTION) explicitly adopted the term "structural change", asserting that it more accurately captures the complexity of change processes. The document stressed that "change must occur at four inter-related levels: symbolic (cultural), institutional, inter-personal and individual, in order to achieve sustainable impact. Institutional and cultural aspects are only two of the four constitutive parts of the structural change approach" (GENDERACTION, 2019, p. 2). Nevertheless, apart from sparse scrutiny, discussions in this regard did not gain significant traction, and the broader academic literature currently demonstrates an overall interchangeable use of these terms.

The extent to which this shift in terminology resulted from deliberate discussions among policymakers and scholars remains unclear. for the purposes of clarity, the terms "structural change" and "institutional change" are employed interchangeably in this thesis. This choice is not a matter of conceptual positioning but aims to align with the predominant usage across both academic and non-academic works in the field, as well as with the current terminology in the GEAR tool (the instrument designed to guide institutions in the design, implementation and evaluation of GEPs) (see EIGE, 2022).

Regardless of the adopted terminology, our aim here is to comprehend the essence of structural/institutional change, that is, to uncover the substantive content encapsulated within the concept. To do so, it is useful to look back at the key reference documents that guided European-funded GEP-implementing projects.

Starting with the benchmarking report developed by the Commission Expert Group titled "Structural Change in Research Institutions: Enhancing Excellence, Gender Equality and Efficiency in Research and Innovation", structural change was proposed as the means to render decision making more transparent, remove unconscious bias from institutional practices, modernise human resources, promote excellence through diversity, and improve research and innovation by integrating a gender perspective (European Commission, 2012). In the same report, the experts articulated that "'structural change' in universities and research institutions means making them more gender-aware, thereby modernising their organizational culture" (p. 14) and that "it implies systemic, integrated, long term approaches rather than piecemeal short term measures" (p. 15).

Reviewing the calls for proposals, we observe the evolution of the main objectives for GEP-implementing projects from FP7 to H2020 funding periods:

Table 1. Calls for proposals under FP7 and H2020 and the respective main objectives

Call for proposal	**Main objectives**
FP7 – SiS.2010-2.1.1-1 Implementing structural change in research organisations/universities	- Increasing the participation of women in research; - Improving the career advancement of women researchers.
FP7 – SiS.2011.2.1.1-1 Implementing structural change in research organisations/ universities	- Increasing the participation of women in research; - Improving the career advancement of women researchers.
FP7 – SiS.2012.2.1.1-1 Ensuring equal opportunities for women and men by encouraging a more gender-aware management in research and scientific decision-making bodies	- Increasing the participation of women in research; - Improving the career advancement of women researchers. - Improving the working conditions of women and men;
FP7 – SiS.2013.2.1.1-1 Supporting changes in the organisation of research institutions to promote Gender Equality	- Increasing the participation of women in research; - Improve the career advancement of women researchers; - Improving the working conditions of women and men; - Integrating gender in curricula and research content.
H2020 – GERI-4-2014 Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans	- Removing 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.
H2020 – GERI-4-2015 Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans	- Removing 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.
H2020 – SwafS.03-2016-2017 Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans	- Removing 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.
H2020 – SwafS.09-2018-2019-2020 Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans	- Removing barriers to the recruitment, retention and career progression of women researchers; - Addressing gender imbalances in decision-making processes; - Integrating the gender dimension in research and innovation content.

Note: self-authored, based on calls for proposal.

It can be observed that a consistent focus on women's participation and career advancement in research persists across all calls. While FP7 calls emphasised increasing the participation of women in research and improving the career advancement of women researchers, H2020 modified the wording to highlight the need to "remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and career progression of female researchers". Furthermore, it seems that the report produced by the Expert Group on structural change brought to light the importance of integrating the gender dimension in curricula and research content, which was then reflected as an objective in all calls from 2013 onwards. Additionally, although leadership development was mentioned as an area to be covered by GEPs, it was not until H2020 calls that tackling gender imbalances in decision-making processes became explicitly addressed as a core objective.

Still, examining the calls and respective Work Programmes reveals that while they outline the specific objectives linked to structural/institutional change, recommended strategies for translating the objectives into actions, and expected impacts, they do not provide a clear, singular definition for structural/institutional change. Instead, they present a multi-goals approach as a strategy towards GE in R&I. These documents reflect that the emergence of a holistic, systemic approach to GE in R&I evolved through a "learning by doing" exercise, as previous initiatives focused exclusively on women scientists proved insufficient (refer to Chapter 1).

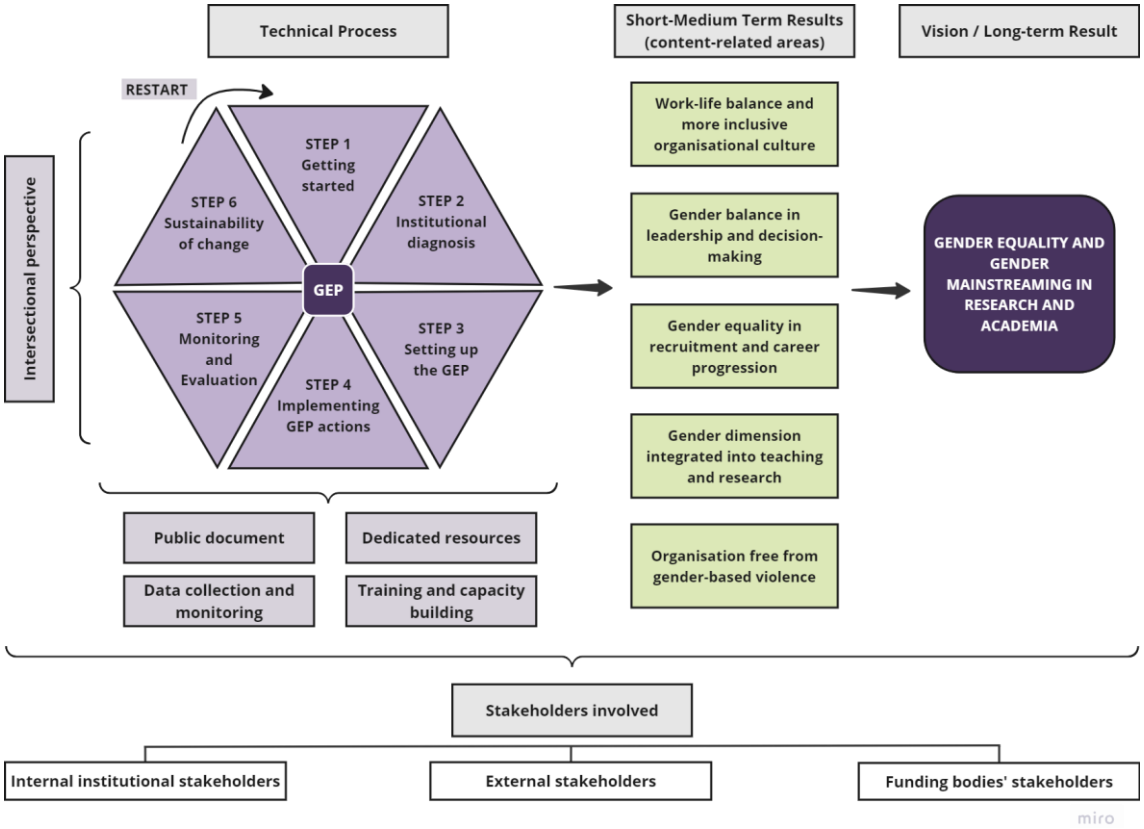
Aside from Work Programmes and calls for proposals, another key reference document for GEP-implementing projects was the GEAR tool. As mentioned earlier, the tool was produced to provide guidance to universities and research organisations throughout all stages of GEP implementation, and since its first publication in 2016, all GEP-implementing projects have been mandated to utilise it as a primary point of reference. According to the 2016 GEAR tool definition, "institutional change is a strategy aimed at removing the obstacles to gender equality that are inherent in the research system itself, and at adapting institutional practices" (EIGE, 2016, p. 7). The updated edition of the document did not bring substantial changes to the definition of the institutional change. When it comes to how it frames the notion of institutional change, the main addition in the new edition was the reinforced emphasis on intersectionality as a transversal approach to GEPs and, therefore, to institutional change (EIGE, 2022).

Considering the above discussions and also the guidelines provided in the GEAR tool – which primarily refer to the recommended areas of intervention for GEPs and process-related orientations (refer to Section 2.3, Chapter 1) – it becomes apparent that the focus

is more on practical orientations for implementing GEPs than on offering a precise definition of the ultimate objective, that is, institutional change.

If we were to summarise the foundational representation of how institutional change processes and objectives in the R&I sector are currently articulated at the European policy level, a baseline depiction could take the following form:

Figure 3. Current baseline depiction of institutional change in European R&I



Note: Self-authored (inspired by Derbyshire et al., 2015, p. 8).

Having explored how institutional change is framed in the European policy framework, we now move on to consider how these policy ideas are translated – and problematised – on theoretical and practical levels.

2.1.2 Framing institutional change in complex systems

Although the objectives of a structural/institutional change approach are now well-established at the policy level, "there is substantial uncertainty as to what the threefold set of GE goals defined in the EU's R&I policy actually entails in practice" (Anagnostou, 2022, p. 80). This uncertainty underscores the lack of a consistent and shared definition of institutional change among those responsible for its practical implementation.

Examining gender mainstreaming in Europe, Verloo (2005) reminds us of the "messy" character of the gender problematic: "there is no consensus as to what the problem is, where it is located, who is responsible for it, or what could be a solution to the problem" (p. 17). While there are extensive academic debates on the definition of gender mainstreaming (see Mergaert, 2012 for a comprehensive review), comparable discussions concerning institutional change and GE in the context of GEP implementation in academia have received less scholarly attention. Although European policies set general standards and guidelines for academic institutions to pursue GE through GEPs, assuming a uniform understanding among diverse actors (including feminist actors) across varied contexts may lead to "a «black box» of distortions in the implementation of policies" (Verloo, 2005, p. 19).

Studies specifically focused on academic settings identify gender inequality as a "wicked problem" characterised by "its multiple causes, lack of a dominant solution (i.e. an optimal solution for most actors), context sensitivity and complex linkages with other societal issues" (Cacace et al., 2023, p. 2, after Eden & Wagstaff, 2021; see also Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020; Tzanakou et al. 2021). In this context, institutional change occurs within a framework marked by complexity, where complexity is defined as "a nonlinear relationship between inputs and outputs of policy measures, where impact depends on the interaction of a multitude of variables strongly related to context" (Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace, 2017, p. 1).

Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) describe complexity through three parameters: i) a holistic view of structural change; ii) a multidimensional notion of power; and iii) the understanding of structural change as social change. A holistic view of institutional change involves designing measures that address different targets and areas, combining all different approaches ("fix the women", "fix the numbers", "fix the institution", and "fix the knowledge") (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). A multidimensional approach to power for developing change strategies may consider four interrelated dimensions: interpretive, symbolic, institutional, and operational (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019; Mergaert et al., 2022).[12] Understanding structural change as social change implies concentrating on actors and processes. It involves placing emphasis on activation mechanisms, mobilising agency, accounting for resistances, and attending to the interaction between agency dynamics and structural circumstances.

[12] For a detailed explanation of the four dimensions, refer to Section 1.1.4 in this chapter.

In addition to those described by Kalpazidou and Cacace, this study considers four other parameters characterising complexity in GEP implementation:

The first of them concerns the depth of the implemented actions. Institutional change entails transforming the very structures, logics, and culture of organisations, rather than merely focusing on less disruptive measures, which is often the case due to institutional inertia and/or resistance (Bustelo, 2023). To achieve this in practice, some authors propose the classification of interventions into two categories: structural change interventions (e.g., changing rules and procedures) and soft or preparatory strategic actions (e.g., awareness raising and training activities) (Gorbacheva & Ramos, 2023; Sangiuliano et al., 2019a). This classification suggests that depending on the predominant typology of actions implemented, change processes may differ in their success in transcending the relatively short-term agenda of GEPs (typically lasting three years) and effectively fostering change that is structural and enduring. Notably, the authors alert that a disproportionately predominant implementation of preparatory actions may signal institutional resistance to transformational change. The typologies are delineated as follows:

Table 2. Typology of interventions: structural change and preparatory

Structural Change	**Preparatory interventions**
Creation of new services and measures	Communication and dissemination actions
Change/update/adaptation of existing provisions and procedures	Raising awareness and training
Creation of new structures	Production of further evidence/data/research
Mentoring & coaching services	
Coordination of existing policies	

Note: Sangiuliano et al. (2019a, p. 26).

To effectively promote substantial and enduring change, Sangiuliano et al. (2019a) argue that transformative interventions must maintain a balance between structural changes and preparatory actions. This approach ensures that initiatives like GEPs do not merely remain peripheral but rather address the fundamental causes of inequality in institutional dynamics, helping to deeply integrate transformative efforts into the core of institutional structures.

Another parameter is the need for flexible and adaptable strategies. As Mergaert and colleagues (2022) note, change "moves in a non-linear fashion, with windows of

opportunity opening and closing in a manner that cannot be fully anticipated. It is complex in that every situation is unique, previous success does not guarantee the ability to duplicate, and expertise helps but is not sufficient, as relationships are key" (p. 1). In this context, as "implementation, outcome and impact become even less predictable, manageable and responsive to linear logic" (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020, p. 16), adopting dynamic frameworks that emphasise flexibility and adaptability is crucial for effective GE interventions (Bustelo, 2023; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019).

In addition to those, in the specific context of academic institutions, another parameter characterising complexity refers to the "dual logic of academia" (Wroblewisky & Palmén, 2022). Academic institutions like universities develop based on two logics: the organisational and the epistemic (academic) logic (Miller, 2022). This entails that they follow multiple institutional logics that (re)produce inequalities not only at the organisational level (i.e., in organisational structures, logics, and culture) but also at the academic, epistemic level (i.e., the dynamics governing knowledge production and validation in the scientific field). Initiatives aiming at driving institutional change in this sector must address not only inherent organisational inequalities but also incorporate measures that address the academic system as a hub of epistemic knowledge production.

Previous studies have shown that while GE initiatives often target the organisational logic, practices deeply entrenched in the academic logic remain unaltered:

> While the relevance of gender is denied in the scientific field, it might be accepted in the organisational logic (e.g. when positive action measures are taken to promote qualified women). These two different logics also entail different power structures. While decision-making powers regarding strategy and resources are exercised by top management in a research organisation (e.g. the rectorate in the case of a university), decision-making in academic contexts is assigned to the highest scientific positions (e.g. full professors). These power structures exist in parallel and remain in most cases unconnected (Wroblewisky & Palmén, 2022, p. 18)

Other scholars validate this concern, contending that "the masculine standard of excellence may be the most difficult gender bias to challenge as it addresses the whole process of assessment and conferring value in the academic sphere" (Albenga, 2016, p. 150; see also Picardi et al., 2023). The complexity here lies in the challenge of reshaping the academic logic, which demands addressing not only organisational aspects but also the foundational epistemic principles that underpin the academic system as a whole. Clavero and Galligan (2021) articulate: "action aimed at effecting institutional change in academic organizations need to tackle both epistemic privilege and discrimination, reset

a traditional culture that normalizes unequal gendered expectations and behaviors, and distribute epistemic-supporting resources in a gender-just manner" (p. 14).

Finally, contextual differences add another layer of complexity. Context is not "an inert backdrop against which policies move around and 'touch down'" (p. 577); instead, "policy ideas are enacted, and re-made, rather than simply implemented, in different local contexts" (Ní Laoire et al., 2021, p. 579). Once adopted, especially transnational policies, undergo adaptation to align with specific implementing contexts, often attributing different meanings to policy goals and leading to different possibilities for concrete intervention.

The proliferation of GEP models in the European R&I scenario represents "an example of transnational policy mobility, whereby policy ideas and models travel quickly between and across jurisdictions, exert normative power across long distances and involve complex networks of actors" (Ní Laoire et al., 2021, p. 578). As GEPs are not technical procedures but rather political processes, they are strongly contingent on organisational and broader cultural factors, thus materialised through policy transfer mechanisms that travel unevenly and inconsistently across various socio-spatial contexts (Anagnostou, 2022; Bencivenga & Drew, 2021; Verloo, 2005).

Yet, as Ní Laoire et al. (2021) note, "while GEAPs are expected to be tailored to local contexts, there is little reflection on the process of 'tailoring' and how it works in practice in a policy environment of high demand for off-the-shelf solutions to 'fix' the problem of gender inequality" (p. 576). Here lies the risk that universal policy ideas and "best practice" models result in the transformation of policy goals into technical "solutions" that might overlook the unique local circumstances where actions are to be implemented.

Various studies highlight the role of context in institutional change. Anagnostou (2022) explores how well EU policies on gender mainstreaming in R&I travel from North to South. The author contends that prevailing European approaches to GE in academia, originating primarily from Northern and Western European countries, have encountered limited acceptance and adoption in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, leading to a substantial policy gap between MS and AC, as well as between EU-15 and EU-13 countries. Other studies look at differences at the organisational level, revealing that different strategies may be required in large and complex institutional settings (Caprile et al., 2022) and within smaller organisations (De Micheli and Vingelli, 2022). Moreover, academic organisations of different nature (e.g., RPOs and RFOs) hold different roles within the academic system and their functioning differs. Thus, initiatives aiming at

promoting change in each of them must take into account the specificities related to each of them (Wroblewski & Leitner, 2022). Finally, varying levels of prominence of distinct gender inequality practices within emerge across fields and disciplines (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). All these require tailored strategies for institutional change.

Importantly, context does not follow deterministic or predictable patterns but emerges dynamically and evolves in tandem with the GE practices themselves. For example, changes in institutional leadership, fluctuations in national political climates regarding gender issues, and global events like the COVID-19 pandemic can all unpredictably influence change processes. This dynamism complicates the ability to anticipate whether certain strategies will be effective or applicable in particular temporal and special settings. Thus, although no strategy ensures success, cultivating a comprehensive and adaptable understanding of the context may contribute to sustaining and propelling the advancement of the process:

> The question of gender equality "implementation" in universities and research organizations is not one of "what works best?", but a much more complex interaction of: what works best here and now?; "who" is seeking, implementing or resisting change, which stakeholders are involved in change, and whose interests are served (or not) by change; "how" local, organizational and national policies, practices and cultures are to be engaged with or altered by proposed changes; "which" contextual factors (again at local, organizational or national level) will work as enablers or barriers to the change; and "where" the drivers or agents of change are located in the local, organizational or national power structures (Ní Laoire et al., 2021, p. 590)

This said, let us now summarise the parameters that will be considered to embrace complexity as a frame of reference for analysing change processes: i) a holistic view of institutional change that considers measures addressing different targets and areas; ii) a multidimensional approach that challenges gendered institutional power at various levels; iii) an understanding of institutional change as social change, with simultaneous focus on structures and agency activation; iv) a balance between the adoption of structural change interventions and preparatory actions; v) the consideration of the notions of non-linearity and unpredictability, followed by the adoption of flexible and adaptable strategies; vi) addressing for the dual logic of academia; and vii) accounting for context specificities.

In this thesis, these parameters will serve as a framework for analysing how the notion of institutional change is translated from policy to practice in the design of GEPs. They will thereby help establish a definition for institutional change in the context of GEP implementation in academia.

PART III. LOOKING AT IMPLEMENTATION

In Part II of this theoretical chapter, I distinguished between the planning and design stages and the actual implementation stage within the broader policy implementation process. My focus was primarily on the planning and design phases, exploring academic discussions to understand how institutional change is defined as a complex process in the context of GEPs. Now, in Part III, my focus shifts to the actual implementation phase, where GEP actions are put in practice.

Just as the complexity of gender-related change processes influences the planning and design stages of GEPs, it also affects the implementation of actions. Interventions in complex systems do not follow a linear cause-and-effect pattern. Instead, it is the union of multiple factors – or conditions for change – that interact to shape transformative outcomes. As Kalpazidou Schmidt et al. (2020) explain:

> The complexity approach implies considering the increased probability of change as part of the desirable effect of complex interventions. As a corollary, the expected impact of complex social interventions needs to be considered in terms of how they foster the conditions for change and increase the probability that change can occur in a particular complex setting (p. 16)

Thus, institutional change through initiatives like GEPs is better interpreted using a "contribution approach" rather than an "attribution approach." The attribution approach seeks to establish a direct cause-effect relationship between interventions and outcomes, requiring long-term quantitative data and often struggling with the complexities of determining causality over time. In contrast, the contribution approach, favoured by scholars for examining GEPs, explores how interventions contribute to observed outcomes without necessarily establishing direct causality, relying instead on a theory of change (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020; Palmén et al., 2019). This approach considers multiple factors that collectively contribute to change, providing a more nuanced understanding of transformative processes.

In the following sections, I will review studies that identify facilitators and barriers for effective GEP implementation. I begin with an overview of the grey literature before examining academic studies. This includes an analysis of facilitating factors, also referred to as conditions for change, as well as resistance to change.

3.1. DRIVERS AND BARRIERS TO INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: INSIGHTS FROM THE GREY LITERATURE

Before delving into the academic literature on the factors impacting GEP implementation, it is important to consider relevant grey literature sources. These sources provide practical insights and information that enhance our understanding of the current landscape and complement the theoretical perspectives discussed.

To start this exploration, I consider what the GEAR tool (EIGE, 2022) identifies as the success factors for implementing GEPs in academic organisations. The document structures these success factors into four groups: i) promoting GEP support and collaboration within and outside the organisation; ii) establishing effective GE structures and embed the GEP into these or other existing structures; iii) following an evidence-based GE approach; and iv) finding a balance between clear and fixed goals and objectives, and their flexible and creative implementation (EIGE, 2022, pp. 58-63).

Table 3. Success factors for GEP development and implementation, according to EIGE

Promoting GEP support and collaboration within and outside the organisation:
Awareness and capacity building;
Senior management support;
Engaging a wide range of stakeholders;
External engagement with networks and communities of practice;
Establishing effective GE structures and embed the GEP into these or other existing structures:
Well-resourced and strategically positioned GE body;
Embedding GE into existing structures;
Legislation and policies;
Following an evidence-based GE approach:
Availability of sex-disaggregated data;
Monitoring systems;
Evaluation;
Finding a balance between clear and fixed goals and objectives, and their flexible and creative implementation:
Clear and tailored goals;

Flexibility, creativity, and resilience.

Note: self-elaborated, adapted from EIGE (2022, pp. 58-63).

The factors identified by EIGE are grounded in the expertise of those commissioned to develop the GEAR tool and the insights gained from European-funded projects conducted under the FP7 and H2020 programmes, which have yielded a wealth of reports and toolkits that outline the elements contributing to successful change within specific implementation contexts. Particularly relevant to this thesis are the recent reports from the Horizon Europe INSPIRE project ("European Centre of Excellence on Inclusive Gender Equality in Research & Innovation"). Based on data collected from surveys with national experts across various European countries, these reports offer an updated analysis of the main facilitators and barriers for initiating change in academic organisations across different European regions, as well as the factors impacting the sustainability of these changes.

Focusing on North West European countries, Myers and Baisner (2023) identify facilitating factors to initiate change that are common among most countries. These include strong stakeholder pressure from top management, broader society, and funders, alongside robust legal frameworks at both European and national levels (except from Denmark). Conversely, the main impediments include inadequate expertise or a lack of experts, as seen in Finland; the absence of recurrent funding, as noted in Ireland; and the lack of policies specifically tailored to the R&I field, as observed in Denmark.

Beranek and Walker (2023) analyse the factors facilitating and hindering institutional change towards GE in Central West European countries. They highlight robust policy frameworks and vibrant gender movements as key drivers paving for initiating change. For example, in Germany, the comprehensive involvement of stakeholders in designing GEPs, coupled with clear objectives and transparent evaluation processes, effectively links GE to R&I excellence. In Belgium, gender audits and gender experts in HEIs supports these initiatives. On the other hand, hindering factors such as insufficient resources and commitment, entrenched gender stereotypes, and strict hierarchies slow progress. Specific challenges include a general lack of awareness in countries like Austria and insufficient human resources in France. Despite some progress in institutionalising GE, supported by strong legal frameworks and funding programs, cultural change remains slow in the region due to the persistent impact of gender norms.

Looking at Southern European countries, Caprile et al. (2023) emphasise the significant role of evolving EU policies in shaping national frameworks and fostering change. Additionally, the study stress that pioneering organisations catalyse change through collaboration and networking, while centres for gender studies, women's associations, and feminist scholars significantly contribute to raising awareness through persistent, albeit often unpaid and unrecognised, advocacy efforts. Conversely, hindering factors include a lack of oversight, limited accountability, low political prioritisation, and constrained resources. Limited gender awareness and competence among managers, human resources, and senior researchers, coupled with a scarcity of gender-disaggregated data and fragile top management commitment, also restrict progress. The authors bring to light the case of Spain, where despite long-standing mandatory GEPs, systemic change is still scarce.

Finally, Hofman et al. (2023) explore the facilitators and barriers to GE across Central East and Eastern European countries, detailing the dynamics within RFOs, HEIs, and RPOs. Their study identifies supportive EU-driven legal and policy frameworks, particularly criteria linked to EU funding, as catalysing local change in both RFOs and HEIs. The commitment of top management and the influence of gender experts within organisations are significant facilitators, although these factors can paradoxically also act as barriers, especially when top management's commitment fluctuates. In HEIs, additional facilitators include the proactive involvement of enthusiastic staff at various organisational levels and the advocacy and activism of younger academic staff and students on issues like sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The strength of communities of practice and networking highlights the role of strong international connections and support from more advanced countries in fostering GE in less experienced countries like Bulgaria.

When it comes to challenges, a general lack of awareness and knowledge about GE, insufficient systemic approaches, and a lack of interest from top management affects RFOs. Political pressures against "gender ideology" in countries like Hungary and Bulgaria, as well as inadequate legal frameworks in Slovakia and Romania, further complicate efforts. HEIs struggle with similar issues, compounded by financial constraints, systemic inertia, and institutional characteristics like complex administrative systems and rigid hierarchies. The prevalent discourse of meritocracy, especially in institutions with a high number of female employees, adds to these challenges. RPOs

share many of these hindrances, with additional barriers in smaller organisations and less targeted public policy support, particularly in Czechia (Hofman et al., 2023).

It is notable that across all regions, robust policy frameworks, particularly those influenced by EU directives and funding criteria, consistently emerge as critical facilitators, underscoring the pivotal role of structured legal support in advancing GE. However, the effectiveness of these policies varies considerably due to regional differences in the commitment of top management, the presence of gender experts, and the strength of gender movements. For instance, while North West and Central West European countries benefit from vibrant feminist movements and a more solid base of gender expertise, Central East and Eastern European regions struggle with political resistance to GE and a pervasive lack of awareness and resources. This discrepancy highlights a significant divide between Western European regions, which tend to have more established frameworks and support for GE initiatives, and Eastern European regions, where GE efforts are often stymied by socio-political challenges and insufficient institutional support. Moreover, the recurrent issues of inadequate funding and entrenched gender norms pose universal challenges, yet their impacts are felt differently across the regions, reflecting varying degrees of institutional readiness and societal acceptance of GE practices.

When it comes to the capacity of sustaining and deepening change, a comparison between the reports shows a significant variation across different regions. Notably, all North West countries, with the exception of Denmark, exhibit either adequate or highly adequate capacity (Myers & Baisner, 2023). In contrast, Central West countries display a split: Austria, Germany, and Luxembourg have adequate capacity, while Belgium, France, and the Netherlands are insufficient (Beranek & Walker, 2023). In Southern Europe, Malta, Portugal, and Spain are adequately equipped to sustain and deepen change. However, Italy shows insufficient capacity, and Cyprus and Greece are marked by highly insufficient capacity (Caprile, et al., 2023). In Central and Eastern Europe, Estonia stands out with adequate capacity, but the remaining ten countries in the region fall short, exhibiting either insufficient or highly insufficient capacity for sustaining and deepening change (Hofman et al., 2023).

The factors impacting GE endeavours, as established in EIGE's documents and in the grey literature such as project reports and toolkits, have been further explored in the academic literature through empirical research. Scholars have validated the factors established by EIGE and identified additional factors that facilitate the implementation

and sustainability of changes. Given the expansive scope of this literature, it is impractical to provide an exhaustive review within this thesis. Therefore, in the subsequent sections, I will focus on a targeted selection of empirical studies, particularly those stemming from the practice of GEPs under European project consortia. The academic insights from these projects are likely to be comparable to the case observed in this research and offer valuable perspectives on implementing changes across diverse institutional settings.

3.1.1 Facilitating factors for effective GEP implementation: Academic explorations

In a comprehensive meta-analysis of 19 GE interventions implemented across HE and research institutions in European countries (namely, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Spain, and Sweden), Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt (2019) identify ten key factors that either facilitate or impede the success of these initiatives: governance frameworks; top-management commitment; bottom-up participation and buy-in; framing synergies with other initiatives; resistance and strategies for tackling resistance; resources; sustainability of actions; gender competence, experience, and knowledge; transparency, targets, standards and monitoring; and accessible data and information.

In their study, governance frameworks are identified as pivotal for successful implementation; robust structures and sanctions for non-compliance enhance implementation, while weak frameworks hinder progress. Additionally, resources, particularly economic and human, are emphasised as major facilitators. Without adequate funding, capacity, and preferably gender-specific dedicated resources, ambitious GE objectives remain unattainable. The authors also emphasise top-management commitment, noting that genuine top leadership support is essential for driving change and ensuring institutional acceptance of GE measures. Yet, equally important is bottom-up participation and buy-in, since engaging a variety of stakeholders fosters a collective commitment to GE and reduces resistance, thus enhancing the effectiveness of interventions. This logic resonates with Clark et al.'s (2020) claim that "structural changes without popular support do not get implemented, and popular supports without formal structural support do not lead to long-term changes; both types of change are necessary" (p. 93).

Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt (2019) also identify the necessity of gender competence, experience, and knowledge among those implementing GE interventions, along with strategies linking GE goals with broader institutional priorities (e.g.,

excellence), as powerful in fostering organisational buy-in. Additionally, the authors stress the importance of transparency, realistic targets, and rigorous monitoring to ensure accountability, all of which are directly linked to – and dependent on – accessible data and information. To foster the sustainability of results, their study identifies some key conditions: maintaining a certain stability of staff and consequently of gender knowledge, sharing this knowledge between internal and external networks, and ensuring that managing directors are convinced of the relevance of equality measures.

In addition to the meta-analysis provided by Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt, other studies contribute to the discussions on the facilitators and barriers for effective GEP implementation and enduring changes.

Aligning with Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt, numerous studies identify adequate resource allocation – including financial support, human capital, time allocation, and infrastructural capacity – as a major condition for both initiating and sustaining changes (Benschop & Verloo, 2011; Dahmen-Adkins & Peterson, 2021). They stress that without sufficient funding, skilled personnel, and the necessary organisational infrastructure, even well-designed policies may falter in execution.

While GEPs carried out under European-funded projects typically have their resources assured for the project duration, scholars recall that maintaining these resources post-project poses a significant challenge for long-term viability (Sangiuliano et al., 2019b). Sangiuliano et al. (2019b) highlight the need for employing various tactics to ensure sustainable funding and staffing for GE initiatives. They advocate for a hybrid model that includes leveraging internal staff with formal managerial approval to integrate gender-related tasks into their workload, securing baseline funding for ongoing activities, and engaging in active fundraising efforts with local or national stakeholders, or through grant applications for more comprehensive projects.

Contributing to the debate on resources, Addabbo et al. (2020) argue that enhancing the transformative power of GEPs requires evaluating them in terms of gender budgeting, linking "gender equality plans with budget cycles, fostering decision-making processes that acknowledge gender equality issues at all organisational levels" (Addabbo et al., 2020, p. 431; see also Addabbo et al., 2021; Erbe, 2015). The authors recall that the effectiveness of gender budgeting, and by extension GEPs, relies on embedding gender considerations into the budget cycle – planning, implementation, and auditing – to assess and address gender impacts systematically. Without this integration, GEPs risk remaining superficial and unable to prompt substantial organisational change (Addabbo et al., 2021).

In this context, gender budgeting emerges not just as a financial tool but as a strategic lever to enhance the transformative potential of GEPs, ensuring that GE moves from a peripheral concern to a central, operational commitment within academic institutions.

Shifting the focus from resource allocation, other scholars centre on the role of governance frameworks as key for effective GEP implementation. Anagnostou (2022) explains that "the existence of a national policy on R&I that gives due weight to gender disparities in line with related EU objectives and approaches provides an indispensable and formative context within which academic and research organisations initiate action to tackle these disparities (or fail to do so)" (p. 76). Examining the experiences of South and East European countries, Anagnostou (2022) illustrates cases such as Romania and Serbia, where national policy discourse on equality primarily focuses on non-discrimination but lacks clearly defined objectives for the existing policies. Furthermore, the author contends that even in countries like Greece and Italy, the integration of GE objectives into policies has been either a recent development or implemented in a limited and fragmented manner. The policy discourse in these countries predominantly emphasises equal opportunities and non-discrimination, along with positive action, but remains "disconnected from any understanding of structural barriers and institutional change goals" (p. 81). This misalignment underscores the difficulty GEPs face in achieving meaningful progress without a concerted effort to address deep-seated institutional challenges (see also Caprile et al., 2022).

Examining the case of Spain, where national legislation has driven the institutionalisation of GE policies in universities and where GEPs are widely adopted, Tildesley et al. (2023) explore the potential of such legislation to catalyse transformative change. They argue that while the Spanish legislative framework supports the establishment of formal GE policies, it often adopted a "women approach" and lacks effective enforcement mechanisms and accountability structures. Despite these limitations, their findings suggest that feminist actors can strategically leverage existing laws to reinterpret and advance feminist goals, "infusing meanings of gender equality oriented toward the transformative change of institutions and the production of knowledge" (p. 14). Moreover, they argue, when implementing GE policies, these actors may use the legislation as a tool to demand institutional commitment.

Another body of scholars focus on the necessary conditions for promoting cultural change. For instance, Clavero and Galligan (2021) align with Anagnostou (2022) in that normative principles embedded in external regulatory frameworks shape the formulation

and implementation of GEPs institutionally, yet they recall the role of informal norms and organisational culture in perpetuating gender inequality. They analyse GEPs from the perspective of epistemic justice, arguing that beyond transforming institutional structures, it is essential to address the organisation's culture in order to prevent initiatives like GEPs from being adopted for reasons other than justice and equality (e.g., meeting legal obligations or obtaining funds).

Examining GEP documents from seven European universities (in England, Spain, Italy, Finland, Switzerland, Portugal, and Sweden), Clavero and Galligan (2021) firstly discuss the challenges and opportunities in mobilising commitment and collective engagement around gender justice. They reveal the critical role of support from institutional leaders, contending that without such backing "the GEP can easily become a bureaucratic box-ticking exercise" (Clavero & Galligan, 2021, p. 10). In addition to top-management, they underscore the necessity of involving the university community, including students and staff, in GE efforts through participatory processes to build consensus. This engagement, however, proved to be challenging in their case studies.

Further, Clavero and Galligan (2021) explore the challenges and possibilities of transforming the gendered culture of academic institutions by altering both formal and informal norms that recognise epistemic authority, such as academic excellence and merit. They argue that "actions aimed at changing both the standards and procedures by which academic merit is formally assessed must be supported by actions directly aimed at informal cultural change" (Clavero & Galligan, 2021, p. 12). Their findings indicate that a key condition for addressing issues related to institutional culture is providing a robust evidence base for policy design, with high-quality data on how institutional culture acts to discriminate against women. Additionally, publishing and widely circulating this information, along with targeted training, can contribute to raise awareness within the organisation. In this context, to ensure sustainable changes, actions "need to tackle both epistemic privilege and discrimination, reset a traditional culture that normalizes unequal gendered expectations and behaviors, and distribute epistemic-supporting resources in a gender-just manner" (Clavero & Galligan, 2021, p. 14).

Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) support Clavero' and Galligan's argument on the importance of designing transformative efforts through a holistic view of institutional change, one that addresses both structural and cultural organisational aspects. To do so, the authors agree on the significance of collecting (qualitative and quantitative) data to foster implementation and mobilise stakeholders. They argue that acknowledging the

knowledge derived from implementation – that is, on the change process itself and on the various actors involved – is just as important as having diagnostic data to initiate change. In this sense, they advocate for the adoption of an approach based on the "heuristics of change", where an observation system is in place to "monitor and analyse change-as-it-happens" (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019, p. 323). By concentrating on the process, they argue, it becomes possible to unveil deeply embedded organisational features and attitudes, and manage unforeseen complexities and address them timely.

In this same study, Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) conduct a case-study analysis of the GEP implementation in a Danish university participating in the FP7 STAGES project ("Structural Transformation to Achieve Gender Equality in Science"). Among the factors facilitating effective implementation the establishment of transformational agents (i.e., a strong core team to implement the GEP and legitimise its efforts), robust support from top management, stability in leadership and the GEP team, and internal cohesion and competence to drive the change process.

Bustelo (2023) also explores the critical role of top-down support, or the lack thereof, in the success of change initiatives. Through a case study of a Spanish university involved in the H2020 SUPERA project ("Supporting the Promotion of Equality in Research and Academia"), Bustelo discusses how changes in institutional leadership significantly weakened support for GEP activities. In response, the author discusses how bottom-up participation was used as a strategy to sustain engagement and progress. Bustelo highlights that, despite institutional resistance, the GEP team adapted and prioritised creating networks and fostering mutual support, leading to the formation of sustained, active internal networks. Interestingly, Bustelo notes that had they adhered strictly to the initial plan, the team might not have emphasised a bottom-up strategy as strongly, potentially missing out on the development of nurturing relationships and mutual support that proved highly impactful.

Bustelo's (2023) experience underscores that "top-down support alone is insufficient to drive meaningful change" (p. 24). It highlights the value of flexible and adaptive strategies, and the importance of building strong bottom-up approaches and supportive networks that can sustain change efforts over time. This perspective aligns with the findings from other researchers, such as Bleijenbergh and Van Engen (2015), Caprile et al. (2022), and McQuillan and Hernandez (2021), who also advocate for the importance of bottom-up engagement and adaptive strategies in achieving long-term institutional change, even against the lack of institutional support.

Closely linked to bottom-up participation is the strategic formation of both internal and external networks, a factor that has also garnered attention from scholars. Drawing from the experiences of seven established Communities of Practice (CoPs) within the H2020 ACT ("Communities of PrACTice for Accelerating Gender Equality and Institutional Change in Research and Innovation across Europe") project, which included 132 CoP members from 26 countries, Thomson et al. (2022) explore how leveraging networks can enhance the development of GE interventions at the institutional level. Their findings reveal that participation in a European-level network provided change agents with the credibility needed to gain leadership support, while CoPs helped overcome resistance to GE efforts, particularly in regions where GE is not yet seen as an institutional responsibility (e.g., Central and Eastern Europe). Moreover, the CoPs facilitated the transfer of essential knowledge to foster institutional change, aiding less experienced institutions, in addition to serving as a tool for mutual support for change agents: "CoPs offered a retreat to seek mutual appreciation of similar problems related to limited resources, strategies against resistance, and provided a low-risk 'safe space'" (Thomson et al., 2022, p. 46; see also Barnard et al., 2016; Hakkola et al., 2021).

Their findings resonate with Palmén' and Caprile's (2022) discussions around the role of CoPs in the H2020 TARGET project. They argue that the CoPs served as a space for establishing a shared understanding of GE and setting common goals among diverse institutional contexts, in addition to providing a forum for collaborative work within institutions, bringing together stakeholders from various hierarchical levels, as well as across various institutions from different sectors. Furthermore, Palmén and Caprile (2022) also reveal that, through their practice-oriented and reflexive approach, CoPs enhanced the development of gender competencies among members – another precondition for enacting change (see also Palmén & Müller, 2023).

Other scholars delve deeper into the importance of gender competence for driving successful change processes. Linková and Mergaert (2021a) emphasise that change agents must possess a blend of "competencies and capabilities related both to gender expertise and steering of the change process, including negotiation skills and strategic framing, mobilisation of stakeholders, and participatory and co-creation techniques" (p. 305). They advocate for cultivating internal gender expertise within GEP teams, rather than relying on a combination of internal and external experts. Similarly, Lipinsky and Wroblewski (2021) place particular emphasis on fostering gender competence among university staff, especially top managers, suggesting that gender competence should be a

requisite for leadership roles. They argue for the integration of gender expertise – encompassing both academic knowledge and practical skills – into decision-making processes to ensure meaningful impact, noting that this practice that is frequently neglected.

To achieve these goals, the authors remind that GE bodies must be endowed with the authority to "formulate, critique or oppose institutional politics and practices" (Lipinsky and Wroblewski, 2021, p. 176; see also Benschop & Verloo, 2011; Dahmen-Adkins & Peterson, 2021), thereby keeping GE goals at the forefront. Said otherwise, they must have the capacity to influence key decision-making processes and enforce accountability within the organisation for its commitments to GE. Their perspective aligns with Linková' and Mergaert's (2021a) argument that the effectiveness of teams implementing GEPs is closely tied to their organisational positioning and stability, as teams that are not centrally located or positioned at the highest institutional levels often struggle to access key decision-makers and build necessary alliances, particularly when top-down support is lacking (see Ní Laoire et al., 2021).

In the praxis, studies reveal that while committed individuals may have the awareness and competencies needed to initiate change, they frequently lack the institutional power, influence, and resources needed to effectively implement measures (Dahmen-Adkins & Peterson, 2021; Tildesley et al., 2023). Moreover, roles such as equality and diversity officers often experience high turnover due to poor pay, limited career advancement opportunities, and their perception as temporary positions. This instability compromises their ability to initiate transformative efforts and sustain long-term actions (van den Brink, 2020; Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019).

Further, gender competence of key stakeholders and the presence of a legitimised equality body must be accompanied by stable systems that function as "storage bins" to retain the knowledge developed about change processes, thereby creating a collective organisational memory. This approach helps avoid the repeated reinvention of solutions by new diversity staff and increases the likelihood that new managers will uphold previously established organisational learning. As Van den Brink (2020) argues, while the mobility of diversity officers cannot be easily countered, several alternatives can address the high turnover issue. These include improving the working conditions of such positions, creating broad organisational responsibility for diversity issues, storing relevant information in internal documents within structural systems to ensure continuity and accessibility, and establishing monitoring systems.

When it comes to monitoring, scholars have stressed the importance of monitoring GEPs and initiatives alike through a process-oriented approach (Löther et al., 2023), adopting a contribution rather than an attribution approach (in line with Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020, and Palmén et al., 2019, as earlier discussed in this section).[13] At this point, it is worth noting the distinction between monitoring and evaluation. As Löther et al. (2023) describe:

> Monitoring is a systematic way of data collection to control whether the implemented initiatives run as planned. Evaluations, in contrast, assess their effectiveness and efficiency and determine causal links between measures and observed changes. Monitoring is an essential requirement for conducting a comprehensive evaluation. The absence of proper monitoring prohibits the effective execution of evaluations (pp. 41-42)

In their study on the "how, what and when successful project monitoring", Dahmen-Adkins and Peterson (2021) highlight the overlap between definitions and types of monitoring and evaluation, which often leads to a greater emphasis on evaluation at the expense of monitoring. They identify several benefits of comprehensive monitoring, noting that it not only produces detailed and structured information about the change process but also allows for the adjustment of objectives and goals to ensure they remain realistic. Moreover, they argue that comprehensive monitoring can systematise individual and shared reflection, creating spaces for knowledge sharing among different stakeholders (see also Dahmen-Adkins & Peterson, 2024; Wroblewski & Leitner, 2022).

Describing the monitoring strategy of the FP7 GenderTime project ("Transfering Implementing Monitoring Equality"), Dahmen-Adkins and Peterson (2019, p. 254-255) argue for eight monitoring principles: i) making monitoring an integrated part of the project; ii) combine a deductive approach with an inductive one; iii) combine qualitative and quantitative tools; iv) tailor-make monitoring tools; v) collect diverse and varied data; vi) make monitoring a collaborative effort; vii) adapt to the project phases; and viii) allocate sufficient resources to monitoring activities (see also Wroblewski & Leitner, 2022).

While these principles underscore the importance of a holistic and flexible approach to monitoring, practical implementation may face significant challenges. These include resource constraints, the need for institutional buy-in, and maintaining consistency and rigor in data collection and analysis. Additionally, relying on both qualitative and quantitative tools requires expertise that may not be readily available in all settings. Also,

[13] See Mergaert et al. (2022) for a practical monitoring tool.

although the discussed ideas are robust, it is worth mentioning that they are based on experiences from institutions implementing GEPs under European-funded projects, thus their practical applicability would require further scrutiny and validation in diverse contexts.

Lastly, accountability has emerged as a crucial factor for the effective implementation of GEPs. Scholars have predominantly emphasised the role of external mechanisms that, directly or indirectly, hold institutions accountable for GE (e.g., national regulations or incentive schemes) (Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019; Sangiuliano et al., 2019b). Yet, there is also an increasing concern about the "risk that external accountability mechanisms, such as the Horizon Europe GEP requirement, may become mere formalities, encouraging institutions to satisfy formal criteria without engendering real change" (Mergaert et al., 2022, p. 15; see also Cacace et al. 2023). Moreover, as Tzanakou et al. (2021) alert, "a certification system does not operate in a vacuum but operates within higher education institutions that are confronted with decreasing public funding which coincides with a heightened need for accountability" (p. 3).

In light of these concerns, and especially given the growing European obligations on GEPs in R&I institutions, Cacace et al. (2023) present the results of the H2020 CASPER project ("Certification-Award Systems to Promote gender Equality in Research") in a study exploring the feasibility of establishing a European certification scheme to enhance institutions' responsibility for their actions and outcomes regarding GE. These models aim to balance rigorous evaluation with robust support mechanisms, ensuring that certification transcends mere formal compliance and fosters genuine institutional change. According to Cacace et al.'s (2023) findings, the main expected advantages of establishing a certification system include increasing organisational reputation and attractiveness, long-term change for GE, and supporting access to research funds. However, the authors advert that several challenges remain, including ensuring consistent yet context-sensitive implementation across diverse national contexts, securing adequate resources, avoiding the imposition of excessive workloads on "gender people", ensuring the feasibility of comprehensive data collection, and engaging relevant stakeholders to overcome institutional resistance (see also Tzanakou et al., 2021). These challenges lead us to conclude that a successful certification scheme must be adaptable, well-resourced, and supported by a strong policy framework to truly advance GE in academia. Meanwhile, in the absence of a structured external accountability system, change agents must continue to pursue accountability through alternative and creative strategies.

I do not assert that the above provides an exhaustive list of the conditions necessary for the effective implementation of GEPs. Nor do I claim that the discussed conditions are universally applicable. Their level of importance and practical implications may vary according to the specific implementation context, such as the size and nature of the organisation in question or its geopolitical location. Through the discussions above, I aimed to provide a comprehensive review of recent and relevant works contributing to the identification of key factors impacting effective GEP implementation in academia. The works considered represent experiences from North to South Europe, as well as from different types of academic organisations. They also vary in scope, with some contributing new theoretical perspectives and others offering more practice-oriented, empirical insights from case studies.

While the conditions listed by EIGE (2022) are primarily presented in a more operational manner, the discussions emerging from the academic literature offer more in-depth explorations of the practical implications for achieving these conditions. For the purposes of analytical clarity, I draw upon Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) and Palmén' and Kalpazidou Schmidt's (2019) categorisation of the factors that impact GEP implementation into structural, processual, and transversal. Structural factors are related to the cultural, social, and normative attributes of the organisation and its environment (e.g., governance frameworks), whereas processual factors concern the implementation dynamics and strategies used in response to these structural conditions (e.g., top management commitment and bottom-up participation and buy in). Other factors such as awareness and capacity building are considered transversal and support both structural and processual ones. Finally, I add the category of agency factors, which include individual attitudes, motivations, and competencies that influence the success of GEPs.

Table 4. Structural, processual, agency, and transversal factors facilitating GEP implementation

Structural factors	Governance framework; Resources; Structured, well-positioned, and stable GE body; GE embedded in institutional structures and strategic documents;
Agency factors	Top-leadership support; Bottom-up participation and buy-in; Skilled change agents with a formal GE mandate;
Processual factors	Networks and synergies with other initiatives; Participatory processes; Evidence-based approach;

Transversal factors	Awareness and gender competence; Monitoring and accountability systems.

Note: self-elaborated, adapted from Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) and Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt (2019).

In the empirical analysis of this thesis, I will first utilise the aforementioned categories to discuss the realisation of the conditions necessary for effective GEP implementation in the case study, with attention to the contextual dynamics influencing their presence or absence in different institutions. Subsequently, I will explore how these factors contribute to the sustainability of changes over time. Through this comprehensive analysis, I aim to provide insights into the mechanisms that support or hinder the long-term success of GEP initiatives.

3.1.2 Hindering factors for effective GEP implementation: Academic explorations

Despite the increased recognition of gender inequalities and the progressive adoption of GEPs across academic organisations, the journey towards institutional change is fraught with complexities. Thus, in addition to examining the facilitators for GEP success, it is crucial to address the barriers these initiatives encounter along the way.

Given the challenges in effecting significant changes, considerable attention has been directed toward identifying and understanding the factors that impede progress towards GE in academia. A recent literature review conducted by Chaves and Benschop (2023) in the context of the Horizon Europe INSPIRE project categorises the obstacles encountered in promoting change into two primary groups: systemic and institutional barriers. Systemic barriers are entrenched in broader societal norms and structures, dictating the dynamics within organisations and shaping their responses to gender-related challenges. Examples of systemic barriers are the pervasive influence of the neoliberal system in academia, the impact of parenthood, care and work-life balance, and the racism and exclusion of women of colour. In turn, institutional barriers for effective GEP implementation manifest in form of the absence of key conditions for effective implementation (as discussed in the previous section) and resistance to change.

While systemic barriers provide a wider lens on the challenges affecting the promotion of GE, they typically reflect broader societal issues necessitating extended, multifaceted approaches for effective identification and resolution. In contrast, institutional barriers signify more direct, immediate obstacles that can be addressed within the specific context

of academic institutions. Despite recognising the importance of systemic barriers, given the institutional analytical frame of this thesis, I concentrate on examining institutional barriers, with a particular focus on resistance to change as, along with the lack of the necessary conditions to enact change discussed in the section above, it is identified as a major reason for the failure of GE initiatives in R&I (Wroblewski & Palmén, 2022).

3.1.2.1 Resistance to institutional change

Resistance to institutional change is often rooted in the complexities of power dynamics and the competing interests of various stakeholders involved in the process. These dynamics are not simply about opposing change for the sake of opposition but are deeply intertwined with the different interpretations and interests that stakeholders bring to the table. As Anagnostou (2022) contends, "implementation can be seen as a field of contestation and power struggles among stakeholders with different aims over meaning and problem diagnosis: some may wish to implement policy as originally intended and mandated from above; others want to modify its goals, slow down or entirely impede its realisation (p. 77).

In the scholarly literature, institutionalised resistance is defined as "the pattern of organizational behaviour that decision makers in organizations employ to actively deny, reject, refuse to implement, repress or even dismantle change proposals and initiative" (Agócs, 1997, p. 918). From a feminist institutionalist perspective, "resistance can be an expression of the informal norms and values that reign in an institution. Due to its systemic character, institutional resistance can greatly influence the formal and informal norms and practices through which an institution works, shaping patterns of (non-) implementation of gender mainstreaming" (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014, p. 7).

In the context of academia, resistance to GE is a well-documented phenomenon and the most prominent challenge in the enactment of GEPs. It typically emerges through discourses that valorise meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity, while simultaneously masking the gendered assumptions embedded within these concepts (Clavero & Galligan, 2020). Such rhetoric tends to overlook the underlying biases and structural barriers that compromise true meritocracy and equitable opportunities, thereby shaping an environment where GE efforts are viewed as redundant or in conflict with the perceived core values of academic excellence and freedom.

In their influential work, Lombardo and Mergaert (2013) defined resistance as "a phenomenon that emerges during processes of change – such as when gender equality

policies are implemented – and that is aimed at maintaining the *status quo* and opposing change" (p. 299). Following Benschop and Verloo (2011), they observe that interventions with strong transformative goals, particularly those aimed at challenging gender biases entrenched in organisational routines, encounter particular resistance as they directly confront the prevailing gender norms, practices, and assumptions, hence the operation of gendered institutional power.

Within this framework, identifying the exact sources of resistance is complex, as it can emanate from various stakeholders, including administrative personnel, faculty members, students, leadership and management, governing body members, and even from "well-intentioned allies that nevertheless cause tensions" (Tildesley et al., 2022, p. 4; see also López & Díez, 2017), all of whom might have differing motivations. Furthermore, manifestations of resistance can occur at any stage of the intervention process, encompassing the definition of the problem, its analysis, the design and implementation of the intervention, and its subsequent evaluation (Bleijenbergh & Van Engen, 2015).

Resistance manifests in both individual and institutional forms, each with explicit and implicit dimensions. Individual resistance could entail personal attitudes or behaviours that resist GE efforts, either overtly or subtly, such as the denial of existing gender biases or a hesitance to engage with gender training (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Mergaet & Lombardo, 2014). In this context, resistance is "a manifestation of power" (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013, p. 300) or, in Chaves' and Benschop's (2023) words, an "articulated defence", where individuals safeguard their privileges when gender norms are contested, thus perpetuating the *status quo*. Often, this resistance masquerades as support, a dynamic labelled by Chaves and Benschop (2023) as "non-performative commitment", where verbal endorsement of equality is not matched by substantive actions.

In turn, institutional resistance is "embedded in and expressed through organizational structures and processes of legitimisation, decision making and resource allocation" (Agócs, 1997, p. 918). It is typified by the systemic obstacles embedded within an organisation, including rigid policies, longstanding practices, or dominant cultural norms that reinforce the *status quo* or actively counteract GE initiatives (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014). Tildesley et al. (2022) explain the fuzziness in the distinction between individual and institutional resistance:

> When resistance comes from individuals occupying top decision-making positions, their decisions and actions are likely to lead to institutional inertia toward the status quo. Simultaneously, decisions regarding institutional priorities and the allocation of resources

> may trigger "unintended" individual resistance. For example, failure to provide staff with gender training is likely to leave them ill equipped to implement gender mainstreaming in their daily tasks (pp. 4-5)

Whether individual or institutional, resistance can manifest in both explicit and implicit forms (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013, Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014). Explicit resistance is directly observable, marked by overt opposition to GE measures, such as open criticism against GE policies. Meanwhile, implicit resistance is subtler, typically shown through passive non-engagement or the silent reinforcement of discriminatory norms. This can be seen in the non-recognition of gender issues, the trivialisation of GE efforts, and the prioritisation of traditional academic values over inclusive practices (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013). Additionally, implicit institutional resistance might also appear in the guise of initiatives like GEPs that are broad in scope but lack focused prioritisation, showing little commitment to enacting timely, impactful actions for substantive change (O'Connor, 2023, Roos et al., 2020b).

Importantly, the distinction between individual/institutional and implicit/explicit resistance is not always precise, as these often intertwine and overlap in how they manifest in practice. For instance, an individual's explicit resistance to a GE policy (like vocally opposing affirmative action measures) might reflect broader informal institutional norms (such as a prevailing culture that undervalues diversity efforts). Moreover, substantial resistance from key stakeholders can transition into institutional inertia, thereby preserving the *status quo* (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013).

Table 5. Types of resistance

Types of resistance	Features
Individual	Resistance expressed through the action or inaction of an individual to oppose gender change.
Institutional	Resistance revealed by a pattern of aggregated action or inaction that is systematically repeated and that suggests a collective orchestration to oppose gender change.
Explicit	Resistance expressed overtly when actors oppose gender equality initiatives through their action and discourses, or do not do what they ought to do to advance gender equality even when they are made aware of gender equality commitments.
Implicit	Resistance not overtly manifested that can be verified by observing the extent to which actors, in their discourses and inactions or inadequate actions, distance themselves from the goal of gender equality itself.

Note: Lombardo and Mergaert (2013, p. 9).

Resistance can also be classified into gender-specific and non-gender-specific (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013). The former directly opposes GE initiatives and are often rooted in biases, stereotypes, or a vested interest in maintaining gendered power structures. This type of resistance is explicitly connected to the content and goals of GE efforts, such as advancing women's representation in leadership positions or challenging prevailing gender norms within the organisation. In turn, non-gender-specific resistance may not specifically target gender issues but can still significantly impact the implementation of GE initiatives.

The underlying causes of resistance are multiple and often interlinked, shaped by broader institutional and societal contexts. Resistance as a fundamental opposition to the goals of GE often emerge to preserve existing privileges or power dynamics that benefit certain groups over others. In turn, resistance caused by scepticism might also surface if attempts to shift gender relations are views as being too closely tied to feminist ideology, potentially being dismissed as more emotive or ideological than rational or evidence-based. Moreover, GE initiatives can also trigger reflection on personal identities and social norms, potentially causing discomfort and leading individuals to resist alterations that require them to reassess their personal or professional identities. Finally, "reactance" is presented as a cause of resistance, occurring when individuals feel that GE initiatives are coercive or overly prescriptive, prompting them to resist to preserve their personal autonomy ad to push back against what they perceive as external control (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014; Roos et al., 2020b).

The body of empirical works exploring resistance in GEP implementation in academia is vast. For instance, the empirical study by Tildesley et al. (2022) provides an extensive exploration into the resistance faced in GEPs implementation in five Spanish universities. The findings reveal a spectrum of resistive behaviours, among which "refusal to accept responsibility" for institutionalising equality structures appears as a prevalent form of resistance across the institutions reviewed. Additionally, a tendency to delegate the responsibility of implementing GEPs solely to equality units and to view gender inequality as an issue exclusively for women to address. Notably, their investigation uncovered substantial resistance to affirmative actions, work-life balance policies, and measures to integrate the gender perspective into academic content, all perceived as incompatible with traditional notions of academic excellence and meritocracy. These findings are particularly alarming, given Spain's advanced standing in GE legislation and the long-standing, extensive implementation of GEPs (see also Verge et al., 2018).

Looking at the Portuguese and Swedish contexts, the research by Peterson et al. (2021) identifies distinct patterns of resistance. Initially, given the relatively stronger institutionalised culture of GE, the Swedish case showed lesser resistance to acknowledging the need for change compared to their Portuguese counterparts, where the resistance was significantly more pronounced. Across both contexts, there was evidence of a decoupling effect, where the outward formal endorsement of GE was not consistently matched with substantive institutional engagement, suggesting a tendency towards superficial support for such change initiatives. Manifestations of resistance were varied, including scepticism towards gender-related data, a dismissive attitude towards feminist insights, refusal to take responsibility, individualisation of the problem, prioritisation of other issues over GE, adherence to individual meritocracy narratives, and refusal to provide necessary resources.

The study conducted by Hodgins et al. (2022) at an Irish university also illuminates the nuanced landscape of institutional resistance. The study is based on a survey conducted with university staff to explore their perceptions of GE initiatives, aiming to identify resistance to or acceptance of GE as an organisational issue. Resistance was identified on four main fronts: denial of the existence of gender inequality, assertions that the problem is already solved, emphasis on meritocracy, and a focus on individually "fixing" women and men. Further, the study reveals that even those who accepted GE as an organisational issue also raised concerns about the limitations of GE interventions. They criticised these measures as often being "tokenistic window dressing" and argued that they fail to impact the organisational culture, including the ways of working and micropolitical practices. Furthermore, they felt that the interventions do not go far enough, as progress remains uneven – women continue to hold housekeeping roles and are excluded from male-dominated networks that favour promotion.

The studies presented above reveal strikingly similar patterns of resistance to GE initiatives across diverse academic environments. Key commonalities include a pervasive reluctance to assume responsibility for GE actions, a denial or minimisation of existing gender disparities, and a superficial endorsement of GE initiatives that do not translate into meaningful change. Collectively, these studies illuminate a resistance to deep-seated structural reforms, frequently justified by appeals to meritocracy and misconceptions of fairness that challenge affirmative actions or gender-specific policies. This consistent resistance across varied cultural and institutional landscapes signals a global trend of

institutional inertia, illustrating entrenched challenges that transcend geographical and cultural demarcations.

In the table below, I present a compilation (though not exhaustive) of resistance across a spectrum of its forms, bearing in mind that its specific manifestations will depend on intensity and contextual factors.

Table 6. Forms of resistance

1. Denial of the need for change: dismissing evidence, justifying current practices or policies as sufficient, downplaying the impact of gender inequality, and redirecting the debate to other matters.
2. Refusal to accept responsibility: shifting blame, denying influence, avoiding engagement, and deferring action that would contribute to change.
3. Active dismantling: undertaking measures to undo or roll back changes that have been initiated.
4. Trivialisation of GE: minimising impact of GE measures, mocking efforts using sexist humour or sarcasm, marginalising GE issues, and ignoring context.
5. Reactance: resistance due to perceived threats to autonomy or freedom.
6. Non-legitimisation of gender-related work: undervaluing contributions, inefficient support, non-integrating into the core strategies and decision-making, side-lining experts.
7. Inadequate resource allocation: budgetary neglect, time constraints, insufficient staffing, resource misallocation.
8. Policy inaction: formal commitment to GE without corresponding policy development or implementation.
9. Superficial compliance and selective enforcement: formulating policies without specificity in the objectives to be achieved, and implementing superficial changes without addressing underlying systemic issues.
10. Resistance to transparency: avoiding or obstructing the sharing of GE metrics.
11. Bureaucratic hurdles: excessive red tape, inflexible procedures, lengthy approval processes, fragmented responsibility.

Note: self-elaborated, based on the above reviewed literature.

3.1.2.2 Overcoming resistance

As this investigation aims to contribute to the body of work that recognises the power of agency, just as it is important to understand how resistance operates, it is equally essential to recognise how feminist actors counteract it.

Back to Tildesley et al.'s (2022) work, the authors explore approaches to counteract resistance to GE policies in Spanish universities. They employ the concepts of "power to" and "power with" to explore individual and collective empowerment strategies

deployed by feminist actors to counter resistance. The "power to" strategies are depicted as involving the strategic framing GE actions to resonate with the prevailing institutional discourses, utilising political window of opportunity to align with broader social movements, and forming alliances with external entities to gain support and legitimacy. In turn, "power with" strategies are characterised as collective efforts to create or transform networks, committees, or other structures to collectively advocate for GE, facilitating the sharing of strategies and mobilisation of resources.

Discussing specific strategies, central to the discourse on overcoming resistance is the employment of participatory and co-creative processes that actively involve stakeholders in the research process, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and engagement in the change process. In line with this idea, Thomson and Rabsch (2021) articulate, "the aim of co-creation is to collaborate, 'create together', cooperate and share ideas, knowledge, practice, and build on the existing stocks to develop them further" (p. 5). Such an approach contributes for institutional actors to be actively engaged in the change process not merely on the receiving end of change but as central to its creation, thus promoting a collective, grassroots methodology over traditional top-down approaches.

The efficacy of participatory and co-creation methods in facilitating change interventions is well-documented, both within the confines of institutional teams (Bleijenbergh, 2018; Bleijenbergh and van Engen 2015) and in transnational, multi-institutional communities of practice (Espinosa-Fajardo et al., 2022). As Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) emphasise, the collaboration among diverse stakeholders and the execution of transformative actions grounded in participatory processes represent "not only the conditions for change, but also a crucial part of the change process itself" (p. 323). In this sense, these strategies not only create the necessary conditions for change but are integral to the transformation process, as they challenge the traditional, centralised paradigms of power dynamics.

Teamwork in the GEP team also emerges as a critical strategy. López and Díez (2017) emphasise the value of interdisciplinary collaboration, advocating for the convergence of academic experts and change agents in the implementation of GEPs, underscoring the importance of mutual learning and experience sharing, and building upon the progress and insights already gleaned from previous initiatives and scholarly works. Similarly, Thomson et al. (2022) explore how transnational communities of practice facilitate knowledge sharing and leverage credibility, especially for newcomer institutions, to address challenges and counter resistance. This collaborative approach not only enhances

the robustness of change strategies but also fosters a culture of continuous learning and mutual empowerment, vital for sustained institutional transformation.

Further, effective communication and negotiation stand out as a powerful tool to resonate with diverse audiences, thereby fostering a broad-based support for GE. Here, Linková and Mergaert (2021a) argue for the importance of engaging with diverse perspectives to navigate resistance more seamlessly. They suggest that both leaders and change agents must develop the capacity to understand and integrate different perspectives within the institution to effectively manage and guide change processes. By introducing the "trading zone" concept, they illustrate an ongoing negotiation space where continuous engagement can transform resistance into a constructive element of the change process, enabling stakeholders to consider negotiations as a valuable aspect or organisational development. In this context:

> If resistance is conceived of as something not to be merely overcome, but as something integral to the change endeavour, this can allow the actors involved to transform it into a matter of ongoing engagement, which can ease the emotional burdens that resistance elicits. The negotiations can then contribute to a learning process whereby the actors involved may come to regard the trading and negotiations as a value in the organisational growth. (Linková & Mergaert, 2021a, p. 306)

Finally, a recent work by López et al., (2023) introduced an innovative approach by proposing feminist humour to challenge stereotypes and counterarguing resistance to gendered institutional change. They contend that humour serves as a potent mechanism for breaking down barriers and enabling difficult conversations, thus playing a significant role in the incremental deconstruction of resistance. By infusing the change process with humour, they propose a novel way to engage stakeholders, lighten the atmosphere of potentially tense interactions, and foster a more open, receptive environment for transformative discussions and actions.

In sum, as resistance is concerned, Mergaert (2012) highlights that "explaining manifestations of resistance in the context of a gender change project as a 'naturally human' reaction to any form of change, or as grounded in men's opposition to attempts to alter gendered power relations are likely to be oversimplifications" (p. 64). Resistance may not be considered merely as opposition to change, but rather as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can stem from various sources, including institutional inertia, fear of the unknown, or even misunderstandings about the goals and implications of GE initiatives.

In this thesis, attending to a comprehensive analysis of resistance, I will in my case analysis address the following questions: In *what* forms (individual/institutional; explicit/implicit) did it manifest? *How* was it expressed (specific practices)? *Who* were the actors involved? And *why* did it arise (causes/enabling factors)? I will, moreover, consider the strategies employed by change agents to mitigate resistance.

PART IV. OPERATIONALISING THE THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS IN THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter has laid out a comprehensive theoretical framework to analyse the dynamics of institutional transformation towards GE within academic institutions. While the body of scholarship employing FI theory to study change processes in academia is growing, it remains relatively limited. In Part I, by acknowledging academic institutions as political terrains, I have argued for the potential of an FI approach in explaining their gendered nature and its manifestations through formal and informal rules. Additionally, I have established the importance of identifying institutional power and agency as crucial for understanding institutional continuity and change. FI, I argue, is a powerful tool for bridging organisational studies on academia with gender and politics explorations. It is thus the underlying theoretical framework that will guide the analysis in this work.

The literature review presented above had not previously been fully integrated, and this chapter unveils the fragmented nature of existing studies. Few studies have comprehensively examined the GEP process from planning and design through to implementation, particularly with a focus on the sustainability of changes. This research aims to bridge this gap. Specifically, this thesis seeks to deepen the understanding of why achieving sustainable changes remains a major challenge in advancing GE in academic institutions.

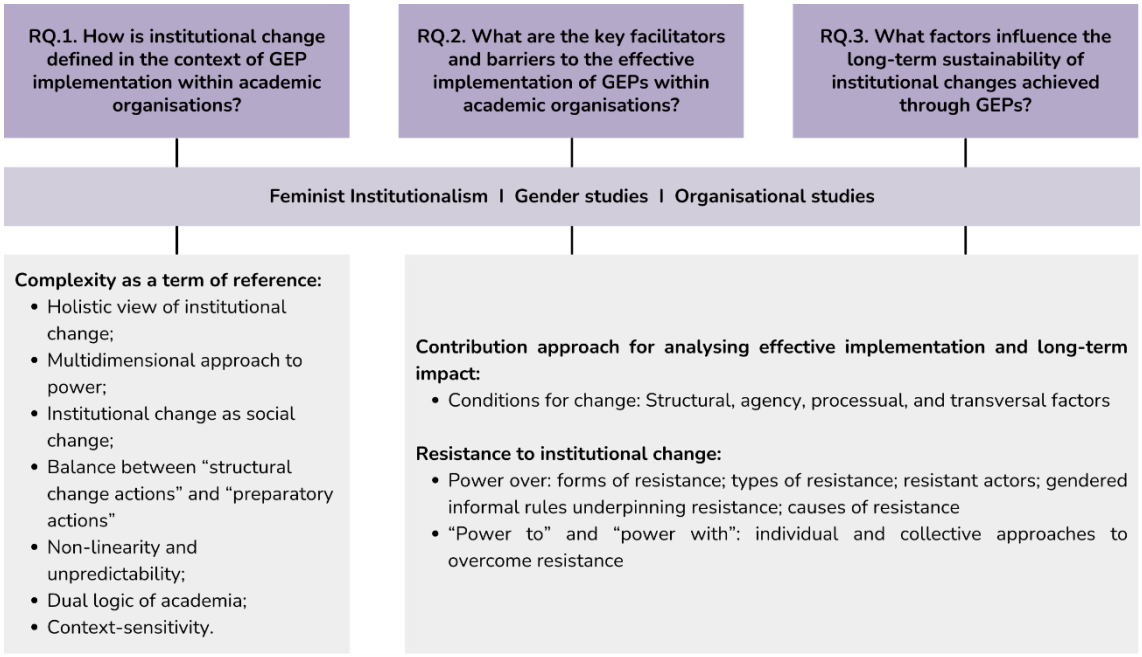
To do so, the empirical analyses in this thesis will follow an FI reasoning to look at GEP processes at all stages. Initially, the discussions presented in Part II of this chapter will guide our investigation on how the notion of institutional change is conceived by those responsible for implementing GEPs in academia. Precisely, I will verify whether the parameters characterising complexity align with the framings attributed to institutional change in practice.

Further, while numerous studies have examined GEP implementation issues, only a small fraction have comprehensively analysed the factors impacting effective implementation through structured empirical analyses. With few exceptions, such as

Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt (2019), the majority of studies have focused on the influence of specific factors facilitating or hindering effective implementation, as well as on resistance. Part III of this chapter provided a comprehensive review of recent works discussing facilitators and barriers to institutional change processes, including resistance. This review will serve as a foundation to compare and verify their applicability in the case study of this thesis. Moreover, these insights will guide our discussions on sustainability issues, aiming to identify the factors that contribute to the embedment of GE efforts beyond the GEP cycle.

The following figure details how this theoretical chapter relates to the research questions:

Figure 4. Theoretical framework: Conceptual layout



Note: self-elaborated.

CHAPTER 3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Having established the contextual and theoretical frameworks underpinning this research, this chapter explores epistemological, methodological, and ethical considerations. I begin by discussing the idea of feminist research, before moving on to situate my study within the body of feminist scholarship employing the notions of situated knowledge and feminist critical friendship (FCF). Next, I describe the methodology applied for this study, describing the rationale behind the qualitative approach employed, the case study design, materials, and methods. Finally, I conclude by addressing pertinent ethical considerations.

1. THE FEMINIST QUESTION IN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

> *Feminist theory has made empirical work particularly challenging because feminist theories reveal the politics in every aspect of the research process.*
>
> (Ackerly & True, 2008, p. 694)

If science was and still is very often linked to positivist principles of universality and objectivity, feminist research comes to sustain and advance post-positivist epistemologies that challenge the very idea of "good science" as value-free and detached from personal and political interests. Feminist scholars in diverse disciplines have long demonstrated how conventional scientific approaches, usually established by "western, white, upper-middle class, heterosexual men" (Stacey & Thorne, 1985, p. 306), actually reproduce patriarchal traits and stimulate the maintenance of oppressive norms against marginalised groups (Collins, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986; Harding & Norberg, 2005). Rather than replacing a "male-centred" hypothesis with a "female-centred" one, they have opposed supposedly neutral rules for generating knowledge and challenged traditional academic paradigms in order to develop explorations that are unbiased towards any particular gender, focusing on representing explorations of reality of social life in a more comprehensive and nuanced way (Harding, 1986).

Feminist scholars have questioned the conventions of scientific research, calling for a feminist scholarship that promotes social and political action not only through theorising gender (in)equality, but also by reformulating essential research practices (Campbell,

2004; O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Central to this project is the recognition that all knowledge is situated within cultural, political, historical and interpersonal relationships, and grounded in gendered experiences of social life (Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1987; hooks, 1984; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992; Stacey & Thorne, 1985).

Situated knowledge encourages researchers to acknowledge their own subjectivities and biases, and to recognise the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into their research. By situating their position, researchers reveal their ideas and create connections with the knowledge generated by others, all while remaining mindful of their own subjective biases and limitations. Reflecting on their position in relation to the subject matter and research participants, researchers can identify and address power dynamics in shaping research, and may produce knowledge that is more relevant, empowering for marginalised groups and that contributes to social justice (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Prügl, 2020; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Sabbarwal, 2000).

> This is because culturewide (or nearly culturewide) beliefs function as evidence at every stage in scientific inquiry: in the selection of problems, the formation of hypotheses, the design of research (including the organization of research communities), the collection of data, the interpretation and sorting of data, decisions about when to stop research the way results of research are reported, and so on (Harding, 1993, p. 69)

In feminist inquiry, "the 'problem' is frequently a blend of an intellectual question and a personal trouble" (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, pp. 259-260). The researcher's personal background and subjective experiences function as a preliminary filter for determining research topics and the approach to data collection and interpretation, which are subsequently moulded by the scientific and disciplinary context in which the researcher operates. The idea is that situating the researcher not as an "invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" places them "in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research" (Harding, 1987, p. 9). By taking this as a starting point in the study, researchers reveal their worldviews and political sites instead of hiding behind the guise of neutrality, thus holding themselves accountable of the entire research process (Dias et al., 2021; Harding & Norberg, 2005).

While there is no one feminist epistemological and methodological approach, feminist research stands out in how it conceives the ethical and political aspects of doing science (Harding, 1987; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). As Ramazanoglu & Holland (2002) assert, "no rules of methodology enable researchers to escape their ideas, subjectivity, politics, ethics and social location" (p. 15). Feminist inquiry is characterised not by a narrow definition of epistemological and methodological norms, but by a set of general principles (such as situated knowledge, critical reflexivity, intersectionality, collaboration, and social justice) that allow for the non-dissociation between theory and practice, knowledge and action, and subject and object (Dias et al., 2021, p. 109).

1.1 WALKING THE TALK: SITUATING THIS THESIS AND ESTABLISHING A FEMINIST APPROACH

I began this research as part of my PhD process in early 2020. The initial research project had the overall goal of understanding which formal and informal factors best contribute to the successful implementation of GE initiatives in institutional settings in academia. From the outset, I decided to conduct a case study, focusing on the GEARING-Roles project (H2020), which aimed to promote institutional change in European academic organisations through the implementation of GEPs in six partner institutions. The case selection was strategically linked to my recent appointment as a research assistant to the coordination team for the GEARING-Roles project. This role enabled me to immerse myself in the studied setting and provided me with a privileged perspective for analysis.

While my objective is to analyse institutional change processes in various academic institutions to identify possible gaps and improve future practices, I am also aware that change does not occur in a linear direction but is rather complex and often unpredictable. As a feminist academic (i.e., a feminist woman carrying out research on the feminist field), I am troubled by the fact that studies on institutions tend "to focus on 'inputs' and 'outputs', treating them as 'black boxes' and thus neglecting the internal dynamics and institutional cultures that enable or challenge modes of activity, including change processes" (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 6). These studies are often excessively pessimistic and fail to recognise the contextual, political and even personal aspects for those driving GE initiatives; they may be counterproductive by only pointing out where feminists fail without providing realistic solutions (Chappell & Mackay, 2020).

Confronted with these concerns, I asked myself: how could I better incorporate feminist principles into the research practices of my thesis? I decided to adopt the Feminist Critical Friendship (FCF) approach, proposed by feminist political scientists Chappell and Mackay (2020), as the foundational framework for my research, as it is specifically designed for studying change in political institutions through a gender lens.

1.2 A FEMINIST CRITICAL FRIENDSHIP APPROACH

Given the limited academic debates on feminist methodological approaches for analysing institutional change, FCF is put forth as a grounded methodological standpoint for research using FI as a theoretical framework. As described by Chappell and Mackay (2020), FCF offers a "promising framework to develop for understanding the dilemmas of feminist researchers engaging with gender reforms and gender expertise in global and local institutions" (p. 4). FCF is proposed by feminist institutionalists in response to the rise of academic critiques that oversimplify gender reform processes; it is a call to support "organisational actors to effect change, at the same time as recognising that change, including transformations, can sometimes come in small, incremental steps" (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 15).

Researching gender reform as a linear and relational-free process is neither realistic nor desirable. I propose using the FCF approach as a means to value personal experience, interpersonal relations, and a feminist ethic of care as intrinsic to knowledge production. In this sense, I advocate for incorporating "attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness" (Tronto, 1993, p. 127; see also Sevenhuijsen, 1998) as essential elements of this approach (Campanini, 2024). In practice, this involves continually reassessing epistemological and methodological choices to take responsibility for producing trustworthy knowledge "beyond formal or legal ties" (Tronto, 1993, p. 132; see also Ackerly & True, 2008). Part of this process entails the restitution of human-sensitive research, where "empathy, intuition, compassion, love, relationality, and commitment (the willing to make connections) are important epistemological values or 'epistemological virtues'" (Sevenhuijsen, 1998, p. 61).

1.2.1 Why is it important to embrace a feminist critical friendship approach?

As discussed in Chapter 2, substantial and lasting change is driven more often by "the internal institutional dynamics of institutions than by external forces" (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 581; see also Clavero & Galligan, 2020). Change tends to occur gradually,

through daily practices and incremental steps, rather than sudden ruptures (Chappell & Mackay, 2020), yet transformative initiatives often face resistance in different forms and levels throughout the process (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013).

As with other political initiatives, projects implementing GEPs in academic organisations are launched with achievable, yet ambitious objectives and milestones intended to be accomplished within a limited timeframe, typically three to four years depending on the grant agreement. While these projects often yield noteworthy and measurable outcomes, the primary challenge in achieving substantial and enduring change lies in the realisation that transforming institutional norms, logics, and culture requires a significant amount of time and continuous strategic action. Furthermore, these processes are not isolated from external influences and are strongly affected by factors such as anti-gender movements, economic crises, and other external challenges.

Despite the increasing policy efforts for holding institutions accountable for addressing gender inequality in academia, the actual enactment of change is frequently met with contradictions. As Tzanakou and Pearce (2019) highlight, "the burden of undertaking this work predominantly falls upon women and other marginalized groups, such as people of colour and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people" (p. 1191). Typically, equality-related responsibilities fall under "academic housework", that is, "the extra work that is put on women [and other marginalised groups] within organisations in the name of gender equality" (Heijstra et al., 2016: 2), remaining marginalised and inadequately recognised, both symbolically and economically (Silvestre et al., 2024).

In this context, the advancement of gender reform frequently ends up depending on "the individual agency and activism of a few passionate individuals in institutions, often with no collective force or voice to systematically challenge the status quo" (Thomson et al., 2022: 46) or, as Henderson (2019, after Ferguson, 2015) characterises them, the 'the gender people':

> In higher education institutions, 'gender people' can take two forms: diversity workers who are predominantly on professional services contracts, and academics who deliver curricula, supervise projects and conduct academic research relating to gender. These roles can overlap; diversity work is often given to academics whose work relates to diversity and who visibly occupy the marginalised positions which diversity work seeks to redress (p. 730)

Referred to in scholarly literature as feminist insiders or change agents (Bleijenbergh, 2018; Dahmen-Adkins & Peterson, 2021; Mackay, 2021)[14], these individuals "are committed both to their organisations and to a cause, identity or ideology that is at odds with the dominant institutional culture" (Mackay, 2021: 76, after Meyerson & Scully, 1995). In the current European R&I framework, they increasingly assume responsibility for leading GEP implementation. Their role involves navigating the academic system and engaging in continuous negotiations with established institutional structures to redefine symbols, norms, practices, and behaviours, questioning the conventional gendered logic of academia (Linková & Mergaert, 2021a). In doing so, feminist insiders often inhabit a paradoxical position: situated within traditional institutions, they "play the rules of the game" while challenging the unequal gender-power dynamics perpetuated by these rules and endeavouring to instigate change in this regard (Campanini, 2024; Heijstra & Pétursdóttir, 2023; Parsons & Priola, 2013).

This two-fold position presents both opportunities and costs. On the one hand, it provides feminist insiders with a unique standpoint (Linková & Mergaert, 2021a), from where they critically appraise the gendered *status quo* of their organisations and strategically work against it from within, "articulating [their] cause within the norms and values of the dominant culture" (Bleijenbergh, 2018, p. 137) and "capitalising on ambiguities, 'soft spots' and internal contradictions" (Mackay, 2021, p. 80). Thereby, they devise strategies to surmount resistance to change, garner institutional trust and legitimation, and progressively advance the GE agenda.

On the other hand, feminist insiders often grapple with the challenge of legitimising their work within and outside the academic system. Spearheading GE initiatives in academia often resembles an "uncomfortable and alien experience of conforming to institutional norms and behaviour and being torn between contradictory organizational and ideological pressures" (Parsons & Priola, 2013, p. 591). Auto-ethnographic accounts by feminist insiders in academic contexts, such as those of Mackay (2021), O'Connor (2019), and Bleijenbergh (2018), shed light on the dilemmas they face in reconciling their commitment to feminist principles with institutional demands, whilst navigating

[14] Previous literature also conceptualises these actors as "outsiders within" (Collins, 1986; Hawkesworth, 2006; Roth, 2006), "femocrats" (Sawer, 1990; Stetson & Mazur, 1995; Eisenstein, 1996), "tempered radicals" (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Eyben, 2013), and "gender equity entrepreneurs" (Chappell, 2006).

strategies to overcome resistance and propel change initiatives forward, often at significant personal cost.

As GE remains at the borders of institutional priorities, the related work of feminist insiders often remains marginalised and poorly legitimised. In this context, the constant playing of the "offence/defence game" within the predominantly masculine institutional structure creates a precarious precondition for instigating change (Heijstra & Pétursdóttir, 2023), which may contribute to a "gender fatigue" not only on the part of resistant actors but also among feminist insiders themselves. As Bleijenbergh (2018) recalls, organisational change not only poses emotional and cognitive challenges for change recipients but also for change agents.

1.2.2 Who is a feminist critical friend?

FCF's origin is traced back to the notion of critical friends introduced by Costa and Kallick (1993), who portray it as "a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend" (p. 50). In their adaptation for an FCF approach, Chappell and Mackay (2020) debate about who might constitute a *feminist* critical friend and suggest some categories of actors, among which are "engaged academic actors". It is on this category that I rely on to adopt an FCF approach in this thesis (Campanini, 2024).

Acting as critical friends to gender advocates, feminist critical friends study their endeavours from a critical, yet grounded and constructive perspective. As the term itself suggests, FCF involves maintaining a balance between two aspects in this relationship: the critique and the friendship. This ensures that feminist critical friends can be concurrently caring towards insider advocates *and* politically committed to a feminist agenda that may not fully coincide with that of the change agents they study (Holvikivi, 2019). As Chappell and Mackay (2020) explain:

> These 'engaged' researchers are often also 'entangled' with the work of insider gender advocates in terms of normatively supporting their objectives, while also seeking to maintain an independent and analytical approach in studying processes of institutional change, including the efforts of insider gender advocates (p. 2)

This idea is supported by previous literature that agrees that "for a feminist-informed researcher interested in engaging in the academic study of the political projects of feminists and women's movements, the researcher's own identity as a scholar, policy analyst, or advocate may be multiple" (Ackerly and True, 2008, p. 698). In fact, in the

case of this thesis, my positioning as a feminist critical friend to the change agents who drive the structural change projects I study is propelled by my multiple identity as a PhD candidate *and* a member of the case study project.

At this point, it is worth recalling my situatedness towards the projects I analyse and my research participants (that is, change agents driving these projects). I officially joined the GEARING-Roles project in early 2020 (when I was also starting this research project) as a research assistant to the coordination team. My contractual status changed in mid-2021, when I became a full-time PhD candidate. Since then, I do not hold contractual commitments to the project, although I remained a member of its core team and attended formal and informal meetings as a means to collect data for my thesis and out of personal interest. This clarification is important to position myself as a feminist critical friend to the change agents driving structural change projects. In this position, I hold characteristics that are required in a feminist critical friend, such as "relative autonomy; expertise; 'close distance'; (at least some) shared goals; and a commitment to understanding contingency and contextual entanglement" (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 3).

1.2.3 How do I employ a feminist critical friendship approach in this thesis?

Chappell and Mackay identify four main features that feminist critical friends should entail. First, they recognise the often concealed "micro-political strategies" necessary for establishing feminist ideas within traditional organisations. Second, they acknowledge the challenges and opportunities that arise from operating from the margins. Third, they identify and evaluate the intended and unintended outcomes of change-oriented initiatives. Lastly, it does not disregard the efforts of insider advocates "who are often working to procure the 'least worst' outcomes', rather than vacate the field entirely" (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 7). In doing so, feminist critical friends can value the small wins that ground change processes and account for the setbacks that also constitute them.

> Taking careful note of contextual constraints and incremental shifts in gender practices and outcomes, feminist critical friends seek to avoid overburdening feminist insiders with unrealistic expectations or making overly generalised claims about policy successes or failures. Rather, they pay attention to the position of feminist actors in institutional settings, the pendulum movement back and forward between small wins and losses, and the cumulative effect of these over time. (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 3)

An FCF approach is well-suited for this thesis for three main reasons: first, it helps navigate the contextual constraints and incremental nature of gender reform. Second, FCF emphasises the role of institutional actors who drive change processes, acknowledging

the value and costs inherent in their institutional activism. Third, FCF embraces researchers' proximity to their object of study and participants, recognising it as an essential and beneficial feature of the approach, while also acknowledging the potential risks it may entail (Campanini, 2024).

Ideally, an FCF approach implies a horizontal, collaborative process in which there is room for a dialogic relationship between the researcher and research participants. Thereby, FCF "takes the middle ground in the debates about the virtues of 'researching up' versus 'researching down'" (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 15). This includes accepting that the critical friendship relationship may work in both ways, that is, those willing to occupy a feminist critical friend position are also called to "create spaces for gender experts to be critical friends" to them in return (Holvikivi, 2019: 132).

As one may imagine, such a relationship may not be easily attained in every research process. As a relational approach, FCF "implies relations (of trust, some shared goals and understanding) between researchers and institutional actors" (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 15). Indeed, possible limitations for employing FCF may include difficulties in accessing relevant data and gaining the trust of insiders. Having access to information about institutional change processes may be particularly challenging when it comes to institutional resistance and informal dynamics that shape transformation and stasis. A trust relationship with insiders is thus essential to have a comprehensive overview of the reality of these processes, especially if the goal is to understand not only contextual and institutional factors in gender reform, but also the personal and political spheres contributing to it (Chappell & Mackay, 2020).

In this study, my proximity to the structural change project community situated me in a privileged position in this regard. Firstly, it allowed me to access information from both formal events and informal meetings and exchanges. In addition to conducting interviews with project representatives, I was able to employ continuous observation techniques to track change processes at institutional level and observe the evolvement of the project community from within, using both my lens as a PhD researcher and my insider perspective as a project member. Secondly, as I shared professional experiences with many of my interviewees, data collection was facilitated not only in terms of access but also trust. Since participants identified me as a community member who shares their goals and understands the reality in which they work, finding fluidity and establishing a safe space during interviews and observations did not represent a challenge. Lastly, my proximity to gender advocates facilitated mutual collaboration throughout the research

process, allowing me to obtain input on their part not only through formal research practices like interviews but also through friendly reviews and informal exchanges.[15]

In practice, I agree with Chappell & Mackay's (2020) that "research imbued with the ethos of FCF involves emotional work on both sides" (p. 14). As a researcher, I take the responsibility of actively listening, creating a safe space for change agents participating in my research to explore their experiences (including of pain, anger and disappointment related to their feminist institutional activism), opening space for critical dialogues with my research participants, and constantly reflecting on how I translate the dynamic and complex movements of change processes into my analyses (Oakly, 1981; Watts, 2006). On the side of feminist insiders, in turn, they "may grapple with the impact of the pain and confidences shared, as well as disappointment from unrealistic expectations of what research(ers) can effect in terms of material change" (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 14). These and other ethical concerns that arise from such a relational approach of engagement and proximity will be discussed in detail in Section 3.1 in this chapter.

Finally, as with other feminist methodological approaches, implementing FCF is not a matter of adhering to a fixed set of rules. Therefore, for purposes of structure and fluidity, this section does not intend to extrapolate the accounts of how FCF has been employed in this thesis. Instead, the following discussions demonstrate how FCF has influenced methodological decisions transversally at various stages of the research process.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In view of the research questions addressed in this work, a qualitative research approach offers the necessary perspective and tools to understand the complexities and nuances of institutional change for several reasons. Firstly, it allows for a deep, nuanced understanding of complex social phenomena, such as gender reform in institutional settings. By focusing on participants' experiences, perceptions, and emotions, qualitative research captures the intricacies of GE initiatives that quantitative methods might overlook. This approach is well-suited for case study analysis and often involves in-depth data collection methods such as interviews and observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To understand the micro-politics and the pendular movements between small victories and setbacks in change processes, "it is necessary to get as close as possible through interviews and ethnographic methods, in addition to studying core texts" (Chappell &

[15] For an in-depth discussion on the application of FCF in this thesis, refer to Campanini, 2024.

Mackay, 2020, p. 11). These methods support the gathering of rich and detailed data that can provide insights into the complexities of institutional reform.

Moreover, qualitative research is particularly adept at providing contextual insights. It enables the exploration of the specific cultural, organisational, and social factors that influence gender reform efforts. This context-rich approach is essential for understanding how change agents operate within their unique environments and how these environments impact their strategies and outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Espedal et al., 2022).

Finally, qualitative methods foster a more personal connection between the researcher and the subject matter, aligning with the FCF approach. By using qualitative methods, I can engage with participants in a way that acknowledges their lived experiences and the relational dynamics at play, thereby producing more meaningful and trustworthy insights for the objectives of this research (Espedal et al., 2022; Oakley, 1981; Strauss, 1987). This approach opens space for dialogue with research participants, fostering a reflexive and self-critical process (Holvikivi, 2019).

2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND SAMPLE

Empirical data for this thesis draws upon two primary sources. First, a case-study analysis was conducted on the GEARING-Roles project, funded under H2020 to implement GEPs in six academic institutions. This analysis involved an in-depth approach utilizing a process tracing strategy and diverse methods for data collection, including documentary analysis, participant observation, and interviews, as will be described in the following sections. In addition to the case study, this thesis includes data from interviews with representatives from other FP7 and H2020 projects. Both sources are explained in more detail below.

In terms of generalisability, this thesis seeks to apply FI theory to establish a framework for understanding institutional change in European academic organisations. Although the study focuses on a project funded under a specific funding programme of the European Commission, the sample includes a range of national contexts and institutions of different natures, with data collected in a manner that highlights both commonalities and differences. Thus, limiting the framework of analysis to EU-funded projects does not represent a limitation in terms of generalisability. The discussions in this thesis have wider implications and may be pertinent to analysing future actions, especially considering the current expansion of GEPs across Europe due to the eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe. In this context, GEARING-Roles can be argued as a typical

case that "provides insight into a broader phenomenon" and is "representative of a broader set of cases" (Gerring, 2007, p. 91). Moreover, the incorporation of insights from change agents representing other GEP-implementing projects further strengthens the generalisability of the findings.

2.1.1 Case study design and case selection

With no single definition, the case study design is used across different disciplines in a variety of approaches. In contrast to experiments, contextual conditions are not demarcated or regulated in case studies, but rather form an integral part of the inquiry (Yanow et al., 2008; Yin, 1994). In the study of political processes, comparative case studies based on quantitative methods are popular (Gerring, 2007), yet research developed on qualitative grounds benefits from it as a strategy to gather detailed information about a particular political phenomenon, which would be difficult to achieve otherwise (Yanow et al., 2008; Yin 1994). Gerring (2006) outlines the core features of research utilising the approach:

> To refer to a work as a "case study" might mean: (a) that its method is qualitative, small-N, (b) that the research is holistic, thick (a more or less comprehensive examination of a phenomenon), (c) that it utilizes a particular type of evidence (e.g., ethnographic, clinical, nonexperimental, non-survey-based, participant-observation, process-tracing, historical, textual, or field research), (d) that its method of evidence gathering is naturalistic (a "real-life context"), (e) that the topic is diffuse (case and context are difficult to distinguish), (f) that it employs triangulation ("multiple sources of evidence"), (g) that the research investigates the properties of a single observation, or (h) that the research investigates the properties of a single phenomenon, instance, or example (p. 17)

A case study design is well suited for researching institutional change processes for several reasons. Firstly, its in-depth analysis is useful for understanding the nuances of institutional change processes. Secondly, it allows for contextual analysis of the institution(s) and/or community under study, helping researchers understand the social, cultural, and political factors that influence institutional reform. Thirdly, case study typically involves the use of multiple sources of data, such as documents, interviews, and observations, contributing to a nuanced and comprehensive overview of change processes. Finally, as Gerring (2007) explains, "the case study – of an individual, group, organization or event – rests implicitly on the existence of a micro-macro link in social behaviour" (p. 1). It supports the identification of patterns in the specific observed case(s)

and can be used to build on existing theory on institutional change (Ridder, 2017) and is replicable in other contexts (Gerring, 2007; Yanow et al., 2008; Yin, 1994).

Fieldwork "can be thought of as engaging in a series of multi-layered and nested case studies, often with intersecting and overlapping units of analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 298). In this context, case studies can be carried out based on a single-case or as a comparison of multiple of them (cross-case comparison) (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2007; Yanow, 2008). In the study of political phenomena, cases may include a single individual, group, organisation, community, or country. A single-case study focuses on one unit of analysis, such as a single GEP-implementing organisation, while a multiple-case study involves the cross-comparative analysis of different cases organisations. This research adopts a case study design by conducting an analysis of a project funded under Horizon 2020, which implemented GEPs across six academic institutions.

The GEARING-Roles project serves as the case study project for this thesis. GEARING-Roles ("Gender Equality Actions in Research Institutions to traNsform Gender ROLES") was funded under the H2020 call "SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans". The primary objective of the project was to promote institutional change towards GE through the implementation of GEPs in academic organisations. Spanning four years (2019-2022), the project included six GEP-implementing institutions: five universities and one research funding organisation located in Estonia, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye, and the UK. For the development of GEPs, all six institutions followed the methodology recommended by the GEAR tool (EIGE, 2016). However, the GEPs were self-tailored and varied in scope, with four being institution-wide and two focused at the institute/faculty level.[16]

GEARING-Roles was selected based on case relevance and pragmatic logistical matters (Gerring, 2007). First, its implementation period was favourable for the timing of this thesis and allowed the follow-up of the project process from inception to completion. Second, as a mid-to-late H2020 project, GEARING-Roles represented an optimal scenario for GEP implementation, as it relied on the extensive knowledge that had been accumulated from prior GEP-implementing projects. GEARING-Roles was thus not composed of pilot initiatives but rather had a solid foundation in terms of established methodologies, best practices, and institutional support mechanisms. This increased the

[16] For a detailed description of GEARING-Roles, refer to Chapter 4.

likelihood that these GEPs would be developed in a structured manner and sustained throughout the project period, thereby ensuring the feasibility of the case study and allowing for meaningful comparisons between the different GEP-implementing institutions.

Finally, GEARING-Roles provided an ideal case study for my research due to my unique positioning within the project. As outlined in Chapter 3, during the initial stages of this thesis, I held the role of research assistant within the project's coordination team. Subsequently, I concluded this contractual engagement to dedicate myself entirely to my doctoral research. Nevertheless, I maintained my involvement as a core member of the research team, participating in meetings and events. This dual role allowed me to engage with the project both as a researcher collecting data for my PhD and as a committed participant, offering a rich and nuanced perspective for my analysis.[17]

Data from the case-study project was collected through documentary analysis of project reports, participant observation of project events, and in-depth semi-structured interview with representatives of the different partner institutions. Further explanations on the data collection can be found in Section 2.2 of this chapter.

2.1.2 Additional research sample

As previously mentioned, this thesis also incorporates insights from representatives of other GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020. Broadening the scope of the sample allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse strategies, challenges, and outcomes associated with GEP implementation across various contexts, thereby enhancing the robustness of the findings and the overall conclusions drawn from the research.

For the selection of the respondents in this phase, I considered the size of the population of potential cases (in this case, the number of GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020), the amount of information available about different projects, the type of general model I aimed to construct, and the likelihood of that model being applicable to the purposes of my study (Gerring, 2007). Given the manageable number of GEP-implementing projects (30)[18], the sample definition was based on the

[17] For considerations on the ethical considerations of such proximity for my research, refer to Chapter 3, section 3.1.

[18] For a complete framework of GEP-implementing projects, see Appendix A.

general representation of the structural change community. After reviewing public deliverables, reports and other materials from all 30 projects, based on relevance and access to participants, I ultimately interviewed 24 individuals, representing a total of 21 GEP-implementing projects.[19] For more detail on the selection of the interviewees, refer to Section 2.2.3 in this chapter.

2.2 DATA COLLECTION

Ethnography, particularly feminist ethnography, was integral to the data collection process in this research. By employing both documentary analysis, participant observation and immersion, and in-depth semi-structure interviews, this method enabled the capturing of nuanced, often hidden dynamics of power and resistance that underpin institutional responses to GE (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). Through this approach, the research delved into both overt and covert forms of resistance, as well as the subtleties of interactions.

Aligned with an FCF approach, feminist ethnography acknowledges the blurred boundaries between the researcher and participants, challenging traditional notions of objectivity and neutrality (Pereira, 2017). This approach emphasised the co-construction of knowledge, recognising the ways in which researcher and participant identities intersect and influence the research process. As Pereira (2017) notes, feminist ethnography critically examines the dynamics of "proper" knowledge production, particularly in academic institutions where feminist scholarship may be marginalised or delegitimised. By addressing these dynamics, this method provided a deeper understanding of how institutional norms and practices shape, and are shaped by, efforts to implement GE in traditional academic settings.

As mentioned, empirical data was collected using multiple sources of data and the combination of different techniques, as a means of validating findings and increasing their reliability (Gerring, 2007; McDonald, 2010). Combining documentary analysis, observation techniques, and interviews demonstrated to be an effective way to triangulate data collection in this research. This strategy contributed to validating the findings, as information obtained through one method could be cross-checked against data gathered through another technique, thereby overcoming the limitations of each individual method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

[19] Some individuals had participated in multiple projects, thus representing more than one project.

In the specific case of this study, while documents provided valuable information and offered insight into the overall structure and progress of projects that may not be directly observable, they also presented concerns regarding the completeness, accuracy, and consistency of data (Patton, 2002). This issue was evident in the examination of project reports and deliverables. Despite their role in reporting progress to the European Commission, these documents typically maintain a formal institutional tone and seldom disclose informal aspects of the change processes they describe. Consequently, while they were useful for generating leads and formulating pertinent questions for interviews, they were limited in revealing the nuanced dynamics of project implementation.

Likewise, limitations to observations were identified. Initially, observations may be limited by the researcher's biases, as they may inadvertently focus on certain aspects of the processes under study while missing others or interpreting data in ways influenced by their preconceptions or expectations (Di Domenico & Phillips, 2010; Patton, 2002). Although the observations of GEP implementation under GEARING-Roles occurred continuously due to my participation in regular consortium meetings, most of these meetings were held online and confined to the timeslots of formal events. This posed a potential limitation for me as an observer in capturing contextual and institutional elements present in the different institutions implementing GEPs that were unfamiliar and outside of my immediate context. Despite these challenges, similar to document analysis, observations proved useful for tracing the change processes and contributed to refining the interview questions.

Like documents and observations, interview data present relevant limitations. Overall, in this research, it was limited by the format of single interview sessions employed. In single sessions, the potential for responses to be distorted is increased due to personal biases (from the researcher and/or respondent), emotions like anger, anxiety, political views, or lack of awareness. Additionally, the accuracy of single interviews can be impacted by factors such as recall errors, reactivity, and the possibility of "self-serving responses" (Patton, 2002, p. 306). The triangulation of these methods was thus critical in mitigating these limitations. As Patton (2002) describes, "the documentation alone would not have been comprehensible without the insight gained from interviews, which were informed by field observations" (p. 307).

2.2.1 Documentary analysis

Documents constituted a central source of data for this research. Through document analysis, one can gain insight into various political, social, and personal aspects of the case that go beyond the immediate information obtained from interviews and observations. As documents are a product of regular day-to-day operations and are not specifically generated for the research that analyses them, they offer genuine records that illuminate aspects of the case and provide rich information for supporting the design of interview questions and observation protocols (Olson, 2010).

European-funded projects report on their processes and outcomes on a continuous and structured basis through deliverables, periodic reports, and other materials. Although not all deliverables and reports are made public, non-confidential documents are available on the European Commission webpage, CORDIS[20], which provides information on all EU-supported Research and Development activities, including from structural change projects. In addition to the European Commission online platform, projects hold their own online webpages where relevant information is made public and project outcomes are exposed in more detail. Together, these sources constitute a vital part of the structural change projects, as they contain, in general terms, information on the project objectives, participating institutions and the roles they occupy within the consortia, the purposes and development of different work packages, the GEP processes, relevant outcomes, and at least part of the project evaluation. Thus, the documents analysed comply with the criteria established in the literature for handling documentary sources, namely, authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Mogalakwe, 2009).

Two levels of documentary analysis were employed in this thesis. Initially, a documentary analysis was conducted to build an initial framework of the different GEP-implementing projects and to identify patterns and trends across them. This analysis was performed randomly, using publicly available documents from either the official EC webpage or the project websites. Documents from all 30 GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020 were consulted. These documents informed the development of research objectives and questions, guiding the initial research design process.

[20] https://cordis.europa.eu/projects/en

In the second phase, specifically for the case study project, the documentary analysis moved beyond an exploratory gaze to support analytical formulations. The following documents were analysed:

Table 7. GEARING-Roles: Analysed documents

Document title	**Type**	**Dissemination level**
1. Institution 1's GEP	GEP	Public
2. Institution 2's GEP	GEP	Public
3. Institution 3's GEP	GEP	Public
4. Institution 4's GEP	GEP	Public
5. Institution 5's GEP	GEP	Public
6. Institution 6's GEP	GEP	Public
7. Institution 1's Institutional Assessment Report	Report	Public
8. Institution 2's Institutional Assessment Report	Report	Internal
9. Institution 3's Institutional Assessment Report	Report	Internal
10. Institution 4's Institutional Assessment Report	Report	Internal
11. Institution 5's Institutional Assessment Report	Report	Internal
12. Institution 6's Institutional Assessment Report	Report	Internal
13. D3.1 Institutional Assessment Report Final	Deliverable	Public
14. GEARING-Roles's Periodic Technical Reports 1, 2, and 3	Report	Internal
15. Task Forces Activities Summary Report	Report	Public
16. D9.1 Guidelines for GEP Design Evaluation	Deliverable	Public
17. D9.2 Guidelines for GEP Impact Evaluation	Deliverable	Public
18. D9.3 GEARING Impact Road Map	Deliverable	Public
19. D9.4 Annual Impact Evaluation Report	Deliverable	Public
20. D9.5 Annual Impact Evaluation Report	Deliverable	Public
21. D9.6 Annual Impact Evaluation Report	Deliverable	Public

22. D9.7 Final Impact Evaluation Report	Deliverable	Public
23. Guidelines for SWAFS projects to report on Institutional Changes	European Commission guidelines	Internal
24. “Institutional changes” Report 2020	Report	Internal
25. “Institutional changes” Report 2021	Report	Internal
26. “Institutional changes” Report 2022	Online form	Internal

Note: self-elaborated.

2.2.2 Participant observation

Participant observation constituted another data collection technique for this thesis. Observation techniques have long been employed in social sciences, particularly in the field of anthropology and sociology. In general terms, observation as a research technique is “the circumstance of being in or around an on-going social setting for the purpose of making a qualitative analysis of that setting” (Lofland, 1971, p. 93, cited in Patton, 2002, p. 262). The method allows the collection of data in a natural setting, without disrupting the normal operations of the phenomena under study. This contributes to ensuring that the data gathered is more representative of reality, rather than relying on self-reported data or surveys which may be subject to bias (Pauly, 2010), and helps researchers capture taken-for-granted aspects of everyday activities that may go unreported by participants (Patton, 2002).

Observational methods can yield valuable insights for those embarking in the analysis of complex and non-linear phenomena, such as institutional change processes, as it helps to acknowledge the complexities of the settings being studied, including the intricate interplay of various elements within the given situation. The closeness to the setting “allows the researcher to live and breathe the everyday realities of the social worlds in which they are interested” (Di Domenico & Phillips, 2010, p. 653). The scope of observations can be broad (e.g., understanding whole cultural systems) or more narrowed (e.g., comprehending specific processes of a programme) (Patton, 2002). In both cases, a significant time for immersion of the researcher within the observed setting is usually necessary as a means of acquiring sufficient insight and experience to conduct a thorough analysis (Pauly, 2010).

Through participant observation, researchers can gain an insider's view of the setting under analysis, meaning that they "not only see what is happening but feel what it is like to be a part of the setting" (Patton, 2002, p. 268). Participant observers may introduce themselves in the studied setting specifically for the purposes of the research or may already be a participant in the setting before taking on the role of a researcher. Either way, the researcher shall balance their position of participation and observation to gain a thorough understanding of the setting as an insider while being able to describe and analyse it as and to an outsider (Patton, 2002).

Due to the scope of this study, observations were conducted exclusively within the case study project. They aimed to understand the dynamics of the change processes undergoing within the six GEP-implementing institutions participating in GEARING-Roles, including both formal and informal aspects. This included observing interactions related to how contextual and institutional factors impacted GEP implementation, and the opportunities and costs for those in charge of driving change processes. Observations helped corroborate information collected through documents and interviews, capturing non-verbal behaviours, and identifying hidden aspects of the setting (Espinosa et al., 2016).

This process was facilitated by my membership as a research assistant in the coordination team of the GEARING-Roles consortium, which granted me access as an observer to public events, internal meetings, and informal spaces. My insider position in the project allowed me to trace the processes of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the GEPs implemented under the project's scope. On one hand, my participation in the project consortium provided me "access, trust, absorption, and interpretation that, some scholars argue, may more closely mirror those within the social setting than data collected by someone who is more of an outsider" (Di Domenico & Phillips, 2010, p. 653). On the other hand, as an insider, I was less likely to recognise taken-for-granted aspects of everyday dynamics of the project that might be more identifiable to an outsider (Pauly, 2010).[21]

In terms of process, I followed Liu and Maitlis' (2010, p. 610) understanding of the observational process as a "three-stage funnel". Observations began to trace a descriptive and general overview of the setting, followed by a more focused observation aimed at

[21] For ethical considerations on this relationship of proximity with the research object, refer to Section 3.1 in this Chapter.

identifying specific aspects of the change processes under investigation. It was then supplemented by a selected observation that established correlations between the elements of greatest interests to the research. Observations concluded when "theoretical saturation [was] reached, which occur[ed] when further observations beg[an] to add little or nothing to researchers' understanding" (Liu & Maitlis, 2010, p. 610).

Participant observations took place from March 2020 to March 2023, coinciding with the core implementation phase of GEARING-Roles. Although I was not physically present in the daily activities of the six GEP-implementing partners for pragmatic reasons, regular follow-up meetings with the teams responsible for implementing the GEPs in the six organisations provided me with relevant information to track change processes on an ongoing basis.

While detailed field notes were taken throughout the whole process, my closeness to the consortium activities allowed me to draw on information and impressions that "go beyond what can be fully recorded in even the most detailed field notes" (Patton, 2002, p. 264). Although a systematic and rigorous recording of the data observed was ensured, continuous immersion in the observed setting led to an imprecise number of events observed, particularly informal ones. The table that follows represents the list of formal events observed. For confidentiality purposes, specific dates are not disclosed.

Table 8. Formal events observed in GEARING-Roles

Type of event	**Date**	**Format**	**Dissemination level**
1. Work Package leaders meeting	Mar 2020	Online	Internal
2. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Apr 2020	Online	Internal
3. Work Package leaders meeting	May 2020	Online	Internal
4. GEP-implementing partners meeting	May 2020	Online	Internal
5. Consortium training on "Leadership and Resistances"	Jun 2020	Online	Internal
6. Work Package leaders meeting	Jul 2020	Online	Internal
7. Work Package leaders and GEP-implementing partners meeting	Sep 2020	Online	Internal
8. Open webinar on "Challenges for feminist leadership in HEIs"	Sep 2020	Online	Public

9. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Oct 2020	Online	Internal
10. Closed webinar on “Tackling Biases and Resistances to Gender Equality"	Oct 2020	Online	Internal
11. Closed training for female leaders	Nov 2020	Online	Internal
12. Work Package leaders meeting	Nov 2020	Online	Internal
13. Annual Conference	Nov 2020	Online	Public
14. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Dec 2020	Online	Internal
15. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Feb 2021	Online	Internal
16. Work Package leaders and GEP-implementing partners meeting	Mar 2021	Online	Internal
17. Pairing Event	Mar 2021	Hybrid	Internal
18. Mutual learning session on “Dealing with Resistances”	May 2021	Online	Internal
19. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Jun 2021	Online	Internal
20. Work Package leaders meeting	Jul 2021	Online	Internal
21. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Sep 2021	Online	Internal
22. Review Meeting with the European Commission	Sep 2021	Online	Internal
23. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Oct 2021	Online	Internal
24. Work Package leaders meeting	Nov 2021	Online	Internal
25. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Dec 2021	Online	Internal
26. Closed webinar on “Gender Information Management Systems”	Dec 2021	Online	Internal
27. Work Package leaders meeting	Jan 2022	Online	Internal
28. Steering Committee meeting	Jan 2022	Online	Internal
29. GEP coaching session with Institution 1	Jan 2022	In-person	Internal
30. GEP coaching session with Institution 4	Jan 2022	Online	Internal
31. GEP coaching session with Institution 2	Feb 2022	Online	Internal

32. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Feb 2022	Online	Internal
33. Closed webinar on “Intersectionality”	Feb 2022	Online	Internal
34. Work Package leaders meeting	Mar 2022	Online	Internal
35. Closed webinar on “Dealing with Resistances”	Mar 2022	Online	Internal
36. Annual Conference	Mar 2022	Online	Public
37. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Apr 2022	Online	Internal
38. Work Package leaders meeting	May 2022	Online	Internal
39. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Jun 2022	Online	Internal
40. Pairing Event	Jun 2022	In-person	Internal
41. Work Package leaders meeting	Jun 2022	Online	Internal
42. Work Package leaders and GEP-implementing partners meeting	Sep 2022	Online	Internal
43. Meeting on “Sustainability of Institutional Change”	Sep 2022	Online	Internal
44. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Oct 2022	Online	Internal
45. Steering Committee meeting	Oct 2022	In-person	Internal
46. Annual Conference	Oct 2022	In-person	Public
47. Work Package leaders meeting	Nov 2022	Online	Internal
48. GEP-implementing partners meeting	Dec 2022	Online	Internal

Note: self-elaborated.

2.2.3 Interviews

As the third and final data gathering method in this thesis, interviews proved to be a suitable method for completing the triangulation of data collection. They are designed to be exploratory, facilitating a deeper understanding of the respondent’s experiences at various levels (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2002). In this research, interviews were particularly useful for capturing informal elements involved in the implementation of change-oriented initiatives and extracting expert interpretations from change agents who have been engaged in the structural change community for a significant period.

Interviews can be approached in various ways, and different disciplines offer classifications, typologies, and rules for conducting them. In this study, I followed the guide-based interview model, which follows a guide to focus on a particular subject but leaves the researcher free to explore spontaneously when relevant (Patton, 2002). The interviews were organised in a semi-structured way, with standardised questions to ensure accurate coverage of specific topics, while also utilising a more open guide-based approach to explore particular themes. This allowed me to ask follow-up questions and probe for more detail based on the participants' responses.

Respondents were organised into two groups: 1) representatives of GEARING-Roles' partner institutions (case-study interviews); and 2) individuals who had participated in other GEP-implementing projects under FP7 and H2020 (additional sample). The criteria for selecting the respondents varied by group. For group 1 (GEARING-Roles' representatives), interviews were conducted with GEP coordinators from each of the six GEP-implementing partners, a representative from the coordination team, the expert technical partner, and the evaluation partner. Respondents were directly contacted via email and/or during project meetings, with the contact facilitated by my membership in the project.

For group 2 (representatives from sister projects), the criteria used to the identification of respondents were based on the roles they occupied in the structural change project community, geographical and institutional (RPOs/RFOs) representation. Priority was given to respondents who have held or hold positions as project coordinators, evaluators, technical support partner. To identify potential respondents for group 2, I initially contacted knowledgeable actors who had been involved in several projects and hold a comprehensive overview of the structural change community, and then used a snowball sampling technique to identify other relevant actors.

In total, 22 interview sessions were conducted with 24 respondents.[22] Together, the change agents interviewed represented 22 GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020, including GEARING-Roles. As respondents were located in different countries, most interviews were conducted online and, where possible, in person. The interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian, depending on the participants' preferred language, to facilitate more fluid and open exchanges and to address topics beyond technical terms. The sessions lasted approximately one hour, with

[22] Two interviews were conducted as joint sessions with two respondents each.

variations between respondents. Below, Table 9 links the respondents to their respective groups and provides general details of the sessions. Information such as whether an interview was conducted individually or in a group, as well as the language of each session, are not specified to preserve anonymisation.

The interview guides were designed for each group, reflecting the different levels of analysis and scope of the interviews (see Appendix B – Interview Guides). The guides were organised into "interview blocks" representing key themes to be covered. As semi-structured interviews, the guides contained predetermined questions, but discussions occurred spontaneously and did not necessarily follow the proposed order. Consequently, the depth dedicated to each block and question varied among respondents, with some demonstrating greater expertise on certain topics and others more willing to share their perspectives on different themes. Nevertheless, all interviews addressed the core topics, and the variation in depth contributed to a balanced and comprehensive set of final results.

The sessions began with a brief introduction of my background and experience within the structural change projects community, aimed at establishing that I am both interested in an academic analysis of GEPs and aware of their practical realities. This was followed by demographic questions to confirm the respondents' backgrounds, locations, and the roles they had assumed in structural change projects. Following an FCF approach, I also emphasised my interest in both their professional and personal experiences as change agents and endeavoured to create an interview environment conducive to reflection and mutual exchange.

Consistent with a feminist research approach, I intentionally avoided conducting the interviews in a unilateral manner where I merely requested information, and the participants provided answers. My aim was to eschew the traditionally hierarchical dynamics often present in conventional interviewing methods (Fontana & Frey, 2000). In this specific research, the typical hierarchical interview dynamics were less pronounced. The participants, primarily senior academics and experts in the study's subject, were more accustomed to academic practices such as interviews than I was as a junior researcher. By adopting a relational approach where "the researcher and participant form a relationship as two knowing subjects, as collaborative partners who share an understanding and try to minimise disparities of power" (Okkonen et al., 2021, p. 381), I was able to establish a professional and personal rapport with the participants.

Table 9. Details of semi-structured interviews

Respondent	Group of respondents	Interview date	Format	Gender	Role	Experience level in change initiatives[23]
I1_GR	GR	04/01/2022	Online	Female	Full Professor	Expert
I2_GR	GR	04/01/2022	Online	Female	Associate Professor	Experienced practitioner
I3_GR	GR	13/01/2022	Online	Female	Full Professor	Active participant
I4_GR	GR	13/04/2022	Online	Female	Full Professor	Active participant
I5_GR	GR	13/04/2022	Online	Female	Associate Professor	Expert
I6_GR	GR	27/01/2022	Online	Female	Full Professor	Expert
I7_GR	GR	31/01/2022	Online	Female	Associate Professor	Active participant
I8_GR	GR	14/01/2022	Online	Female	R&D Analyst	Active participant
I9_SP	GR / SP *	23/05/2022	Online	Female	Full Professor	Experienced practitioner
I10_SP	GR / SP *	23/06/2022	In-person	Female	Research Director and Senior Consultant	Expert

[23] **Beginner:** Little to no prior experience in GE change initiatives. Their involvement is often limited to introductory roles or one-off activities. **Occasional Contributor:** Involved in GE initiatives intermittently, typically in supporting roles, without sustained or regular engagement. **Active Participant:** Regular engagement in GE-related initiatives, contributing to both planning and implementation processes in a consistent manner. **Experienced Practitioner:** Significant, sustained experience in GE initiatives, often taking responsibility for specific activities, projects, or leadership within the field. **Expert:** Extensive experience, typically in leadership or decision-making roles, who design, implement, or evaluate major GE programmes or policies in various settings.

I11_SP	SP	14/07/2022	In-person	Female	Senior Researcher and Project Manager	Expert
I12_SP	SP	15/09/2022	Online	Female	Associate Professor	Expert
I13_SP	SP	28/06/2022	Online	Female	Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator	Active participant
I14_SP	SP	29/06/2022	Online	Female	Full Professor	Active participant
I15_SP	SP	06/07/2022	Online	Female	Project Manager	Active participant
I16_SP	SP	28/06/2022	Online	Female	Director EDI and Associate Professor	Expert
I17_SP	SP	01/09/2022	Online	Female	Senior Researcher and Project Manager	Expert
I18_SP	SP	01/06/2022	Online	Female	Senior Researcher	Expert
I19_SP	SP	08/06/2022	Online	Female	Principal Research Associate and Associate Professor	Experienced practitioner
I20_SP	SP	14/06/2022	Online	Female	Senior Researcher	Experienced practitioner
I21_SP	SP	07/06/2022	Online	Female	Senior Researcher	Expert
I22_SP	SP	04/06/2022	Online	Male	Senior Researcher	Expert
I23_SP	SP	08/06/2022	Online	Female	Senior Researcher	Experienced practitioner

I24_SP	SP	23/06/2022	Online	Female	Senior Researcher	Expert

Note: Self-elaborated. * GR: GEARING-Roles; SP: sister project; * I9_SP and I10_SP were interviewed both as members of GEARING-Roles and as change agents with extensive experience in other sister projects. To maintain consistency, their acronyms will remain "SP" throughout the thesis.

Overall, the interviews were characterised by a positive and friendly atmosphere, with respondents demonstrating trust and empathy towards me as a junior feminist researcher with practical experience in implementing GE projects. Several participants shared that the interview sessions provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their own institutional activism and the change initiatives they were leading. Many respondents expressed gratitude for having a space where they could share their experiences as women, feminists, and professionals striving to promote change, often while feeling marginalised and misunderstood. This exemplified how feminist research, though it may not result in immediate societal transformation, can still empower participants by valuing and legitimising their experiences (Maynard, 1994).

All interviews were transcribed, and any translations from their original language to English for use as direct quotations in this thesis were self-translated.

2.3 DATA ANALYSIS

The objective of data analysis in empirical research is to extract the essence of raw data by identifying patterns and themes, and to make sense out of it as a means to provide answers to the research questions. The structure of analytical processes can vary significantly depending on the approach and methodology adopted in a research project. In this work, the analytical process unfolds in two primary cycles/phases: the descriptive and the conceptual (Friese, 2014). The descriptive cycle represents the first analytical phase and is aimed at immersing in the data to form a first general sense of the information and identify relevant patterns and themes. The conceptual cycle, in turn, constitutes the second analytical phase and intends to look at the information collected from different angles and critically analyse the data to recognise new patterns and relationships between themes, with the aim of addressing the research questions (Friese, 2014).

Both cycles of analysis involved a crucial step: coding the data. Technically speaking, in qualitative research, a code "is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3), such as interview transcripts and field notes. The coding process enables the systematic transformation of raw data into descriptive units that accurately capture the relevant features of the content under analysis (Saldaña, 2013). By coding, it was possible to assign analytical categories to words, sentences, or paragraphs derived from the documents, observation notes, and interview transcripts, labelling them under themes and concepts (descriptive analysis). Coded

fragments were then retrieved and explored to build conceptual models that linked the themes and analytical categories identified in the data (conceptual analysis), forming the foundations for an interpretative analysis (Friese, 2014).

This process was supported by the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) ATLAS.ti. This type of software is useful in documenting the analysis trail, explicitly illustrating the sorting, comparing, and coding process, and providing direct access to the original data (Friese, 2014; Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013). This contributed to the analysis in terms of time, accuracy, verifiability, and replicability.

In the following subsections, I first provide a brief introduction to the ATLAS.ti functions used in this thesis, and explore each analytical cycle and the coding process in more detail.

2.3.1 Qualitative analysis through computer-aided software

Computer-aided software function is an effective organisational and visualisation tool for qualitative analysis, making it easier to manage large amounts of data consistently. They help identify and organise themes and patterns in the data that may not be immediately apparent through manual analysis and facilitate the analysis and interpretation of the information by enabling the deconstruction and reconstruction of data into different meaningful forms that foster new insights (Saldaña, 2013).

However, it is worth noting that such softwares do not define the dimensions and variables for analysis, nor do they interpret the data and perform the analysis themselves. Instead, they serve as support tools for organising and coding data and for combining different search criteria to visualise how different pieces of information interact under various analytical perspectives (Friese, 2014). As with manual analysis, the dimensions and variables are established by the researcher, who feeds the software and structures it according to the purposes of the analysis. Likewise, the researcher codes and interprets the information with the organisational and visualisation support of the distinct analytical functions of the software.

The ATLAS.ti software offers a feature called the “hermeneutic unit”. The unit is a flexible and dynamic analytical framework that works as a workspace, handling all the necessary components for data analysis, including the files containing the data under analysis (e.g., interview transcripts). Within the hermeneutic unit, data can be stored, sorted, coded, and analysed using various functions of the tool. In the main, a full picture

of the unit contains the data files, code folders, codes, sub-codes, memos, quotations, and a range of analysis tools such as co-occurrence tables and word clouds (Friese, 2014).

For this research, the files uploaded to the programme were project reports and deliverables, observation notes, and anonymised versions of interview transcripts. Codes were assigned to portions of text to label and categorise data according to specific themes or topics. The coding process involved using code folders as the macro organising tool, with the folders representing the dimensions of analysis:

Figure 5. Code folders with dimensions of analysis in ATLAS.ti

Note: self-elaborated.

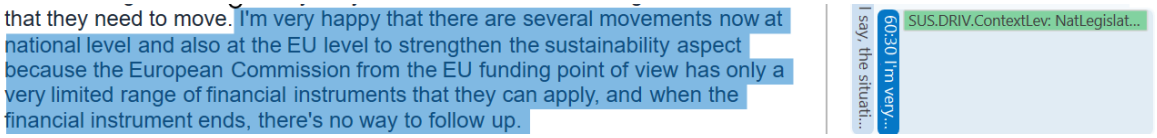
In turn, codes and sub-codes were grouped together into the core folders and used to represent the variables under each dimension:

Figure 6. Examples of codes and sub-codes ATLAS.ti

Note: self-elaborated.

During the coding process, quotations with longer text fragments were used as excerpts from the raw data. These excerpts were identified as particularly relevant or interesting, and they helped in locating and comparing key information throughout the entire dataset.

Figure 7. Example of quotation in ATLAS.ti



Note: self- elaborated.

Finally, the conceptual analysis phase was mainly supported by functions including code frequency tables, co-occurrence matrices, and network diagrams. Those are visualisation functions that enable the exploration and analysis of the data in various ways, helping to identify patterns, trends, and relationships between them. They were used to provide insight into the frequency and co-occurrence of different terms and concepts within the data, and to explore the relationships between different themes and sub-themes, providing a visual representation that aided the analytical process.

2.3.2 Analytical cycles and the coding process

While the descriptive and conceptual cycles were adopted as the primary cycles/phases of the analytical process, it is worth recalling that qualitative data analysis is often not linear, but rather a "recursive process where you move back and forth" (Friese, 2014, p. 17) throughout the process. In practical terms, this means that data analysis consisted of an ongoing and cyclical process of categorising and comparing data, sifting through information, and establishing connections between different pieces of data, in a continuous effort to refine themes, identify new relevant patterns, and make connections between them (Friese, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). Thus, building on the descriptive and conceptual cycles as primary analytical phases, the data analysis in this thesis unfolded in multiple and iterative steps within each of them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In the descriptive cycle, I focused on capturing a first general sense of the data collected and identifying emerging patterns and themes, rather than interpreting or making judgements about it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Friese, 2014). The first step in the data analysis consisted of preparing the data and organising the materials within a structured framework in ATLAS.ti, cataloguing the files and sorting them according to the different sources of data. Next, I familiarised myself with the data to capture a general sense of the information collected. I did so by organising field notes and transcribing the interviews, while taking notes of relevant ideas emerging from the data. This initial overview led me to the next step: the coding process.

During the coding process, data was scrutinised to identify categories, themes, and sub-themes. The coding process relied both on deductive and inductive reasoning (Saldaña, 2013). To begin with, I established a set of deductive categories and codes based on prior literature, notably FI-informed studies and academic works focused on the implementation and evaluation aspects of institutional change initiatives, as well as on my practical experience with the structural change projects community. These codes served to harmonise the analytical process with the conceptual framework and were a starting point to further develop the coding scheme.

Building on the established list of deductive codes, I conducted a pilot coding round to generate a first set of inductive codes. For this pilot round, I selected six interviews that contained key and detailed information on various themes under analysis. Thereafter, I coded and re-coded the entire sample of interview transcripts and observation notes in multiple cycles until achieving complete refinement, ensuring consistency in the coded material and eliminating redundancy or overlapping in the coding scheme (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2013). To ensure a high-quality set of data codes, the final list of codes was identified through meticulous line-by-line analysis. The definitions of each code were carefully considered to maintain a single, clear meaning across different parts of the data and avoid "definitional drift" (Glesne, 2016, p. 198), meaning each code maintains a single, clear meaning throughout different parts of the data.

By breaking down the data into categories, it became possible to view it from the perspective of analytical frameworks rather than the original research event. This opened the final stage of conceptual analysis, where I uncovered patters and correlations that emerged from the descriptive analysis to gain insight beyond the surface level of the information. To do so, I used ATLAS.ti analytical functions such as co-occurrence tables and networks as visualisation tools. The ultimate goal was to identify connections between underlying concepts or theories and the collected information, to develop a conceptual framework that helped to explain the data in a meaningful way and address the research questions (Friese, 2014; Saldaña, 2013). The following coding methods or code types were employed:

Table 10. Description of coding methods / code types used in data analysis

Coding method / Code type	Description

Structural coding	Structural coding is typically one of the initial steps of the coding process. Its purpose is to categorise the data corpus and assign an initial set of general codes to it.
Attribute coding	Attribute coding signalises key content information and identifies demographic features of research participants for future management and reference.
Sub-coding	Sub-coding enables the expansion of attribute coding by providing additional details. It allows for the creation of hierarchical structures in coding and assists in coding intricate and nuanced information.
Evaluation coding	Evaluation coding supports the analysis of how participants judge the merit, significance, pertinence, and utility of particular policies and programmes.
Emotion coding	Emotion coding tags the emotions expressed by the participants about their experiences and/or deducted by the researcher when observing and/or listening to respondents.
Pattern coding	Especially useful in the conceptual cycle of analysis, pattern coding supports the attribution of meaning to identified patterns and relations between codes. It serves as a catalyst to interpret and discuss the data in contrast to the conceptual framework. It is usually assisted by CAQDAS analytical functions such as co-occurrence tables and network schemes.

Note: self- elaborated, based on Saldaña, 2013, pp. 69-71, 209-212.

The analysis concluded with the interpretation and synthesis of the data into a narrative. Here, different theoretical frameworks oriented critical analysis of the information and yielded the identification of relationships between themes and conceptual frameworks, providing insights into the research questions. The analysis was guided by a two-pronged approach, as it was neither based solely on field information nor rigidly bound to pre-existing theories. Instead, access to theory informed the interpretation of information derived from the field work, while various theories were considered throughout the research process and the most appropriated as an explanatory framework to the data were selected.

3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical concerns in research have traditionally focused on issues such as accurately informing participants about the study, obtaining their agreement to participate, protecting their privacy, and preventing them from any harm (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p.

662). In this thesis, an ethical perspective spans the entire research process, from formulating research questions and objectives to collecting and analysing data, using language, and disseminating research findings. More precisely, I align this approach with an ethic of care model that "draws close attention to such matters as exploitation of subjects, integrity of representation of subjects' views and experiences, and openness about research aims that has mutuality inherent within the process" (Watts, 2006, p. 387).

This transversal ethical perspective is closely intertwined with the feminist approach adopted in this study and the principles that underpin it. Feminist research places special emphasis on generating knowledge with the aim of advancing social justice by exploring the ways in which gender impacts social and political systems and how these systems, in turn, impact individuals and society at large (Ackerly & True, 2008; Collins, 1986; Harding, 1987; hooks, 1984; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Thus, in a feminist ethical framework, the research process must respond to ethical considerations that go beyond academic responsibility, in that methods and practices must align with the research outcomes that are aimed at promoting liberation and transformation. In practice, this entails intentional and persistent engagement in self- reflection on the part of the researcher throughout the research process.

In the following paragraphs, I discuss the ethical considerations involved in the development of this work. I start by addressing the ethical implications resulting from my position of proximity to the case study project, GEARING-Roles, and the adoption of an FCF approach. I conclude by discussing how an ethical standpoint was maintained during the phases of data collection and analysis.

3.1 PROXIMITY IN RESEARCH

As previously discussed in this chapter, my proximity to the research setting in the case study project provided significant benefits in terms of access to information and participants, fostering trust among feminist insiders, and facilitating collaboration throughout the process. This proximity enabled me to employ FCF as an underlying research approach to this study. Nevertheless, I also acknowledge that this close relationship can bring ethical implications, particularly potential bias and breaches of confidentiality. Indeed, Chappell and Mackay (2020, p. 8) stress that adopting an FCF approach calls us to account for "our responsibilities as researchers to these insiders; the benefits and the limits of our investigations; the tools available and best suited for

undertaking this research; and the need to understand the boundaries between where academic outsiders and insiders reside" (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 8).

In line with a feminist approach, which provides that the basis for academic rigour is achieved by explicitly stating the researcher situatedness to the object and subjects of study, I disclose my relationship with GEARING-Roles to ensure the findings of this this can be evaluated for soundness and reliability (Maynard, 1994; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). By situating myself as part of the studied community, I incorporate my personal experiences with those of my research participants, while maintaining critical objectivity (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) claim, "feminists can aim to be reasonable without claiming that reason either requires or produces detachment" (p. 54). Acknowledging my position allows me to analyse the data through well-established lens, presenting "material objectively while guided by an explicit perspective" (O'Leary, 1977, cited in Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 262).

The first ethical challenge that may be provoked by proximity relates to the *collection and treatment of data*. It is common ground that adhering to informed consent principles is fundamental in research. In my dual capacity as a doctoral researcher and active project member, I maintained vigilance in distinguishing these roles, especially when participating in internal meetings where sensitive information was exchanged. On such occasions, emphasising my identity as a researcher employing observation techniques, distinct from my role as a team member, was pivotal. It not only ensured I obtained the necessary authorisation but also ensured a respectful and caring approach towards any refusals or limitations in participation (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Hayward & Cassell, 2018). Precisely, for internal project events, a project-level informed consent was obtained once by all members of the case-study project, authorising the use of data for research purposes. Additionally, for more sensitive settings, such as one-to-one meetings between the support technical partner and GEP teams aimed at discussing specific challenging situations, I secured additional consent from participants before conducting observations. Whenever an event involved participants external to the project consortium, specific consent was also collected (refer to Campanini, 2024).

In addition to data-related concerns, proximity can pose challenges in terms of *critical analysis*. Chappell and Mackay (2020) alert that "having gained access to and built-up trust with feminist insiders, [feminist critical friends] are likely to develop a sense of loyalty to them and may feel guarded about the presentation of difficult findings" (p. 13). To conduct research from a close position, it is necessary to maintain a "critical distance"

(Hayward & Cassell, 2018), establishing a partial separation between the researcher and the research subjects, thereby safeguarding the subjectivity of social relations while upholding research integrity.

To ensure critical distance in my research practice, I engaged in regular self-reflection and ethical audits, using feminist reflexivity both as a process and a tool (Chilmeran & Hedström, 2021) to assess the impact of my dual role as a researcher and team member. First, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process, which allowed me to document thoughts, feelings, and potential biases, helping me remain aware of how my proximity to the subjects might influence my interpretations (Wallin & Adawi, 2018). Second, I sought peer debriefing and feedback from colleagues who were not involved in the project. These external perspectives provided a valuable counterbalance to my insider insights, helping me to question my assumptions and refine my interpretations based on broader academic standards. Finally, I triangulated my findings. By combining data from interviews and observations with documentary information from official project reports, I was able to cross-verify the results and reduce the risk of bias, ensuring that conclusions were well-supported by multiple lines of evidence (refer to Campanini, 2024).

Furthermore, although proximity might foster shared goals and solidarity, I follow Holvikivi's (2019) suggestion that it does not "signal complete agreement, but rather alliance" (p. 135). As a project member, I deeply understood the practical limitations of gender reform, yet as a researcher, I could not lack a (constructive) critical standpoint. Researching from a critical distance, I contend, opened up the possibility to navigate in between the "hyphen-spaces of insiderness-outsiderness, sameness-difference, engagement-distance, and political activism-active neutrality" (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 364). This ongoing process of self-scrutiny helped maintain the integrity of my research and ensured that I remained accountable to both my academic standards and the feminist principles underlying my work (refer to Campanini, 2024).

Finally, in cases of proximity, "the research relationship may become more exploitative because, given the enduring nature of the relationship, the researched may feel personally obliged to the researcher" (Holvikivi, 2019, p. 136). Holvikivi (2019) advises distinguishing "friendliness" from "friendship" and stresses the importance of maintaining clear boundaries. While my close relationship with the project initially raised concerns about potentially pressuring feminist insiders to participate more extensively in my study than they might have desired, there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case. First, my association with the case study project did not extend beyond professional

terms with the feminist insiders I studied. In other words, personal aspects of 'friendship' did not influence our research interactions, although an atmosphere of 'friendliness' was present throughout. Additionally, as the participants in my study were mostly senior academics, they possessed greater familiarity with academic dynamics than I did. Although these factors do not preclude the operation of power in such relationships, my experience as a junior researcher conducting research on senior academics revealed that power dynamics might manifest differently in these circumstances, occasionally occurring "the other way around", that is, with hierarchical dynamics operating from participants to the researcher (refer to Campanini, 2024).

Finally, to ensure the anonymity of research participants, no links are made between respondent codes and project names, and the names of specific institutions and programmes and censured and decontextualised in the presentation of findings (Watts, 2006). For this, a continuous self-reflection process has been necessary and allowed me to recognise and accept the limitations of my results in the name of research ethics (Ackerly & True, 2008; Blakely, 2007).

3.2 DATA TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and standards, having received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Deusto (see Appendix C). This involved obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring their right to privacy and confidentiality, and minimising any harm or distress caused by the research.

All respondents received a research information sheet and an informed consent form a few days prior to the interview sessions. Two different informed consent forms were used. For respondents interviewed based on their participation in GEARING-Roles, their consent was covered under an informed consent form designed at the project consortium level (Appendix D). In these cases, I informed participants about the study's objectives and the aim of the interview when requesting their participation. For those interviewed regarding their experiences in both GEARING-Roles and other structural change projects, or solely in other structural change projects, a separate informed consent form was created specifically for this thesis (refer to Appendix E).

Before conducting the interviews, I provided the interview guide to respondents who specifically requested it, in order to prepare the session in advance. At the beginning of each session, I briefly reminded participants of the research objectives and the aim of the

interview, providing space for them to request any clarifications. It was also reinforced that confidentiality would be maintained in the entire process, and that they could withdraw their participation at any point without facing any consequences. All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the respondents, either through a videocall recording tool or a voice recorder. The interviews were then transcribed and anonymised. All video and audio files, as well as transcript records, were stored on an institutional computer with restricted access to entering a username and password. Only the author of this thesis, the supervisor and the co-supervisor had access to it.

The transcripts were sent to respondents upon their specific request. Only two participants included minor amendments to the transcripts, including corrections to programme and department names. Moreover, respondents who asked to be informed when directly quoted in the discussions were notified of their respective citations prior to the submission of this thesis.

With regard to participant observations, consent was also obtained through the informed consent form elaborated by the GEARING-Roles project consortium. In training sessions or meetings where sensitive and/or other confidential information were more likely to be shared, specific consent was obtained through e-mail with the event organiser prior to it, and participants were precisely informed about my presence as an observer to those events. Only one participant in one event did not consent to be observed for the purposes of research. As with interviews, the identity of event participants was not disclosed throughout the discussions of this work. As many of the interviewees were also participants in the observed events, any citations deriving from the observations are not linked to the interview respondent codes.

CHAPTER 4. GEARING-ROLES: PROJECT OVERVIEW AND GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

This chapter presents the case study project, GEARING-Roles, and is organised into four sections. The first section provides an overview of the project framework, delineating its general and specific objectives, consortium partners, and implementation structure. Here, I contextualise GEARING-Roles within the broader landscape of European projects designed to implement GEPs in academic organisations. By outlining the general overview of the project, I highlight the aspects most relevant to this thesis, particularly the activities directly related to GEP implementation.

The second section focuses on the GEPs developed under GEARING-Roles. I describe the shared approach devised for all GEPIs at the consortium level. In the third section, I narrow the focus to provide an overview of each of the six GEPs in question. Drawing on project reports and broader studies focusing on the specific national contexts of the GEP-implementing institutions, I offer a contextualised description of each GEP, exploring their distinct structural and content-related features. This characterisation will inform further analyses of the observed change processes.

Finally, I summarise the information on the national and institutional contexts in tabular format, with special attention to the state-of-play of each GEP-implementing organisation in relation to gender-related initiatives at the project's inception.

1. GEARING-ROLES: CONTEXT, OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

GEARING-Roles was funded under the Science with and for Society (H2020-SwafS-2018-2020 – Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans) call. As a Coordination and Support Actions project, GEARING-Roles leaned more towards an implementation initiative than a research-oriented one. Still, as with other sister projects (see Dahmen-Adkins et al., 2019), its methodology aligned with an action-research approach. Researchers leading project activities often combined research endeavours with practical actions, working collaboratively with institutional stakeholders to identify GE-related issues in their organisations, propose solutions, implement interventions, and evaluate their impact.

It is worth noting that the first GEP-implementing projects initiated in January 2011.[24] Hence, when GEARING-Roles was implemented, it could already benefit from the extensive knowledge generated by 21 preceding projects. Alongside the numerous established practices and guidelines forged by predecessor sister projects[25], the European Commission also provided lines of action by the time GEARING-Roles initiated its operations. Notably, the first edition of the GEAR tool, published in 2016, was already available and mandatorily used by EU-funded projects implementing GEPs (EIGE, 2016). Thus, rather than "reinventing the wheel", GEARING-Roles aimed to refine and contribute to the improvement of the existing framework.

This accumulated wealth of previous experiences, along with the already well-established European policy framework, provided a robust foundation upon which the project activities were strategically structured and executed. Nonetheless, this optimal scenario, the implementation of GEARING-Roles and GEP-related activities encountered its own (anticipated and unforeseen) challenges, including the rise of anti-gender movements in Europe and the unpredictable emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These will be considered in subsequent discussions.

In terms of objective, GEARING-Roles aimed at designing, implementing, and monitoring evaluating six GEPs in European academic institutions – five RPOs and one RFO – located in six different countries. Spanning four years (2019-2022), it brought together a multidisciplinary consortium of ten European academic and non-academic partners with the primary objective of "promoting structural change in the 6 GEP implementing institutions, questioning and transforming gender roles at the micro, meso, and macro levels" (GEARING-Roles, n.d.-b).

In addition to this overarching goal, GEARING-Roles pursued four specific objectives under dedicated Work Packages (WPs), as illustrated in the figure below. The first objective focused on enhancing female career progression and included activities such as creating a mentorship program (GEARING-Roles, n.d.-a) and developing tools and methodologies to ensure transparency in selection and promotion processes (GEARING-Roles, 2020). The second objective targeted gender-based disparities in leadership and

[24] For the complete list of GEP-implementing projects, refer to Appendix A.

[25] To cite a few: the FESTA handbook on resistance (FESTA, 2016); the GENOVATE guidelines for evaluating GEPs (Espinosa-Fajardo et al., 2016); the EGERA recommendations on preventing and fighting sexual harassment (Voorspoels & Meier, 2016).

decision-making roles. The third objective centred on education and research, comprising initiatives like creating a handbook for a gender-sensitive curriculum (Kitchener & Humbert, 2022). The fourth objective aimed to promote GE in research organizations and engage key stakeholders to reinforce the European Research Area (ERA). This included diverse activities targeting the academic community and beyond, such as launching the Nobel Run board game on women in scientific careers (GEARING-Roles, n.d.-c) and Twitter campaigns addressing current gender inequality challenges in science (Campanini et al., 2020, 2021).

At the consortium level, GEARING-Roles operated under nine Work Packages (WPs). While all WPs were relevant to the development of the GEPs, this thesis focuses on activities and associated documents within WP2, WP3, WP7, and WP9, as these relate directly to the processes of planning, setting up, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the GEPs.

Figure 8. GEARING-Roles: Work packages

Note: Adapted from GEARING-Roles (n.d.-b).

At the institutional level of GEP-implementing institutions, the teams operated within Task Forces. These groups comprised institutional actors who supported and contributed to the implementation of the GEPs, serving as the principal change agents driving transformative initiatives within each institution. These included internal allies across different institutional structures, including top and middle management units, human resource departments, academic and administrative staff, and students. The responsibilities undertaken by the Task Forces included:

> i) provide training and awareness-raising activities for academics, students and professional services staff; ii) organise events and workshops that highlight the relevance of embedding gender in research; iii) ensure that the gender issue is advocated and supported by senior managers; iv) identify, challenge and overcome any formal and informal resistances which may arise during implementation of the project objectives; v) promote participation and

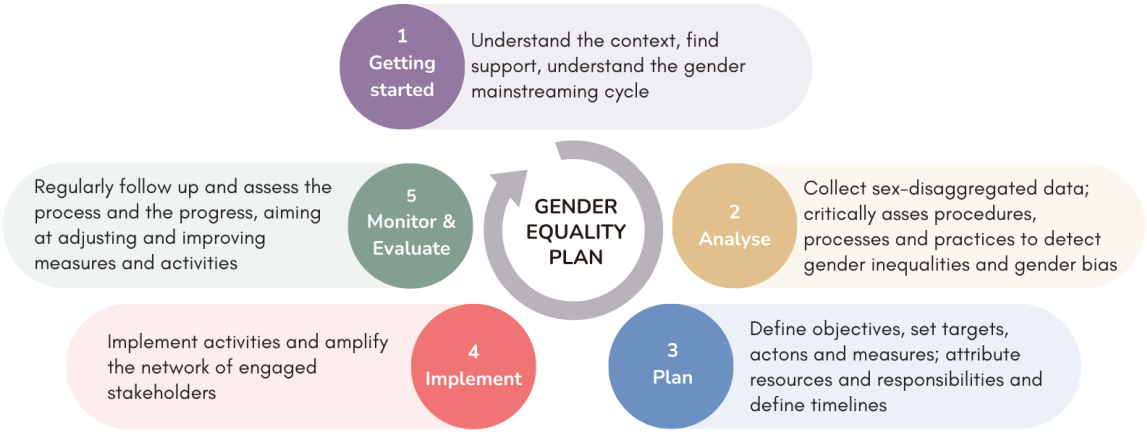
> engagement in an organisational auto-diagnostic gender audits and data analysis; vi) provide technical support and consultations for academic staff and grant applicants to include a gender perspective (GEARING-Roles, n.d.-d)

Task Forces were broadly composed of two main groups. The "core group" (hereafter referred to as the GEP team) consisted of members directly engaged in project activities as outlined in the Grant Agreement with the European Commission. The "extended group" was formed by institutional stakeholders who supported and contributed to the GEP processes at the institutional level. While the GEP teams were responsible for coordinating and operationalising all GEP cycles, including negotiations with institutional leadership, the extended groups played roles based on their expertise or scope of influence. This typically aimed to broaden institutional coverage and engagement.

2. GEARING-ROLES: METHODOLOGY FOR GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

In earlier discussions in this thesis, we have seen a baseline depiction of the current European policy framework for promoting institutional change in R&I (see Figure 3). Within this picture, which represents the current version of the GEAR tool (EIGE, 2022), GEPs are structured into six steps (getting started, institutional diagnosis, setting up the GEP, implementing GEP actions, monitoring and evaluation, and sustainability of change). It is worth noting that this updated version was not yet available during the design phase of GEARING-Roles GEPs in 2019. Hence, GEP-implementing partners followed the methodology of the 2016 edition of the GEAR tool, which outlined the following:

Figure 9. GEP steps, according to the 2016 edition of the GEAR tool



Note: self-authored, based on EIGE (2016).

Based on this model, the GEARING-Roles partners defined a common process to be followed in the development of the six GEPs. At the outset of the project (early 2019), a first (macro-level) analysis led by WP3 was undertaken to understand the context in which the GEPs would be implemented. This involved identifying factors such as national legal frameworks, experiences promoting GE initiatives in academia by other institutions in the different national contexts, and relevant cultural considerations.

Following this, Task Forces conducted a meso-level analysis of the GE situation in the GEP-implementing institutions. Through Participatory Gender Audits[26], they developed detailed organisational baseline gender analyses, incorporating quantitative and qualitative data to gain insights, for example, into the state-of-play of GE in institutional policies for talent attraction, promotion and retention, as well as policies related to research and education (curricula, contents, etc.) in the participating institutions. Finally, micro-level analyses were undertaken to analyse the values, attitudes, and behaviours of the organisational communities in relation to gender roles, particularly centring on leaders and decision-makers.

After completing the institutional assessments, GEP teams identified the needs of their respective institutions and started the design of the documents. Objectives and targets were defined, concrete actions were devised, and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) and SPICED (Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted and communicable, Cross-checked and compared, Empowering, Diverse and aggregated) indicators were set (Gaber et al., 2019b). It is worth noting that, while the original plan envisioned conducting the planning and design of the GEPs in in-person meetings, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to lockdowns across all institutions. Consequently, GEP teams had to adapt to the new circumstances, meaning that part of the design phase of GEPs was held online, as were the negotiations for the institutional approval of the documents.

Back in the literature, this moment of planning, designing, and approving the GEP represents the planning stage within the broader policy implementation phase (Lombardo et al., 2012). At this point, European policy ideas underwent processes of reinterpretation

[26] Participatory Gender Audits involve a participatory process where institutional stakeholders at all levels engage in evaluating gender-related policies, practices, and the organisational culture. The audit aims to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and develop action plans to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment.

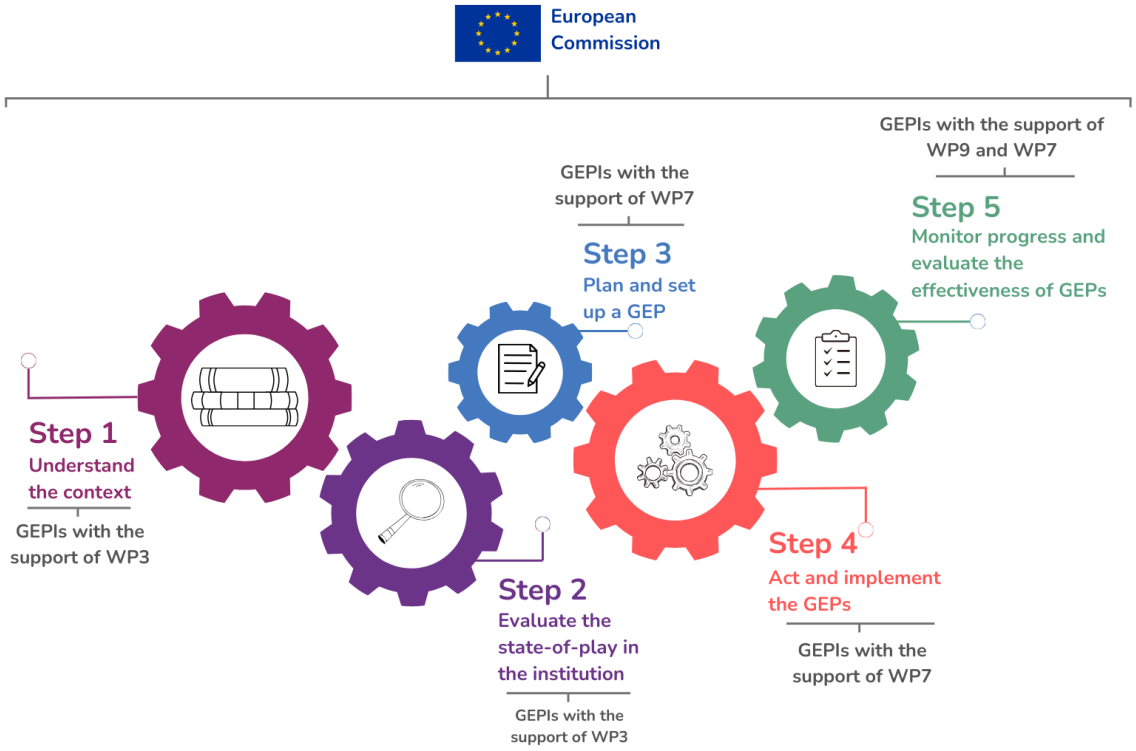
and reframing for practical application in the concrete organisations. A crucial and demanding phase in the GEP cycle, the planning and design phase involves negotiations among diverse institutional stakeholders, each advocating for their respective – sometimes conflicting – feminist knowledge perspectives to define the issue to be addressed and determine the necessary remedies (Albenga, 2016). In a context where power struggles and knowledge conflicts became prominent, the lack of on-campus activities, coupled with the de-prioritisation of GE issues due to other institutional priorities prompted by the COVID-19 crisis, impacted the policy transfer processes in unexpected ways in the different GEARING-Roles's implementing institutions.

Regarding the execution of actions, it officially commenced after the documents received institutional approvals. This marked the beginning of the actual implementation (operationalisation) phase (Lombardo et al., 2012). Regular monitoring and self-assessment efforts were undertaken by each GEP team the institutional level, through the employment of different strategies that suited their concrete contexts. Additionally, bimonthly GEP teams' meetings were held at the consortium level to follow-up on the progress of each change process. The data originating from monitoring and assessment outcomes were documented and reported to the external evaluator partner (WP9), as well to the European Commission, throughout the entire process.

External evaluation activities, led by the WP9 team, were also held on an ongoing basis. Evaluators tracked the processes of GEPs and collected data through participant observation of project meetings and other events, as well as through interviews with representatives of the GEP teams. Impact assessment and evaluation reports were developed under WP9 in three different moments during the four-year project duration: the first evaluated the planning and design of the GEPs (Roos et al., 2020a), the second discussed the approval and implementation of GEPs (Bleijenbergh et al., 2021), and the third centred on the implementation of GEPs (Bleijenbergh et al., 2022). These were followed by a final impact evaluation which comprehended the entire process (Roos et al., 2022).

A general representation of the GEP processes within GEARING-Roles can be articulated as follows:

Figure 10. GEARING-Roles: GEP planning, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation structure



Note: Adapted from López (2019).

It is noteworthy that GEPIs received substantial backing from the WP7 (training and capacity building) and WP9 (external evaluation) teams, led by experienced professionals in GEPs and institutional change in R&I under the framework of European projects. The WP7 team delivered comprehensive training for GEP teams on the utilisation of participatory and co-creation techniques for identifying gender inequalities and gender bias in institutional settings, on how to design a GEP, on strategies for dealing with resistance throughout change process, and on strategies for effectively negotiating with institutional leadership. Moreover, institutional stakeholders who were not part of the principal working group for GEP implementation, such as leaders and managers of implementing institutions, were also involved in training sessions. Such an expert support structure exemplifies an optimal scenario for GEP implementation, highlighting the presence of an essential condition for successful change initiatives: expertise and capacity-building, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

3. THE SIX GENDER EQUALITY PLANS: CONTEXT, STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Transitioning to the exploration of the six GEARING-Roles GEPs, this section offers a more focused insight into the content-related features of each plan, their specific structures, and the contextual nuances of implementing institutions.

As earlier mentioned, the first step undertaken by GEPIs was to conduct an institutional analysis to assess the status of each organisation concerning gender issues. An analysis conducted by WP3 leaders of the institutional self-assessments revealed common challenges identified across the GEPIs (Gaber et al., 2019b, pp. 8-9):

i) Limited scope of sex-disaggregated databases, when they existed;
ii) Underrepresentation of women among both academic staff and students in certain disciplines (mostly STEM), coupled with their overrepresentation in other areas (such as administrative staff and social science departments);
iii) General scepticism towards affirmative actions like gender quotas;
iv) Predominantly male leadership and decision-making bodies;
v) Existence of horizontal gender pay gaps;
vi) Cultural challenges related to work-like balance, strongly affected by informal beliefs rooted in broader gendered social norms;
vii) Gender-biased recruitment and progression criteria, with a prevalence adherence to traditional notions of merit and excellence;
viii) Limited access to formal mentorship/sponsorship for women researchers at the early stages of their careers;
ix) Early-stage development of gender-sensitive curricula and research;
x) Limited awareness about gender stereotypes, discrimination, and sexual harassment;
xi) Lack of policies addressing equality for LGBTIQ+ communities.

Considering such common concerns, and drawing from the GEAR tool (EIGE, 2016) and the SUPERA guidelines for data-collection and reporting (Krizsan & Lopez, 2018), WP3 leaders recommended GEP teams to build actions clustered in four main areas (Gaber et al., 2019b, p. 10):

i) Tackling gender biases in recruitment, retention, career progression, and work-life balance;
ii) Addressing gender inequalities in leadership and decision-making;

iii) Introducing the gender dimension into research and knowledge transfer;

iv) Combatting gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

Drawing from these common strategic pillars and combining them with context-specific information, each GEP was individually tailored to meet the unique contexts, needs and capacities of the implementing institutions. As elaborated in the subsequent subsections, the scope of the GEPs varied among the implementing institutions. Some were implemented at the institutional level, while other at the faculty/department level. Additionally, the implementing organisations differed in terms of their nature (RPO/RFO), size, mode of governance, disciplinary field, and the extent or their prior experience in instituting GE initiatives. Variations were also observed in the approaches and strategies employed by each GEP team to operationalise the interventions at the institutional level.

This said, the following subsections provide an overview of the six GEP cases. These descriptions do not aim to explore exhaustively all the activities undertaken within each GEP but present a contextualised summary of each of them, laying the foundation for further discussions on the different change processes. At this point, it is important to note that while some descriptions reflect the data generated in the organisational baseline gender analyses of GEP-implementing institutions, some of these documents are not publicly available due to institutional ethical agreements. The data disclosed in the subsections below adheres to these ethical considerations, showcasing only public information.

3.1 GENDER EQUALITY PLAN: INSTITUTION 1

Institution 1, situated in Northern Spain, is a private university grounded in Jesuit traditions with a strong emphasis on teaching. It operates within a context where the national regulatory framework on GE in HE and R&I is comprehensive, and GE initiatives, including GEPs, are widely implemented across academic institutions.

The regulatory framework for GE in the academic sector in Spain is a shared responsibility between the Spanish State and the Autonomous Regions. At the national level, the primary legal framework guiding these efforts is the Organic Law for Effective Equality between Women and Men (3/2007). This law mandates GEPs for institutions with over 50 employees, enforcing equal salary rights, work-life balance, and non-transferable childbirth leave for both parents. GEPs are regulated under Real Decree 901/2020, which stipulates a detailed institutional gender diagnosis, sets deadlines, and

describes the procedure for negotiation, approval, and public registration of GEPs. Complementing this, Real Decree 902/2020 addresses equal pay, introducing mechanisms to identify and correct gender-based discrimination in remuneration.

Looking specifically at the R&I sector, Law 4/2007 on Universities makes GEP mandates more explicit for both public and private universities and research organisations, and mandates the establishment of Equality Units at HEIs. Furthermore, Law 17/2022 on Science, Technology and Innovation Law (modifying Law 14/2011) emphasises the integration of a gender and intersectional perspective in the content and evaluation processes of R&I projects.

At the Basque regional level, where Institution 1 is situated, Law 4/2005 on Equality between Women and Men extends the obligation to promote equality and implement GEPs to regional and local public administrations. Within the university sector, Law 3/2005 on the Basque University System addresses the need to promote education and research concerning GE. This is reflected in specific teaching initiatives, the inclusion of the gender perspective in research projects, and initiatives fostering equal treatment in recruitment and promotion.

As a result of this regulatory framework, by 2022, 94% of public universities and 73.1% of private universities in Spain had adopted GEPs (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación, 2023). In the Basque region, this figure reaches 100%. Despite this positive picture, recent studies have highlighted the limited impact of these GEPs in achieving substantial changes in practice (Bustelo, 2023). Recent studies contend that national legislation addressing gender inequality in Spanish academia still predominantly adopt a "fix the women" approach, framing gender inequality primarily as a women's issue. In this context, GEPs and associated initiatives are implemented amidst a prevailing discourse that emphasises a formal interpretation of equality, where traditional "universal" notions of meritocracy and excellence continue to wield influence (Tildesley et al., 2023). Progress has been hindered by economic crises, which have been used as a rationale for insufficiently allocating funds for policy implementation, and by the rise of far-right ideologies in regional and local governments, marked by an anti-gender discourse (Caprile et al., 2023). Furthermore, there seems to be an inadequacy in the knowledge base for effectively monitoring, sustaining, and deepening change within Spanish institutions (Caprile et al., 2023).

For example, data indicates that, as of 2017, women constituted 40.5% among researchers in Spain, yet they were underrepresented in STEM fields and hold

disproportionately more precarious contracts than their male counterparts.[27] Moreover, women accounted for only 23.9% of Grade A professors and 18% of heads of HEIs (European Commission, 2021b). Administrative staff predominantly comprises women, and even when occupying academic roles, women disproportionately shoulder more administrative responsibilities than their male colleagues, including tasks labelled as "academic household" (e.g., student support and project management) (Romero et al., 2024).

Looking specifically at Institution 1 and its history with gender-related initiatives, it is pertinent to note that its Jesuit traditions and adherence to Ignatian principles position social justice at the core of the organisational mission. The GEARING-Roles GEP marked the third edition of the GEP at Institution 1. Although the institution adopted its first GEP in 2008, prior to its participation in GEARING-Roles, GE activities were limited in scope. For example, the previous GEPs addressed only matters related to working conditions, neglecting other fundamental university functions such as teaching and research, as well as important groups like the student community.

In terms of structures, at the inception of GEARING-Roles's GEP, three main bodies were dedicated to GE at Institution 1: i) the Equality Unit, responsible for the operationalisation of GE initiatives, including the GEP; ii) the Joint Commission for Equality, comprising representatives from management and other staff who participate in institutional negotiations for the adoption of gender-related initiatives; and iii) the Interdisciplinary Research Platform on Gender, which brings together experts from diverse fields of knowledge to collaborate in academic efforts addressing gender-related issues.

During the planning stage of this third GEP, Institution 1 had only 18,18% of women in the Board of Governors and 26,08% in the Board of Directors. Notably, the position of rector has never been held by a woman, a trend that can be linked to the enduring influence of the Jesuit culture within the organisation. Despite there is no longer a formal obligation for Jesuit leaders (thus necessarily male) to assume this role, a substantial shift in this direction has not yet materialised. When it comes to the composition of academic staff, gender disparities also emerged, with variations across different faculties: women were underrepresented in the Business School, Engineering, Law, and Theology, while being

[27] According to the 2021 She Figures report, "'precarious' means those with no contracts, with fixed-term contracts of up to one year, or with other contracts often associated with student status" (p. 149).

overrepresented in Social and Human Sciences and Psychology (Bleijenbergh et al., 2022). In the area of research, there were no projects addressing gender-related topics funded through internal institutional channels, and a dearth of training or guidelines for academic staff on integrating the gender perspective into research practices and content was evident. Furthermore, although the university had implemented mechanisms for gathering sex-disaggregated data and established a sexual harassment protocol, these tools were limited in their practical applicability. Finally, affirmative actions were absent, measures for tracking academic careers from a gender perspective, and initiatives promoting work-life balance beyond legal obligations.

Against this background, by evaluating the previous GEP and conducting a participatory institutional assessment, the GEP team identified the main challenges in fostering GE at Institution 1. The first was related to cultural patterns, particularly the prevailing perception of women as primary caregivers, which results in gender-based educational and professional segregation. Moreover, the team recognised resistance to introducing a more inclusive approach in research and teaching, primarily based on traditional ideals of excellence. Gender biases in leadership models were also brought to the forefront, with the observation that those were primarily based on masculine ideals of leadership and meritocracy, largely unacknowledged amongst the institutional community.

Building on these findings, the GEP team developed a comprehensive GEP document, distributed across seven intervention areas (dimensions) and comprising 63 actions, plus the GEP evaluation. These actions were applicable to all university faculties and departments, targeting the entire institutional community. The execution of these actions was achieved through collaborative efforts among multiple institutional departments, as a means to consider diverse perspectives and reach broad engagement.

At the inception of the GEP, Institution 1 comprised six faculties (Law, Psychology and Education, Social and Human Sciences, Engineering, Theology, and the Business School), all of which were covered by the GEP. Throughout this period, structural alterations unfolded at the institution, leading to the reorganisation of the university into seven faculties (Law, Social and Human Sciences, Engineering, Theology, Health Sciences, Education and Sports, and the Business School). As this shift occurred during the final implementation phase of the GEP, the new faculties had limited participation in the process.

Table 11. Overview of Gender Equality Plan: Institution 1

GEP: Institution 1			
Responsible Stakeholders	**Scope of application**	**Institutional Approval**	**Implementation Period**
Human Resources Staff, University's Dean, Vice rector, Administrative Staff, Task Force, University Social Responsibility Unit	Institutional level	June 2020	2020-2022
Dimension			**N. of Actions**
1. Recruitment, selection and promotion			10
2. Gender pay gap			3
3. Work-life balance			6
4. Gender mainstreaming in research and education			20
5. Leadership and decision-making			8
6. Sexual harassment			6
7. Non-sexist communication			9
8. GEP evaluation			1

Note: Self-authored, based on Institution 1's GEP.

3.2 GENDER EQUALITY PLAN: INSTITUTION 2

Institution 2, a public university located in Portugal, operates in a national context that "lags considerably behind other EU27 countries in what concerns gender equality in R&I" (Caprile et al., 2023, p. 26). The last She Figures report indicates that, as of 2018, women represented 43.4% among researchers, but only 27.15% among Grade A positions in the same year, and 27.2% of heads of HEIs in 2019 (European Commission, 2021b).

Studies suggest that gender inequality is often overlooked as a significant problem in Portuguese academic institutions, reflecting a widespread lack of awareness within the academic community about gender-related concerns (Jordão et al., 2020). This situation aligns with the concern raised by Caprile and colleagues (2023) regarding the limited public disclosure of relevant information about GEPs in Portuguese settings, particularly regarding institutional gender diagnoses, which hinders dialogue and the experience sharing. In this context, a prevailing discourse asserts the gender neutrality of universities and upholds universal merit principles (Carvalho & de Lourdes Machado-Taylor, 2017; Peterson et al., 2021). As is the case in Spain, women in Portugal are predominantly

viewed as caregivers, assuming disproportionally more academic household responsibilities than their male colleagues (Lopes & Santos, 2023).

While Portugal has instituted a number of legal measures to promote GE, there is a notable absence of laws specifically addressing these issues in the R&I sector. The mainstreaming of the gender perspective in public policies results from the application, from the late 1990s, of national strategies (currently, the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030). Within this broad framework, strategic axes and guidelines are defined under three National Action Plans which, in turn, set concrete measures for action – the National Action Plan for Equality between Women and Men; the National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence; and the National Action Plan to Combat Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sexual Characteristics. Including the promotion of egalitarian, inclusive and future-oriented scientific and technological development, the Strategy 2018-2030 was the first to address the scientific sector (Council of Ministers, 2023).

When it comes to GEPs, they are obligatory for listed companies but not for private HEIs (ERAC SWG GRI, 2021). The adoption of GEPs in Portuguese academic institutions is a relatively recent development, largely spurred by EU-funded projects (Peterson et al., 2021; Lopes et al., 2024). Similar to the situation in Spain, the existing knowledge for effectively monitoring, sustaining and deepening change is considered insufficient in Portugal (Caprile et al., 2023, p. 28).

In contrast to Institution 1, the ambit of the GEP at Institution 2 was confined to a small institute within the broader scope of a large university. The GEP developed at Institute 2 was the continuation of a process which started in 2016, when a workgroup conducted a gender audit and formulate a Strategy for Gender Equality at the institute. These initial efforts, carried out voluntarily by dedicated individuals, had limited impact due to a lack of institutional recognition and resource allocation. It was thus the participation in the GEARING-Roles project that consolidated Institution 2's commitment to GE and propelled the advancement of tangible initiatives.

The institutional assessment conducted at Institution 2 revealed the underrepresentation of women in academic staff juxtaposed with their overrepresentation in technical and administrative positions. Gender imbalances extended to leadership and management bodies (23,1% in the Scientific Council, 33% in the Pedagogic Council, and 0% in the Management Council). Additionally, women hold disproportionately less

positions of academic coordination (thesis supervision, courses coordination, etc.), with a conspicuous absence of a formal institutional strategy or guidance to address this concern (Roos et al., 2022). Concurrently, at the time of the assessment, no measures promoting work-life balance were in place, sex-disaggregated databases were absent, institutional communications did not follow an inclusive language, and women were underrepresented in institutional communications (Gaber et al., 2019a).

Building on this scenario, the Task Force at Institution 2 formulated a 35-action GEP, distributed across eight intervention areas (dimensions). The document was elaborated through a collaborative process involving academic, technical, and administrative staff, student representatives, and members of governing bodies. Additionally, inputs from a public consultation process were incorporated.

Table 12. Overview of Gender Equality Plan: Institution 2

GEP: Institution 2			
Responsible Stakeholders	**Scope of application**	**Institutional Approval**	**Implementation Period**
Task force, Human Resources Unit, all Administrative levels, Decision-making levels, Coordinators of Teaching Units and Research Projects	Department level	September 2020	2020-2022
Dimension			**N. of Actions**
1. Mission and institutional culture			12
2. Women's leadership and participation within the school's and university's decision-making bodies			1
3. Student recruitment and trajectories			3
4. Recruitment and academic career progression			3
5. Gender in research			7
6. Inclusion of gender perspective within curricula			2
7. Work-personal life balance			5
8. Sexism and sexual harassment			2

Note: self-authored, based on Institution 2's GEP.

3.3 GENDER EQUALITY PLAN: INSTITUTION 3

The third GEP-implementing institution is a faculty specialising in the field of social and human sciences at a public Slovenian university. Within the Slovenian context, the legacy of the Yugoslav socialism has left a distinctive imprint on contemporary welfare state policies. This historical backdrop holds significant relevant when conducting gender analysis in the Slovenian context, as it shapes the current dynamics of employment in the country in varied ways (Perger et al., 2020).

For instance, research indicates that women in Slovenia have traditionally maintained high participation rates in the labour market (Petrović et al., 2018, p. 20). Compared to other European countries, the percentage of women working part-time in the HE and R&I sectors is significantly lower, particularly among women with children (EIGE, 2021). This trend is attributed to the extensive and comprehensive national system of childcare facilities, a legacy of the former regime that was further developed in the post-Yugoslav period in Slovenia (Dobrotić, 2022; Petrović, 2021).

Despite this favourable outlook, a more profound examination reveals persistent gender disparities across various dimensions within the Slovenian academic landscape. Issues such as the gender pay gap, vertical and horizontal gender-based segregation, an uneven share of administrative responsibilities between male and female academics, and conflicts related to work-life balance continue to disproportionately impact women. Women remain predominantly concentrated in fields traditionally associated with "female" areas, such as social and human sciences, while constituting a minority in the upper echelons of institutional and epistemic hierarchy (Petrović, 2021). As of 2017, women accounted for 32.7% of heads of HEIs, and in 2018, they constituted 32.95% of academic staff in Grade A positions (European Commission, 2021b).

At the regulatory level, at the inception of Institution 3's GEP, the Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2015-2020 guided the GE agenda. Amongst its key priorities were promoting economic independence, fostering work-life balance, cultivating a knowledge-based society free from gender stereotypes, advancing social inclusion, promoting health equity for both women and men, advocating for gender balance in decision-making, combating gender-based violence, and fostering GE in foreign policy and international relations. Specifically within the HE and R&I domain, it prioritised increasing women's participation in science, improving their career paths, systematically integrating the gender perspective into research, and addressing concerns surrounding gender disparities in remuneration, awards, and honorary titles.

Additionally, Resolution on the Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia 2011-2020 (currently the Resolution on the Slovenian Scientific Research and Innovation Strategy 2030) provided for the development of an Action Plan for Improving Career Opportunities for Researchers in all career stages and for Ensuring the Gender Equality Principle, yet the plan was never officially adopted (Petrović et al., 2018).

GEPs represent a relatively recent introduction within the Slovenian academic landscape. The Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts was the first academic organisation to implement a fully-fledged GEP in 2019, as part of the H2020 project R&I PEERS ("Pilot experiences for improving gender equality in research organisations"). At the point when Institution 3 formulated its GEP, the Slovenian experience with such plans was still in its early stages, since they gained traction particularly with the advent of Horizon Europe's eligibility criterion.

In the specific case of Institution 3, prior to its participation in GEARING-Roles, gender inequality issues had previously been addressed in an uneven fashion. At the (entire) university level, responding to the call of the Resolution on the Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia 2011-2020, in 2012, the university adopted a Strategy for Career Development of Researchers (2012-2016), where GE was referred to but not explicitly addressed. Given the autonomy granted to the individual faculties to develop their own GE initiatives, the prevalence of gender-related efforts varied across the institution. Notably, at the faculty participating in GEARING-Roles, an initiative promoting the use of gender-inclusive language had been implemented in 2018, which brought about changes in the writing of official documents and contributed to heightened awareness among the institutional community.

While certain initiatives had been undertaken, a comprehensive strategy backed by concrete and varied actions was still lacking at Institution 3. First and foremost, sex-disaggregated databases were significantly limited and data was not interconnected between sectors, posing a challenge for the GEP team in conducting the institutional assessment. Actions aimed at improving recruitment and promotion processes and fostering GE in leadership and decision-making were noticeably lacking, with an evident prevailing discourse based on traditional notions of meritocracy. Additionally, women at Institution 3 reported that, despite the seemingly advantageous national provisions for maternity leave, they faced a significant workload increase upon their return, as there were limited replacements during their absence. In the area of teaching and research, there were no existing policies or practices aimed at incorporating the gender perspective in

curricula and research practices and content. Finally, the development of complaint mechanisms for instances of sexual harassment was in its initial stages, still lacking a comprehensive structure (Gaber et al., 2019a).

Against this backdrop, the GEP at Institution 3 was planned under five intervention areas (dimensions), with a total of 24 actions. The document was developed through collaborative efforts, involving the GEP team, the faculty's Quality Assurance Committee, actors in leadership and decision-making positions, academic staff, and students. For the operationalisation of the GEP, a 45-member team was divided in three working groups, each in charge of different actions: Group 1 was responsible for establishing sex-disaggregated database and mechanisms, and institutional indicators for analysing gender inequalities in the different intervention areas of the GEP; Group 2 implemented actions related to gender in research and curricula; and Group 3 addressed gender biases and stereotypes, sexism and sexual harassment, and gender-sensitive language.

Table 13. Overview of Gender Equality Plan: Institution 3

GEP: Institution 3			
Responsible Stakeholders	**Scope of application**	**Institutional Approval**	**Implementation Period**
Members of the Quality Assurance Committee, academic staff, support staff, and students.	Faculty level	April 2020	2020-2022
Dimension			**N. of Actions**
1. Systematic collection and monitoring of data for all employees and students by gender			4
2. GE in employment, promotions, career opportunities and balancing the work-life relationship			4
3. Gender in research, curricula and the pedagogical process			6
4. Gender-sensitive language use			2
5. Gender stereotypes, gender discrimination and sexual harassment			8
6. GE as part of the faculty's mission			5

Note: self-authored, based on Institution 3's GEP.

3.4 GENDER EQUALITY PLAN: INSTITUTION 4

The fourth GEP-implementing institution was a public university in the UK. In the UK, equality and diversity have long been prominent societal concerns, evident in political commitments and marked by significant formal strides, underpinned by a robust framework of equality provisions in various sectors, including employment and education. Despite these efforts, studies consistently point out a persistent gender pay gap across all sectors, traditional gender roles associated with care responsibilities continue to hinder women's career progression, and despite women's dominance in the education sector, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions (Westoby et al., 2020).

This scenario is also prevalent in the scientific domain. Transformative practices continue to be hindered by the hegemonic ideal of male, white, heterosexual, middle-class academics. Additionally, the persistence of an "old boys" club restricts women's access to networks. Challenges with work-life balance, gender biases in hierarchy and power structures, the lack of an intersectional perspective, and everyday sexism significantly hinder women's advancement in the academic sphere (Westoby et al., 2020).

Statistical data confirms this picture. In 2017, women constituted 38.8% among researchers (European Commission, 2021b), with a notable discrepancy also in the distribution of male and female professors in all fields of specialisation (Westoby et al., 2020). In 2016, women accounted for 26.41% of Grade A positions among academic staff, and their representation as heads of HEIs stood at 24.2% in 2019 (European Commission, 2021b). Additionally, women tend to have more precarious contracts compared to their male counterparts, and the gender salary gap is particularly pronounced in the upper pay brackets (Westoby et al., 2020).

In this context, while there is no legal requirement for HE and research organisations to have GEPs, the UK has been at the forefront of developing certification systems for GE in the sector. Since 2005, Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) has functioned as an equality charter and an accreditation scheme that recognises HE and research organisations for their endeavours in promoting GE in terms of representation, progression, and success, with currently over a thousand awards held. While acknowledging its limitations, studies suggest that Athena SWAN has the potential to foster a conductive environment for concerted action and the widespread of GEP implementation (Bencivenga & Drew, 2021; O'Mullane, 2021; Tzanakou et al., 2021).

Institution 4 has a longstanding history dating back to the 1990s of driving GE initiatives and maintains a well-established engagement with Athena SWAN. The

formulation and implementation of its GEP differed somewhat from those of other project GEPIs, as the document served dual purposes: its participation in GEARING-Roles and the renewal submission for Athena SWAN. This strategy of integrating the GEARING-Roles and Athena SWAN GEPs aimed to avoid redundancy of efforts and facilitate the expansion of existing initiatives by leveraging insights from diverse institutions across Europe.

In terms of structures, prior to its participation in GEARING-Roles, Institution 4 counted with structures like the Race Equality Charter, the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers or the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group, and the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice (in-house expertise). At the time of the institutional assessment, Institution 4 had already an established mechanism for collecting sex-disaggregated and intersectional data. Institutional policies covered all areas (equal pay, recruitment and retention, work-life balance, leadership and decision-making, gender biases and stereotypes, and sexism and sexual harassment), except from research and curricula (Gaber et al., 2019a).

Within this framework, Institution 4 exhibited distinct needs and capacities compared to the other GEPIs. Apart from the creation of measures to incorporate the gender perspective in research and curricula, rather than establishing structures and policies from scratch, the objective at Institution 4 was primarily to refine the existing mechanisms. Like the other GEPIs, the process was collaborative, involving institutional stakeholders from various departments. The resulting document was a 48-action GEP, structured across seven intervention areas (dimensions). The responsibility for implementing actions was shared across the institution, supported by senior leadership and faculty stakeholders.

Table 14. Overview of Gender Equality Plan: Institution 4

GEP: Institution 4			
Responsible Stakeholders	**Scope of application**	**Institutional Approval**	**Implementation Period**
Human Resources, Athena Swan Self-assessment team, Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice, Centre for Staff and Learning Development	Faculty level	December 2020	2020-2023
Dimension			**N. of Actions**

1. Data monitoring and evaluation	4
2. Governance	5
3. Leadership	6
4. Careers and recruitment	16
5. Inclusive research and curriculum	8
6. Work-life balance	3
7. Gender-based violence and harassment	6

Note: self-authored, based on Institution 4's GEP.

3.5 GENDER EQUALITY PLAN: INSTITUTION 5

The fifth institution implementing the GEP in GEARING-Roles is a private university located in Türkiye, comprised by three faculties (Engineering and Natural Sciences, Arts and Social Sciences, and Management Sciences).

Türkiye has faced persistent challenges in achieving GE, reflecting a complex interplay of cultural, social, and political factors. Despite progress in certain areas, issues such as violence against women, workplace disparities, and traditional gender roles continue to be significant concerns. The country's cultural and historical context, rooted in patriarchal views and conservative values, continues to influence gendered societal expectations and norms, and the ongoing shift toward neoliberalist models has played a crucial role in sustaining this intricate scenario (Linková et al., 2021).

While women's participation in Turkish HE and employment rates is notable, they continue to constitute the majority among unemployed tertiary-educated people. In 2018, women represented 37% of researchers and held 30,46% of academic staff positions in Grade A across all fields in HE. Leadership positions in the HE sector also exhibited gender disparities, with women comprising only 28% of heads of institutions in 2019 (EIGE, 2021). Studies emphasise that despite opportunities for women in academia, the reasons behind their access are inherently gendered. This often stems from associating teaching tasks as feminised and considering academic careers as "a 'safe' and 'proper' choice for women" (Sağlamer et al., 2018, p. 36, after Ötzan & Doğan, 2015). When combined with cultural norms assigning domestic and childcare responsibilities to women, the seemingly positive scenario reveals itself to be grounded in gendered assumptions.

Currently, Turkish academic organisations grapple with authoritarian pressures on academics, all while navigating the absence of a national framework incentivising university reforms (Doğan & Selenica, 2022). Amidst a democratic crisis that aligns with potent anti-gender movements, gender studies face continual threats, gender expertise is dismissed, and feminist/LGBTIQ+ groups are continuously attacked. In such a context, gender activism and initiatives aimed at gender-relate transformation in academia face unique challenges influenced by the broader societal and political context (Göker & Polatdemir, 2022).

GE endeavours rely primarily on the constitutional provision for equality and diversity (Article 10). Specifically in the HE sphere, the first impetus for fostering GE was the Position Paper 1 on GE issued in 2015 by the Council of Higher Education (an autonomous body tasked with planning, coordinating, and supervising the HE system). Encouraged by this, as of 2021, 50% of Turkish universities had established GE research centres that carry out research projects on the topic, generated gender-related indicators, and raised awareness about gender issues between universities (ERAC SWG, GRI, 2021b). Yet, as Göker & Polatdemir's (2022) note, confronted with pervasive anti-gender pressures, the document in question was removed from the Council's webpage in 2019.

When it comes to GEPs, there is no legal requirement for HE and R&I organisations to adopt them. In 2019, TUBITAK (the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye), following the establishment of its Gender Equality Advisory Group in 2019, published the Policy Guidelines for Increasing the Participation of Women Researchers in its processes. Currently, the Council holds a significant role in supporting academic organisations in these endeavours.

Looking at the situation of Institution 5, despite the unfavourable political climate, the organisation was a pioneer in adopting GE policies and gender-related academic and social programmes. At the inception of the GEP, it counted with a number of formal statements concerning equality and diversity (the Non-Discrimination Statement, the Domestic Violence Prevention and Support Statement, and the Sexual Harassment Policy Statement). Nevertheless, they lacked clear lines for action.

At the time of the institutional assessment at Institution 5, the absence of gender-disaggregated data required the GEP team to sift through general existing statistics, sorting them with a gender variable or creating new statistics as needed. In 2019, the institution offered a PhD programme in Gender Studies and incorporated gender-related courses in BA and MA programmes in the field of Social and Human Sciences, yet the

gender perspective was notably lacking in STEM fields. While several faculty and researchers engaged in gender-related research, these endeavours were primarily driven by personal discretion. Regarding recruitment and career progression, despite the acknowledgement of GE as an abstract principle, the processes demonstrated a lack of a comprehensive gender perspective. The examination of work-life balance at Institution 3 mirrored broader research findings, indicating that women's academic careers were directly impacted by an uneven burden of care responsibilities and the gendered division of labour in private life. However, formal mechanisms to address this issue were not in place. Finally, absent were also measures to increase women's representation in leadership and decision-making roles, with initiatives like quotas being perceived as conflicting with the principles of meritocracy (Gaber et al., 2019a).

Despite facing considerable challenges stemming from the political situation in Türkiye during the initial year of the project, the GEP team at Institution 5 persevered. The GEP process progressed driven by a bottom-up strategy, involving nearly 100 contributors, including academic and administrative staff, as well as students, in the collaborative development of a comprehensive 96-action document, structured across eight intervention areas (dimensions).

Table 15. Overview of Gender Equality Plan: Institution 5

GEP: Institution 4			
Responsible Stakeholders	**Scope of application**	**Institutional Approval**	**Implementation Period**
Gender and Women's Studies Centre of Excellence, Human Resources, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Business School, President's Office, Research Planning and Policy Development Office, Marketing and Institutional, Communications Unit	Institutional level	March 2021	2021-2023
Dimension			**N. of Actions**
1. Institutionalisation and capacity building			4
2. Recruitment			13
3. Career progression			10

4. Work-life balance	20
5. Decision-making and leadership	11
6. Gender perspective in research	8
7. Gender perspective in curriculum and teaching	16
8. Sexual harassment mechanisms and gender-neutral communication	14

Note: self-authored, based on Institution 5's GEP.

3.6 GENDER EQUALITY PLAN: INSTITUTION 6

The sixth institution implementing a GEP under GEARING-Roles is an RFO situated in Estonia. Institution 6 funds research across all areas of specialisation and facilitates collaboration among the government, business, and research institutions at the national level. Additionally, it contributes to the internationalisation of research cooperation and communication. Given its singular position as the sole RFO implementing a GEP within the GEARING-Roles consortium, it stands apart from the other implementing organisations, all of which are universities.

Looking at the Estonian context, since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country has undergone significant changes its economic, political, and social domains. While the Estonian development is considered a success story among the Baltic nations, studies highlight that these changes have led to "a mixture of the asymmetrical development of different values and unbalanced shifts for different social groups, offering new life opportunities for some and loss and impoverishment for others" (Talves, 2018, p. 8). This asymmetry extends to the gender system, with Estonia currently ranking 23rd in EIGE's Index for GE amongst EU28 (EIGE, 2023). Influenced by remnants of discredited Soviet rhetoric about gender inequality, a significant portion of contemporary Estonian society still does not perceive GE as a problem that impacts the nation as a whole. Instead, it is often viewed as an imported idea from the West, which risks diverting attention from what is considered "real" social concerns (Marling, 2010).

Academia is generally perceived as a neutral system, with both women and men seeing GE initiatives unnecessary (Urmann et al., 2021). The last She Figures report revealed that, in 2018, women comprised 42.2% of researchers, with the lowest representation observed in Engineering and Natural Sciences (EIGE, 2021). Studies associate this relatively equal representation of women in the scientific sector with the Soviet strategy of promoting mathematics, physics and other sciences in the military regime. However,

beneath these statistics lies an invisible culture shaped by the (masculine) ideal figure of scientists, a conservative concept of excellence, and an unfavourable workplace climate for women scientists, especially for young female researchers (Talves, 2018). Despite women having higher participation in HE than men and equal participation in the labour force, they are still underrepresented in leadership positions, a wage gap is evident, and patriarchal gender roles in the division of labour remains (Talves, 2018).

When it comes to research funding, a study carried out by the H2020 GENDER-NET Plus ("Promoting Gender Equality in H2020 and the ERA") project revealed that, in 2020, women were underrepresented mainly among applicants for research funding in Engineering (10%) and Natural Sciences (29%), experiencing success rates lower than those of men in all fields except Medicine and Humanities. Furthermore, the study stressed the notable underrepresentation of women in selection/funding committees within Estonian RFOs (Hermansson et al., 2021). In this context, measures like quotas are deemed incompatible with the prevailing notion that career progression in academia should strictly depend on conventional ideals of merit and excellence (Urmann et al., 2021).

At the national regulatory level, the Gender Equality Act of 2004 (last amended in 2018) incorporates provisions aimed at promoting GE in R&I. In addition to addressing equal treatment in both the public and private sectors and providing for mainstreaming GE across all areas, it specifically tackles issues such as the gender pay gap and mandates the collection of gender-disaggregated data. These acts, however, lack sanctions in case of non-compliance (see Urmann and colleagues, 2021). Moreover, concerning the regulations governing the work of research institutions, these are primarily outlined in the Organisation of Research and Development Act and the Higher Education Act, both of which lack specific regulations on GE. On the policy level, the Estonian Research and Development and Innovation Strategy 2014-2020, or "Knowledge-based Estonia" (in place when Institution 6's GEP was developed), only made a minor mention of GE in its equal opportunities provision. The current version of the strategy, Estonia 2021, has not presented any modifications in this regard.

Estonian academic institutions have engaged in GE projects, either through national cross-institutional initiatives or as part of European consortia. A recent study indicates that currently the majority of RFOs and HEIs in Estonia have GEPs in place, however, these initiatives are relatively new, lacking widespread systematic development, as they are still considered newcomers in this regard (Hofman et al., 2023). In the specific case

of Institution 6, before its participation in GEARING-Roles, it had been part of two European projects, in addition to collaborating with the ERAC SWG GRI and the network of the Estonian Gender Equality and Treatment Commissioner. Despite having no experience with GEP implementation and lacking comprehensive institutional policies addressing GE, initiatives like publishing gender-sensitive statistics in its webpage, with relevant indicators on funding applicants and success rates, were already in place.

As the only RFO in the GEARING-Roles project, the objectives and scope of the GEP at Institution 6 differ from those of Institutions 1-5. At the time of the institutional assessment, the GEP team recognised the predominance of male researchers in top-level research positions in Estonia. Nevertheless, as an administrative organisation, Institution 6 exhibited a notably greater share of women amongst its employees. What the institutional assessment brought to light was a concern related to the lack of a gender perspective in grant allocations, with the success rate for male applicants being higher and women underrepresented in several categories of grants. Furthermore, the GEP team highlighted the scarcity of concrete measures fostering the incorporation of the gender dimension in research projects, with the primary state-provided national grants lacking any requirement in this regard. Gender-specific funded projects were also absent, and the evaluation and expert panels lacked gender experts (Gaber et al., 2019a).

In this context, the GEP process at Institution 6 was in charge of the Department of Analysis, which led a collaborative effort involving representatives from the management team and all departments within the organisation. The outcome was a document structured around five intervention areas (dimensions), encompassing a total of 25 actions. After a first implementation period, a sixth dimension was included to the GEP, with five related actions, accounting for a final GEP document comprised of 30 actions. In addition to the work developed at the organisational level, as part of its activities in GEARING-Roles, the GEP team at Institution 6 took further strides by creating a working group with representatives from Estonian universities and other research organisations to facilitate the exchange good practices and ideas on GE interventions.

Table 16. Overview of Gender Equality Plan: Institution 6

GEP: Institution 6			
Responsible Stakeholders	**Scope of application**	**Institutional Approval**	**Implementation Period**

Department of Analysis, managers, other institutional employees.	Institutiona l level	September 2020	2020-2027
Dimension			**N. of Actions**
1. Raising awareness among the employees and among the members of the panels and committees of the Institution			4
2. Adhering to the principles of equal treatment			4
3. Improving gender balance among the members of the panels, committees, and among the reviewers			5
4. Improving gender balance among the applicants and recipients of research grants, awards, and funding			6
5. Implementing a gender-sensitive communication strategy			6
6. Ensuring equal opportunities and a supportive work environment for the employees of the Institution			5

Note: self-authored, based on Institution 6's GEP.

4. FINAL REMARKS ON THE CASE STUDY PROJECT

As elucidated in the theoretical discussions and reflected in the above considerations, while existing literature identifies a spectrum of common barriers obstructing GE in academia, gender inequality is a complex and context-dependent issue. The very understanding of gender inequality and the identification of the most effective strategies to address it vary from one context to another, making generalised analyses problematic.

As seen, in the case of GEARING-Roles GEPIs, all institutions adhered to a common general approach, yet the particularities of each institution defined the final outcomes of the approved plans and determined their implementation strategies. Among the common concerns identified across all GEP-implementing institutions were the underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making positions, male dominance in positions of epistemic power, and a gendered division of labour associating women with care responsibilities. Despite these shared concerns, each GEP team developed self-tailored strategies to address these issues according to the specific needs and capacities of their respective organisations.

In an effort to represent this contextualised overview and facilitate further discussions, in the following tables I summarise the key data delineating the situation of each GEPI. In Table 17 I provide pertinent data on the national and institutional context of the

different institutions, while in Table 18 I offer a more detailed overview of the presence of gender-related data, policies, and practices in each GEP-implementing institution.

Table 17. GEARING-Roles: National and institutional elements of GEP-implementing institutions [28]

	Institution 1 (Spain)	Institution 2 (Portugal)	Institution 3 (Türkiye)	Institution 3 (UK)	Institution 4 (Slovenia)	Institution 5 (Estonia)
Nature of the institution	Private HEI / RPO	Public HEI / RPO	Private HEI / RPO	Public HEI / RPO	Public HEI / RPO	Public RFO
GEP scope	University level	Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning	University level	University level	Faculty of Arts	University level
Number of students	11,607	745	5,057	18,000	4,431	No
Ratio of academic/administrative or professional services staff	817/524	45/16	405/363	1,300/900	531/153	63
National legal GEP requirement	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Previous GEPs	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Pre-established GE infrastructure	Yes (limited)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gender-specific budget	Yes (external)	No	Yes (internal and external)	Yes (internal and external)	No	No
Other sponsorship arrangements for GE initiatives	No	No	No	Yes – Athena SWAN	No	No

Note: self-authored, adapted from Gaber et al. (2019a) and Ní Laoire et al. (2021).

[28] The data contained in this table reflects the situation of GEP-implementing institutions at the inception of the GEPs, i.e., 2019.

Table 18. GEARING-Roles: Data, policies and practices [29]

	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Institution 4	Institution 5	Institution 6
Collection of sex-disaggregated data on staff	YES	GR	GR	YES	GR	YES
Monitoring of GE (GEPs, data, etc.)	GR	GR	GR	YES	GR	YES
Monitoring of academic careers	NO	GR	GR	YES	GR	NDA
Monitoring sex ratio on type of contracts	YES	GR	NO	YES	GR	YES
Sex ratio successful job applicants	YES	GR	NO	YES	GR	NO
Gender-sensitive protocols for recruitment	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Data on number of w/m leaving the organisation	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Data on salary comparison	YES	YES	YES	YES	GR	NDA
Policies on equal pay	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NDA
Formal institutional practices on work-life balance (beyond legal provisions)	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NDA
Formal policies to reduce the impact of care responsibilities	GR	NO	YES	YES	YES	NDA

[29] YES: established, NO: not established, GR: GEARING-Roles initiative, NDA: no data available, NA: not applicable.

Informal policies to reduce care responsibilities	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NDA
Inclusiveness of governing bodies	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Affirmative actions on leadership	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Gender equality hub	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Inclusive decision making	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Policies and guidelines for integrating the gender dimension into research	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Monitoring of gender-sensitive research practices	GR	GR	GR	GR	GR	NA
Policies and guidelines integrating the gender dimension into curricula	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NA
Gender Studies department	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Collection of sex-disaggregated data on students	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NA
Students monitoring progress by sex	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NA
Policy on gender for students	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NA
Work-life balance policy/practice for students	NDA	NDA	YES	NDA	NO	NA

Note: self-authored, based on Gaber et al. (2019a).

CHAPTER 5. FRAMING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: PRACTICAL TRANSLATIONS

In Chapter 2, Part II, I explored how the notion of institutional change is presented in key European reference documents and presented theoretical discussions about the complexity of translating policy ideas into concrete actions at institutional level. These discussions have shown that gendered institutional change in the R&I field does not hold a clear, singular definition. European documents articulate it through a set of objectives and processual steps, embracing GEPs as the primary instrument to catalyse change. In turn, scholars and practitioners involved in GEP implementation at the institutional level highlight the complexity of translating policy ideas into tangible effective actions. Academic literature and project reports and guidelines expose a wide range of approaches adopted by various project consortia and institutions for GEP implementation. Yet, none of these approaches has proposed a universally applicable strategy or presented an experience of linear causal relationship in change processes.

Drawing from these discussions, in this first empirical chapter, I begin to apply (based on an underlying feminist institutionalist perspective) this theoretical framework to the analysis of the material case study. My aim is to understand how policy ideas regarding institutional change are received, interpreted, and reshaped by institutional stakeholders responsible for the planning and design of concrete change-oriented actions at the organisational level. My objective is twofold: firstly, to verify whether and how the complexity of institutional change, as presented in European documents and discussed by scholars, is confirmed in the material case; and secondly, to understand if there is a common understanding of the notion of institutional change across different organisational settings.

Together, the discussions in this chapter will contribute to addressing **Research Question 1: how is structural/institutional change defined in the context of GEP implementation in academic organisations?** To support this primary question, the chapter will also explore the following sub-questions:

- Is there a common definition of institutional change among partners involved in European-funded GEP-implementing projects?

- Is there alignment in the definition of institutional change between GEP-implementing project consortia and the European Commission?
- How do contextual differences across institutions and countries influence the development of a shared definition of institutional change?

To achieve these aims, I structure this chapter into four sections. In **Section 1**, my focus is on how institutional change was conceptualised and translated into concrete actions across the GEARING-Roles's GEPs. To support this analysis, I consider whether the elements characterising complexity (as discussed in Section 2.1.2, Chapter 2) are evident in the change processes undertaken in our case study. Moreover, I analyse the consistency in how various GEPIs framed their institutional change initiatives, and explore whether there was alignment with the perspectives of the European Commission.

In **Section 2**, I expand the analysis of Section 1 and incorporate insights derived from interviews with representatives of other GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020. By gathering a variety of perspectives, my aim is to contrast information across different institutional and temporal contexts and offer a more extensive perspective for the analysis.

In **Section 3**, I explore how intersectionality is (dis)regarded in real-life endeavours to promote institutional change towards GE. I consider how, despite the increasing priority given to the issue at the policy level, GEPs are still limited in effectively incorporating intersectional perspectives into the design of change-oriented actions.

Finally, **Section 4** concludes this chapter by connecting the findings from GEARING-Roles and sister projects to the broader academic literature.

1. FRAMING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE UNDER GEARING-ROLES

To initiate the empirical analysis, this section explores the conceptualisation of institutional change within the GEARING-Roles framework. To do so, I firstly consider the process employed by the project partners to establish their approach to institutional change. I then explore how change agents leading GEP activities defined institutional change to translate their conceptualisations into concrete actions. Further, I look at how GEP teams reported "institutional change actions" to the European Commission. Here, my focus will not be on the reporting mechanisms themselves but rather on the rationale GEP teams used to classify certain actions as indicative of institutional change, as this approach offers an insight into how they conceptualised and operationalised the notion in

practice. I conclude with an analysis of the six GEP documents, categorising the proposed actions into "preparatory actions" and "institutional change actions", drawing upon the classification proposed by Sangiuliano et al. (2019a).

1.1 INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE DEFINITION UNDER GEARING-ROLES

A first glance at the GEARING-Roles project – including its core documents and webpage (GEARING-Roles, 2022; GEARING-Roles, n.d.-b) – shows that the common approach adopted by the project consortium for planning and designing its institutional change strategies was not developed in isolation. Instead, it was largely guided by the GEAR tool (EIGE, 2016) and further informed by the accumulated knowledge from preceding sister projects, leveraging the collective wisdom and lessons learned from these earlier initiatives. This rationale was explained by an interviewee:

> From the very beginning, we were very clear that we couldn't reinvent the wheel (…) it was very difficult to propose something that hadn't already been suggested, that hadn't already been worked on by sister projects, and that wasn't already developed in the Commission's own GEAR tool. That's why we did not propose ourselves to reinvent the wheel but rather to make good use of the resources and toolkits that other sister projects had already developed, to apply them according to the reality of each [GEP-implementing] institution. (I2_GR) [30]

Asked if a shared definition of the notion of institutional change existed among the GEP teams forming the GEARING-Roles consortium, the interviewees indicated that there was no formal occasion where the teams collectively discussed and defined the concept for the specific scope of the project. They clarified that the discussions held at the start of the project among the project consortium mainly centred on the processual components needed to active the change processes, with less emphasis on theorising the concept itself (I1_GR, I6_GR, I7_GR).

When prompted to articulate what institutional change meant in the context of GEP implementation, the interviewees provided diverse yet interconnected insights. The majority defined institutional change by associating it with addressing gender issues in the five recommended intervention areas – GEP dimensions – outlined in the GEAR tool, namely: work-life balance, recruitment and career progression, leadership and decision-making, research and curricula, and gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

[30] To maintain confidentiality, a numerical identifier (e.g., I1) was assigned to each interviewee. Moreover, for contextualisation, their association with the in-depth case study project GEARING-Roles (GR) or other sister projects (SP) is denoted by a subsequent code (e.g., I1_GR; I20_SP).

(I1_GR, I2_GR, I4_GR, I5_GR). In addition to those, one interviewee emphasised transforming institutional values and culture as central to institutional change (I3_ GR), whereas others highlighted the establishment of new structures, such as equality bodies, as representative of institutional change (I6_GR, I7_GR). Notably, one respondent explicitly linked the concept of institutional change to fostering initiatives that will be institutionalised and sustained over time:

> It [the notion of institutional change] can vary between the partners. And we see it as something that is really permanent, that will outlast the project. And, of course, this is something at this point, but we can only assume that it will be institutional change, because what happens after the project, we can only see when it has ended actually (I8_GR)

Additionally, the respondents explained that all GEP teams followed the same process for developing their GEPs – five-step methodology proposed by the GEAR tool (EIGE, 2016) – while also employing a context-centred strategy. Acknowledging the substantial variances in the contextual environments of the implementing organisations (both national and institutional), the GEP teams prioritised the possibility to tailor their documents to fit the unique conditions of their respective institutions, favouring adaptability over a uniform template (I1_GR, I2_GR, I4_GR, I6_GR). The following statements capture the essence of these collective viewpoints:

> We were very much aware that we were diverse institutions, each at different stages of the structural change process and, for the change process to be effective, it had to be a process that was adapted to the reality of the different institutions. And that's why a Work Package was designed (WP3) to be in charge of conducting that context and institutional analysis, to ensure the viability of the change process. I believe that was the starting point. Beyond that, obviously, we had some shared objectives that were somewhat structured based on the thematic areas of the project, which have to do with leadership, with work-life balance, with gender mainstreaming in teaching and research, and with leadership. But I believe the fundamental characteristic and what we all understood from the beginning is that, for the process to be effective, it had to be adapted to the institutional reality of each of the organisations (I2_GR)

> I think the project has also been flexible enough not giving anyone a blueprint, and maybe that is part of our theory of institutional change. That has been repeated from the very beginning from everyone, and it has been common understanding that none of us has to fit a blueprint of institutional organising or change, that each one of us had to develop our unique path (…) So, both providing a pool of resources that comes from sister projects, as well as coming from each other – because we shared with one another –, but also having the freedom to swim in that pool as it fits in our institutional setting. (I6_GR)

When exploring this context-centred approach in more detail, all the interviewees emphasised the crucial role of the comprehensive organisational baseline gender analyses conducted through Participatory Gender Audits at each implementing organisation during the GEP planning stage. This process enabled GEP teams to leverage broader European political provisions and national legal and policy frameworks for the strategic formulation of interventions tailored to their specific organisations. For instance, at Institution 4, where GE structures and policies were well-established before joining GEARING-Roles due to their longstanding engagement with the Athena SWAN Charter, the institutional assessment facilitated a comparison between European provisions and Athena SWAN action plans, further enhancing existing institutional measures and policies. Conversely, at Institution 2, where previous GE efforts had received little institutional support, the initial institutional assessment was instrumental in raising awareness and giving visibility to the very existence of gender inequalities within the institution.

What becomes evident here is that, despite not explicitly aiming to conceptualise or theorise the notion of institutional change, the Participatory Gender Audits served *de facto* as the stage when GEPIs identified the "gender issues" within each institution, setting the stage for identifying priority areas for intervention and designing concrete strategies tailored to their specific needs.

In summary, the explorations above indicate that within GEARING-Roles, the notion of institutional change was not theoretically deliberated specifically for the project's scope. Despite the absence of explicit consortium-level discussions for establishing a shared conceptualisation of institutional change, a foundational approach was, in effect, collectively embraced by all GEARNG-Roles GEP teams. This approach was largely shaped by the provisions of European policies and guidelines, especially those delineated in the GEAR tool. As noted by I1_GR, although the European Commission does not provide a precise definition of institutional or structural change, it does specify certain areas of intervention (i.e., the five GEP dimensions) and processual aspects to be followed (i.e., the five-step methodology). This indirect definition offered a common framework for the GEP teams, while also allowing for flexibility in interpreting what constitutes institutional change in practice for each of them.

While the lack of a more precise definition enabled consideration of the unique contexts of each institution and encouraged further development of the concept of institutional change itself, it also led to uncertainties and inconsistencies in how concrete

GEP actions were interpreted and evaluated by the European Commission and the GEP teams themselves, as will be examined in the following section.

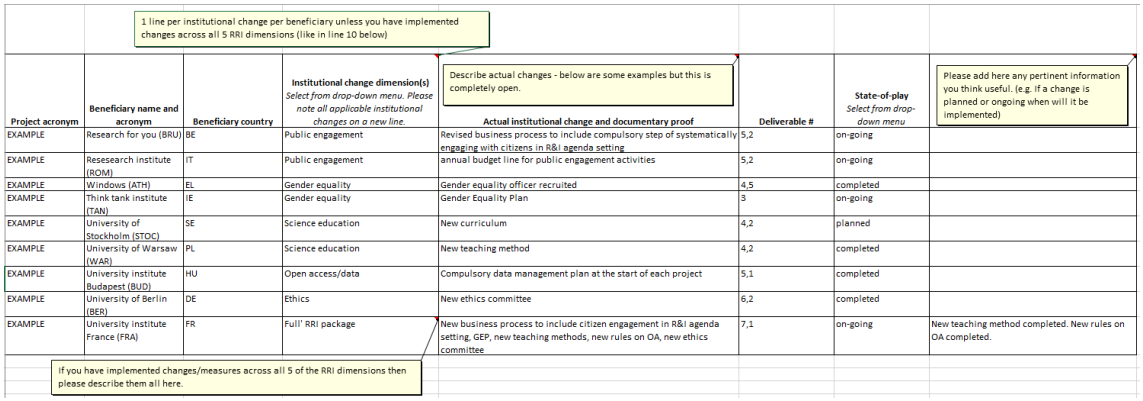
1.2 REPORTING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: AMBIGUITIES IN DEFINITIONS UNDER GEARING-ROLES

Despite the consensus on the fundamental intervention areas and methodology adopted for GEPs between GEARING-Roles partners, a closer examination of the project activities uncovers significant variability in the classification of concrete actions as "institutional changes" by both GEP teams and the European Commission. This variability emerged at various points in the project, but most notably in the way project partners reported "institutional change actions" to the European Commission.

In the context of GEARING-Roles, as with all European-funded projects, a variety of reporting mechanisms was utilised to document the progress and outcomes of its activities, including deliverables and periodic reports. Of particular relevance for our examination of how the notion of institutional change was translated into concrete actions and evaluated as such is a mechanism specifically designated for the reporting of "institutional change actions" by GEP-implementing partners to the European Commission.

Throughout the GEARING-Roles lifespan, this mechanism adopted two distinct formats. For the first and second reporting periods (i.e., 2019 and 2020), an Excel file circulated by the European Commission – precisely by the Research Executive Agency (REA) – was utilised. This file was intended for project partners to report on the institutional changes enacted by each beneficiary institution. Within this Excel sheet, partners were required to list and detail their implemented "actual institutional changes" and categorise them under "institutional change dimension(s)" using a predefined drop-down menu. The options available for selection were "public engagement", "gender equality", "science education", "open access/data", "ethics", and "'full' RRI package":

Figure 11. Screenshot of the European Commission's Excel file template for reporting institutional changes



1 line per institutional change per beneficiary unless you have implemented changes across all 5 RRI dimensions (like in line 10 below)

Describe actual changes - below are some examples but this is completely open.

Please add here any pertinent information you think useful. (e.g. If a change is planned or ongoing when will it be implemented)

Project acronym	Beneficiary name and acronym	Beneficiary country	Institutional change dimension(s) *Select from drop-down menu. Please note all applicable institutional changes on a new line.*	Actual institutional change and documentary proof	Deliverable #	State-of-play *Select from drop-down menu*	
EXAMPLE	Research for you (BRU)	BE	Public engagement	Revised business process to include compulsory step of systematically engaging with citizens in R&I agenda setting	5,2	on-going	
EXAMPLE	Resesearch institute (ROM)	IT	Public engagement	annual budget line for public engagement activities	5,2	on-going	
EXAMPLE	Windows (ATH)	EL	Gender equality	Gender equality officer recruited	4,5	completed	
EXAMPLE	Think tank institute (TAN)	IE	Gender equality	Gender Equality Plan	3	on-going	
EXAMPLE	University of Stockholm (STOC)	SE	Science education	New curriculum	4,2	planned	
EXAMPLE	University of Warsaw (WAR)	PL	Science education	New teaching method	4,2	completed	
EXAMPLE	University institute Budapest (BUD)	HU	Open access/data	Compulsory data management plan at the start of each project	5,1	completed	
EXAMPLE	University of Berlin (BER)	DE	Ethics	New ethics committee	6,2	completed	
EXAMPLE	University institute France (FRA)	FR	Full' RRI package	New business process to include citizen engagement in R&I agenda setting, GEP, new teaching methods, new rules on OA, new ethics committee	7,1	on-going	New teaching method completed. New rules on OA completed.

If you have implemented changes/measures across all 5 of the RRI dimensions then please describe them all here.

Note: unpublished document, internally distributed by REA to the project consortium.

Attached to the Excel file, project partners received a letter from the Project Officer and the "Guidelines for SWAFS projects to report on Institutional Changes" (unpublished documents). The letter explained that this report would serve to monitor progress of KPI "Number of institutional change actions promoted by the programme towards Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI)" for the Science with and for Society part of H2020. Through the guidelines, partners were provided with more detailed information on how to interpret the Excel. According to the guidelines, institutional change in towards RRI is:

> 1. A change to how a beneficiary governs/structures itself; 2. Is expected to have meaningful impact within the institution concerned; 3. Is intended to last beyond the lifetime of project funding; 4. Applied in one or more of RRI's five operational dimensions: gender equality, science education, open access/open data, public engagement, and ethics (including research integrity); it can also manifest as an 'RRI package' integrating all five of these dimensions (Appendix I)

The guidelines also presented a table with examples of change initiatives reported by sister projects. The examples were left "as open as possible to allow for innovative ideas and approaches" (REA Guidelines for SWAFS projects to report on Institutional Changes (unpublished document).

Table 19. Examples provided by REA of institutional change actions

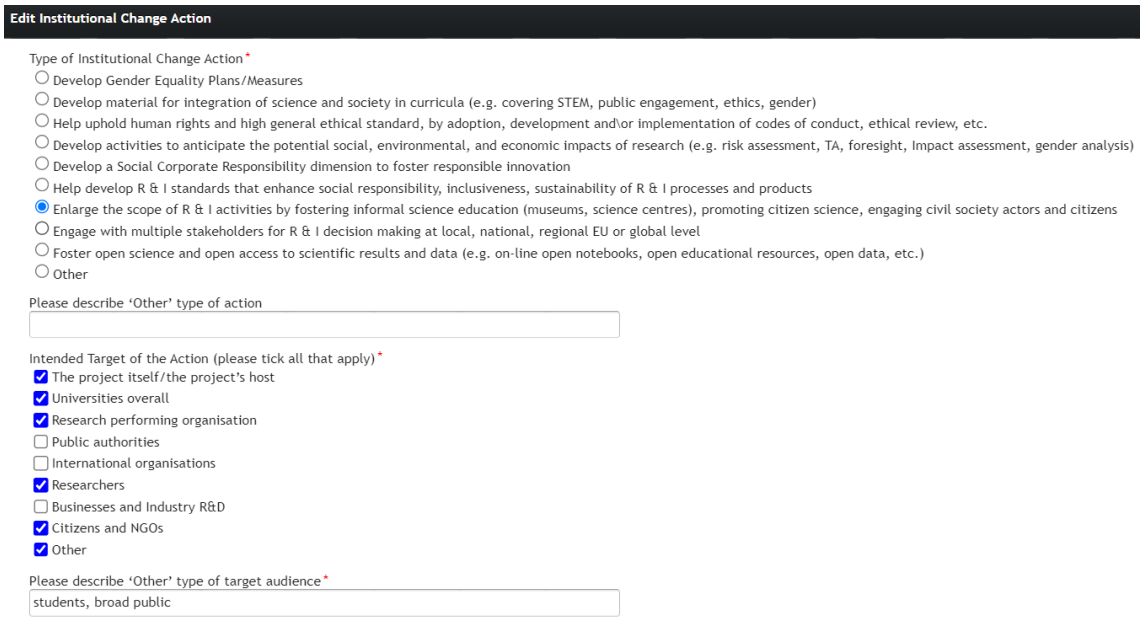
RRI dimension	**Example change**
Gender equality	Implementation of a Gender Equality Plan
Science education	Introduction of a new curriculum (e.g. on Responsible Research and Innovation), new teaching methods (e.g. Inquiry-Based Science

	Education), and new means of systematically fostering informal learning in non-educational settings (e.g. citizen science activities)
Open access/open data	Introduction of new Open Access policy, action plan, rules or practices; establishment of an open data repository; requiring Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability and Reuse (FAIR) of data; mandating Data Management Plans
Public engagement	Implementation of new means of systematically engaging citizens/Civil Society Organisations in research and innovation activities such as through agenda setting, foresight and public outreach; earmarking of budgets for public engagement activities; introducing new rewards and incentives into career development processes that favour public engagement
Ethics (including research integrity)	Implementation of new rules including for example guidelines and codes of conduct, to improve the ethics review process; actions (e.g. training) to help embed ethics and integrity within the research design; and/or development of research integrity standard operating procedures
RRI 'package'	A comprehensive package of measures across the five RRI dimensions listed above

Note: REA Guidelines for SWAFS projects to report on Institutional Changes (unpublished document).

For the third and final reporting period of GEARING-Roles (i.e., 2021), this reporting mechanism was converted into an online questionnaire, which project partners were required to complete directly within the H2020 project management online portal. Unlike the previous version, which granted GEP teams more discretion to interpret and decide on which concrete actions they considered institutional change, this revised format provided project partners with specific types of institutional change actions to be selected from a predetermined list (see Figure 12 below). Given the format of the questionnaire, while it was still possible for beneficiaries to opt out of this list and categorise actions under the designation "other", this structure implicitly recommended a more limited interpretation of the types of information deemed appropriate for inclusion.

Figure 12. Screenshot of the European Commission's online portal system for reporting institutional changes



Note: Unpublished document, internally distributed by REA to the project consortium through the H2020 project management online portal.

The outcome of this reporting process is an aggregated dataset that encapsulates information on the "institutional change actions" as reported by all project partners at the different reporting periods. For the purposes of this thesis, this dataset provides an insightful overview and comparable information of how institutional change was practically interpreted across GEP teams, as will now be discussed.

Initially, observations and interviews conducted under the scope of this study reveal that GEP teams faced considerable uncertainty in completing the referred reporting document. Initially, there was ambiguity regarding which partners were expected to provide information, specifically whether reports of institutional changes should be submitted exclusively by GEPIs or by other project partners as well. Furthermore, the GEP teams underscored the lack of clear guidelines on what types of actions can be considered representative of institutional change, emphasising the reliance on individual experiences and interpretations to classify actions within the reporting tool (I6_GR). This lack of clarity resulted in inconsistencies in reporting, as I8_GR explains:

> I don't think we've ever discussed it within the project (what exactly is institutional change and how to perceive it). We have had to fill some tables with this kind of information where there has been some discussion about what can be inserted there and what not. But this conversation hasn't been very thorough, or it hasn't been focused on actually understanding and defining it for ourselves, but rather just complying with the rules and doing it as we can.

> So, I don't think it's very well defined and everybody can interpret it a little bit differently. When I mention these tables, you can also see that they [GEP teams] have interpreted it differently; where some institutions have marked something as institutional change, I wouldn't necessarily say it is (I8_GR)

Looking at the completed version of these documents, the activities reported as "institutional change actions" indicate a broad range of actions, exhibiting both common ground among GEPIs but also notable variability in the types of actions they reported as institutional changes. At the outset, in the reporting periods of 2019 and 2020 (as detailed in the Excel files), all institutions uniformly reported the elaboration, approval, and implementation of the GEPs as their foundational change activity. Additionally, the establishment of new GE structures and appointment of GE personnel, the creation of checklists and guidelines for introducing the gender dimension into curricula and research, and the review of existing teaching and research guidelines from a gender perspective, emerged as strategies reported by all. Finally, training and awareness-raising activities were also reported by all GEP teams as institutional change actions.

Despite these commonalities, the types of actions reported also reveal considerable variation across institutions. For example, while diverse institutions enacted initiatives such as institutional prizes for gender-related research, only one GEP team reported it as an institutional change. Similarly, although most GEPs addressed wage gap, recruitment and promotion practices, and sexual harassment through the establishment of new protocols and the enhancement of existing mechanisms, only a minority reported these efforts in the institutional change reports. This discrepancy was also observed in mentorship activities; even though all institutions participated in a mentoring programme organised within the project's scope, not all GEP teams reported it as an institutional change. The summarised content from the 2019 and 2020 reporting periods is as follows:

Table 20. GEARING-Roles: Summary of actions reported as institutional changes, by institution (2019 and 2020 reporting periods)

	Institutional change actions

Institution 1	- Adoption/approval/implementation of GEP - Establishment or enhancement of GE structures/work groups/and personnel - Gender perspective in curricula and teaching - Gender perspective in research - Inclusion GE in the Strategic Plan of the University - Mentoring activities - Training activities - Activities to promote equal representation women and men in leadership and decision-making positions - Activities to cause behavioural change regarding leadership models in terms of gender (including mandatory trainings on inclusive leadership) - Identification of good practices on measures seeking GE in leadership - Incorporation of non-sexist language in institutional communications - Monitoring gender balance in events held at the university - Social impact research seal - Establishment of external alliances
Institution 2	- Adoption/approval/implementation of GEP - Establishment or enhancement of GE structures/work groups/and personnel - Gender perspective in curricula and teaching - Mentoring activities - Training activities - Awareness-raising activities - Creation of a prize for gender-related research - Inclusion of the commitment for GE promotion within the institute's mission - Elaborate and make public and accessible a Welcome Guide on GE - Participation on GE networks - Participation in gender-based violence project
Institution 3	- Adoption/approval/implementation of GEP - Establishment or enhancement of GE structures/work groups/and personnel - Gender perspective in curricula and teaching - Mentoring activities - Creation protocol on sexual harassment - Organisation of European Researchers Night - Support panels with gender balance of events held at the university - Analysis of sexual harassment with student population
	- Creation of repository of good practices on gender-sensitive language - Participation in GE networks - Training activities - Awareness-raising activities

Institution 4	- Adoption/approval/implementation of GEP - Establishment or enhancement of GE structures/work groups/and personnel - Gender perspective in curricula and teaching - Gender perspective in research - Mentoring activities - Analysis and decomposition of pay gap - Training activities - Awareness-raising activities
Institution 5	- Adoption/approval/implementation of GEP - Establishment or enhancement of GE structures/work groups/and personnel - Gender perspective in curricula and teaching - Mentoring activities - Inclusion of anti-discrimination clause in job announcements - Home-office principles guidelines through a gender lens - Analysis of gender-based discrimination and work-life balance issues - Training activities - Awareness-raising activities
Institution 6	- Adoption/approval/implementation of GEP - Establishment or enhancement of GE structures/work groups/and personnel - Gender perspective in research - Mentoring activities - Inclusion of GE in the Strategic Plan of the institution - Integration of the gender dimension in all internal trainings, where applicable - Regular in-house seminars on GE and the institutional GEP - Training activities - Review of all rules and regulations from a gender perspective - Awareness-raising activities

Note: self-elaborated, based on project reports (unpublished documents).

Remarkably, the omission of certain actions from the reports as "institutional changes" does not imply that these actions were not carried out in practice by the GEPIs. Rather, a thorough analysis of the full spectrum of actions in the six GEPs reveals that the observed variations are less about the actual differences in the measures implemented by the various GEPIs and more about the diverse interpretations by the GEP teams regarding how they defined what qualifies as "institutional changes" to be reported.[31] As I6_GR elucidates:

> I do remember conversations from our team where, for instance, we would say "oh, these people [other project partners] have written about this as institutional change", and until that

[31] For a comprehensive comparison of variations, please refer to Tables 20 and 21 in this chapter (actions reported as institutional change per institution and reporting periods) and compare their content to Appendix F (complete list of GEP actions per institution).

> it would not have occurred to us (…) we said "oh, of course we should write that, I mean, we are doing it, but we are not considering it as something that should be put in that report and that category", for instance (I6_GR)

Turning our attention to the 2021 reporting period, as previously mentioned, the introduction of a new reporting format provided GEP teams with a predetermined list of action types for documenting their initiatives. The format's specificity and the generic characterisation of the listed actions led to a narrower interpretation by partners in comparison to previous reporting periods. Contrary to the previous reporting periods, in the 2021 period, variations in reported actions can still be observed, yet they mirror the actual differences in the activities conducted within each GEPI.

Table 21. GEARING-Roles: Summary of actions reported as institutional changes, by institution (2021 reporting period)

	Institutional change actions
Institution 1	- Develop GEPs/Measures - Develop material for integration of science and society in curricula (e.g. covering STEM, public engagement, ethics, gender)
Institution 2	- Develop GEPs/Measures
Institution 3	- Develop GEPs/Measures
Institution 4	- Develop GEPs/Measures - Develop material for integration of science and society in curricula (e.g. covering STEM, public engagement, ethics, gender) - Enlarge the scope of R&I activities by fostering informal science education (museums, science centres), promoting citizen science, engaging civil society actors and citizens
Institution 5	- Develop GEPs/Measures
Institution 6	- Develop GEPs/Measures

Note: self-elaborated, based on project reports (unpublished documents).

Still regarding the reporting process, I5_GR raises an important limitation, emphasising the difficulty in adequately capturing institutional changes through the prescribed reporting mechanisms: *"I think it's just such a nebulous concept and just trying to capture it with just those batteries of indicators"*. In a similar vein, I7_GR points out that changes within an institution can be facilitated not only through direct interventions targeting formal structures and policies but also through initiatives that may indirectly contribute to institutional change, such as capacity building or training activities. Despite not being immediately recognised as such, I7_GR argues, these efforts also hold potential for fostering transformation:

> The Excel file has different categories, right? But it does not really say what institutional change is or what it is not. We just decide on it based on our own experience or knowledge. There is not really a guide with like "this is institutional change and this is not". (…) institutions can be formal and informal institutions, and for me institutional change can be at the level of policy but it could be also on the level of norm. So, for instance, capacity building or training activities are not seen as institutional change, as far as I see, but they can lead to institutional change, so it is a bit tricky, right? It is not really clear (I7_GR)

The observation by I7_GR that capacity building and training activities are "not seen as institutional change" takes us back to REA's criteria for distinguishing between what is considered institutional change and what is not. As earlier explained in this section, the guidelines provided to project partners outlined that an institutional change refers to a modification in the governance or structure of an institution expected to produce substantial internal impacts and endure beyond the project termination (e.g., introduction of new funding, mechanisms, rules, procedures). Consequently, this definition excludes "a one-off project activity (e.g. a workshop, conference, meeting, publishing a report) that will not repeat after the end of the project's funding" (Annex H, p. 1). The guidelines however did not delve further into the specifics of which actions are classified as institutional change. It was through REA's evaluative feedback on the reported actions that a more specific classification was provided.

To contextualise, REA evaluated the Excel file submitted by project partners and provided feedback comments on each of the reported actions, determining whether they were representative of institutional change or not. An examination of REA's comments reveals a general standard to classify actions, yet also some variability and inconsistency in evaluations. To explore these in more detail, we will look at REA's comments on the actions reported in the second reporting period (i.e., 2020), as described in the table below

Table 22. GEARING-Roles: REA's comments on the actions reported as institutional changes, by institution (2020 reporting period)

	Description institutional change	**REA's comments**
I 1	1. Design and approval of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	2. Implementation of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	3. Incorporation of the gender dimension in teaching and research in all faculties and areas of knowledge	Institutional change
	4. Social Impact of Research Seal	Not institutional change
	5. Implementation of activities to promote equal representation of women and men in leadership and decision-making positions, as well as to cause behavioural change regarding the leadership models in terms of gender	Institutional change
	6. Identification and publication of good practices on measures seeking GE in leadership and decision-making at the European and global levels	Institutional change
	7. Establishment of external alliances to deal with cases of sexual harassment within the institutional context	Potential institutional change
	8. Incorporation of non-sexist language in institutional communications; equal representation in events; and promotion of activities that make visible the contribution of women to the various scientific fields and disciplines	Institutional change
I 2	1. Design and approval of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	2. Implementation of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change

	3. Introduction of gender-based topics and perspectives in the syllabus of several undergraduate courses. A new seminar on gender is available for students of a Master's degree	Institutional change
	4. Establishment of a prize for gender-related research	Institutional change
	5. Ethics Committee	Not institutional change
	6. Equality Committee	Not institutional change
	7. Subscribed SAGE - Systematic Action for Gender Equality - Letter of Principles	Institutional change
I 3	1. Design and approval of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	2. Implementation of GEP actions	Institutional change
	3. European Researchers night focused on fostering awareness and promoting the role and status of researchers in society, with special emphasis on women in the academia	Not institutional change
	4. Repository of good practice. Links to projects and tools fostering GE for staff and students. Parallel to promoting and implementing GEP actions, we gathered useful tools and links to projects and material developed in different EU projects. These were selected in relation to actions implementing institutional priorities put forth in the GEP and in the GEP action plan. For now, this is for internal use at the institution only	Not institutional change
	5. Promoting the GEP as a GE mechanism in academic events	Not institutional change

	6. Support other faculties within the university in the development of GEPs	Potential institutional change
	7. Sexual harassment activities: survey on sexual harassment among students; faculty leadership decided to give priority to the topic of sexual harassment; a protocol on sexual harassment is currently drafted and ready for discussion	Potential institutional change
	8. Gender-sensitive language. Inclusive language workshops have been held with support staff, and the development of a repository of good practice on gender-sensitive language is underway	Potential institutional change
I 4	1. Design and approval of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	2. Implementation of actions of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	3. Decomposition of pay gap (gender and intersection approach). Better data analysis using administrative (HR) data, decomposition of the pay gap in the institution on the basis of gender	Potential institutional change
	4. Establishment of a gender network to promote the inclusion of a gender+ and diversity approach in the research across the university	Institutional change
	5. Women's leadership training evaluation. Developing evaluation survey of leadership training for women (Aurora evaluation)	Not institutional change
	6. Enhancing GE structures. Appointment of a Research Fellow to support the GEP implementation in the institution, and ensure links with other gender/diversity initiatives e.g. Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter	Institutional change
I 5	1. Design and approval of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	2. Implementation of actions of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change

	3. An HR personnel was appointed part-time as a Gender Equality Officer	Institutional change
	4. GE trainings for university personnel with the participation of 216 people from 4 different units	Institutional change
	5. Anti-discrimination clause was added into job announcements	Institutional change
	6. The Gender and Women's Studies Centre for Excellence organised Sexual Harassment Webinar Series with various academics and civil society organisation representatives. These webinars created a network of solidarity on the issue. In total 9 webinars were organised with the participation of 810 people	Not institutional change
	7. Sexual harassment committee received a training on responding to sexual harassment survivors	Institutional change
	8. Home office principles guideline is being drafted by the HR department with a gender perspective	Institutional change
	9. HR Department is aiming to adhere to GE perspective in all their operations	Institutional change
	10. Exit surveys have revised to have questions related to gender-based discrimination and work-life balance issues	Institutional change
	11. Four middle managers participated in the Leadership trainings organised by GEARING-Roles expert support partner, and they have formed an unofficial working group	Not institutional change
I 6	1. Design and approval of a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	2. Implementing a Gender Equality Plan	Institutional change
	3. Integrating the gender dimension in all of our trainings, where applicable	Institutional change

	4. Revision of all rules and regulations from the perspective of gender	Institutional change
	5. Launching regular in-house seminars on GE and the GEP	Institutional change

Note: self-elaborated (based on GEARING-Roles institutional changes reporting document, reporting period 2020).

The table presents a nuanced and at times inconsistent approach employed by REA in determining what constitutes institutional change. On one hand, certain actions such as the design, approval, and implementation of GEPs, as well as the integration of a gender perspective into teaching and research practices, programmes, and procedures, were uniformly recognised as indicative of institutional change. Conversely, the classification of other types of measures demonstrated inconsistency, with REA's comments reflecting variable categorisations of similar actions. For example, while the creation of equality structures was overall consistently identified as institutional change, the establishment of the Equality Committee by Institution 2 (action 6, Table 22) was not recognised as such. Furthermore, the act of identifying good practices on GE in other academic organisations was reported by both Institution 1 and 3, yet REA's feedback acknowledged it as institutional change only for Institution 1 (see Table 22, Institution 1, action 6; Institution 3, action 4). This disparity extends to gender-related training activities as well, where different categorisations were given to similar measures (e.g., Institution 5, actions 4, 6 and 11, Table 22).

As the table illustrates, beyond categorising actions as "institutional change" and "not institutional change", REA also labelled certain activities as "potential institutional change", suggesting their dependency on further development or impact assessment. This categorisation included initiatives related to forming external alliances and collaborations that extend beyond the institutional boundaries (Institution 1, action 7; Institution 3, action 6), measures enhancing data collection processes (Institution 4, action 3), and activities that were still under elaboration without clear outcomes (Institution 3, actions 7 and 8). Herein, a certain degree of inconsistency is also observed, particularly when considering that other reported activities, likewise under progress, were classified as institutional changes in REA's evaluations (e.g., Institution 5, actions 8 and 9, Table 22).

Ultimately, the rationale employed by REA to classify reported actions as either institutional changes or otherwise remains somewhat ambiguous. The feedback provided did not extend beyond the categories outlined in Table 22 – i.e., "institutional change", "not institutional change", and "potential institutional change" – lacking thus detailed explanations for these classifications. It was against this backdrop that GEARING-Roles partners expressed uncertainty about how to accurately identify concrete actions as indicative of change.

> There has not been a clear guideline, and again providing a guideline does not mean to specify what exactly we are looking for because each institution has its own unique characteristics;

> there is no way Brussels (EC) can know what institutional change would look like in every institution, and yet there could be again a pool of examples of what different partners consider, what steps different universities take towards institutional change (I6_GR)

1.3 GEARING-ROLES: CATEGORISING GEP ACTIONS

In the previous sections, I explored how institutional change is perceived by the change agents responsible for implementing GEPs in the GEARING-Roles project. I also examined how both the GEP teams and REA identified certain concrete measures as indicative of institutional change in the project reports. In this section, I take a more comprehensive approach by analysing not just the actions labelled as institutional changes by the GEP teams in their reports to the European Commission, but all actions contained in the six GEARING-Roles GEP documents. My objective is to develop a systematic categorisation for these actions, as a means to redress the ambiguities and inconsistencies identified in the previous subsection.

To develop this categorisation, I build upon the framework proposed by Sangiuliano et al. (2019a), which distinguishes between "preparatory actions" and "structural change actions" (see Refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2). I have adapted this framework to incorporate the logic used by REA for categorising the actions reported under GEARING-Roles. I have named the categories "preparatory actions" and "institutional change actions", connecting them with both the action typologies outlined by Sangiuliano et al. (2019a) and additional typologies identified in the GEARING-Roles GEPs. The table below illustrates this integrated framework, which will be used for categorising actions in this study:

Table 23. GEARING-Roles: Categories of actions and the respective typologies

Institutional change actions	**Preparatory actions**
Creation of new policies, services, instruments, and procedures	Communication and dissemination actions
Change/update/adaptation of existing policies, services, instruments, and procedures	Raising awareness and training
Creation of new structures	Production of further evidence/data/research
Mentoring and coaching services	Establishment of collaborations
Coordination of existing policies and services	

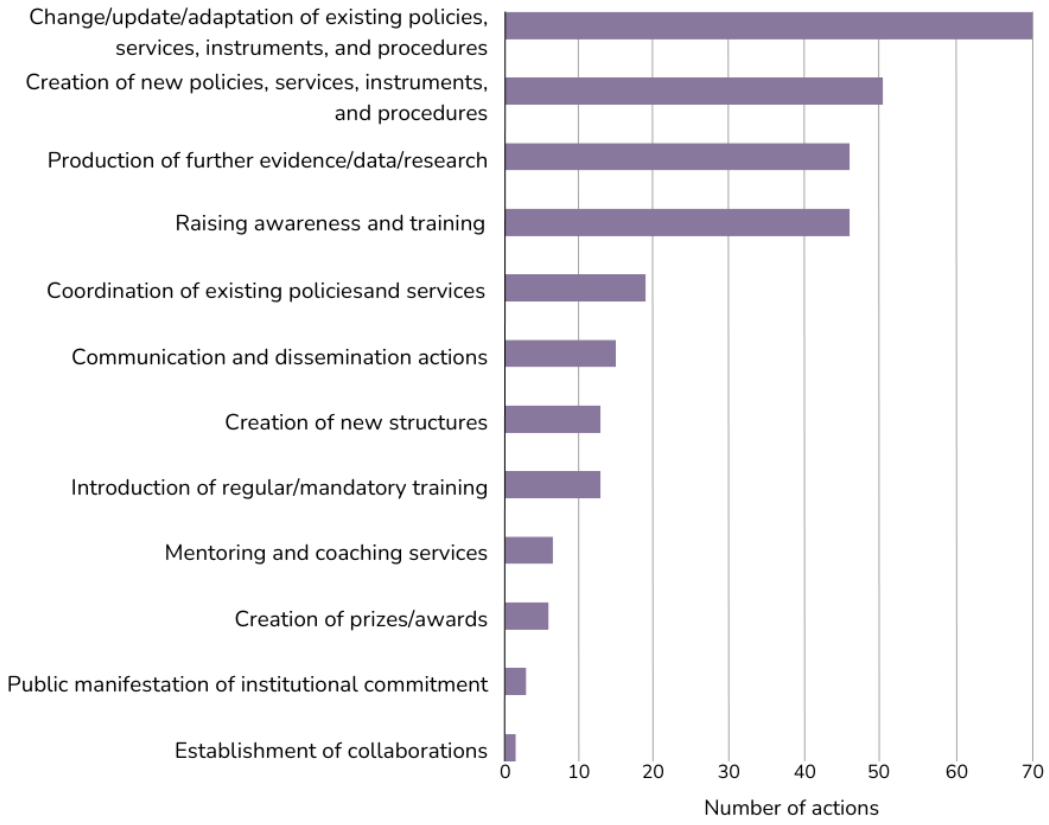
Introduction of regular/mandatory training	
Creation of prizes/awards	
Manifestation of public institutional commitment	

Note: adapted from Sangiuliano et al. (2019a, p. 26).

For the scope of readability, the complete table containing the entire set of actions from the six GEPs, along with their respective categorisations, is presented in Appendix F (Tables 37-42). In the present section, I present this data through both graphical and descriptive formats, seeking to offer an overview and (non-exhaustive) comparative analysis of the six GEPs.[32]

To initiate the analysis, let us look at the six observed GEPs collectively, without distinguishing between institutions, to examine the representation of the different typologies of actions across the plans.

Graph 2. GEARING-Roles: Number of GEP actions by typology



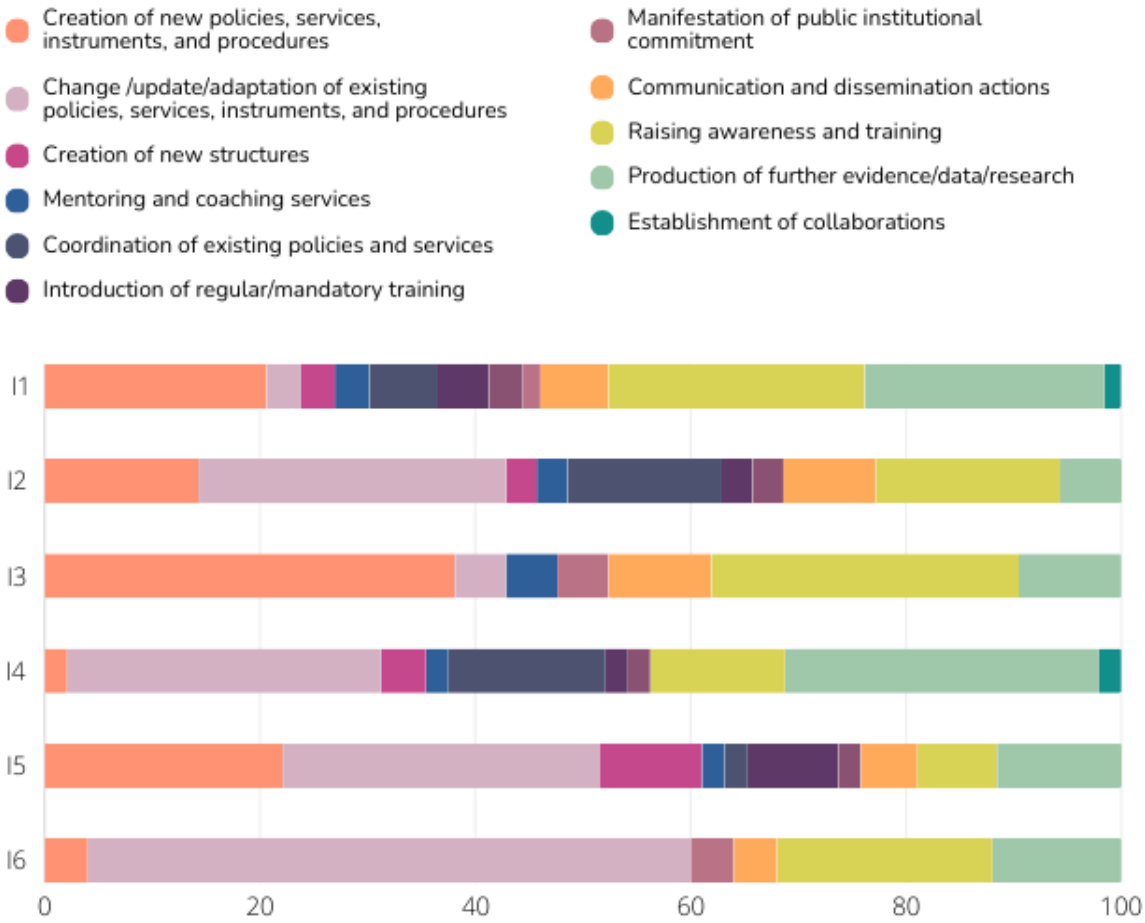
[32] An exhaustive comparative analysis of the GEP documents exceeds the scope of this study. Additionally, the contextual differences at national and institutional levels among the GEARING-Roles GEPIs, along with the resulting variations in the structure and content of the respective GEPs, render an exhaustive comparative analysis impractical.

Note: self-elaborated, based on information available in Appendix F.

As illustrated in above graph, the majority of the proposed measures under the six GEARING-Roles GEP, encompassing nearly 70 actions, involve the change/update/adaptation of existing policies, services, instruments, and procedures. These are followed by the creation of new policies, services, instruments, and procedures (50 actions), the production of further data/evidence/research (46 actions), and awareness raising and training activities (45 actions). Subsequently, the coordination of existing policies and services, communication and dissemination of GE initiatives, the creation of new structures (e.g., establishment of equality committees, appointment of an equality officer, etc.), and the introduction of mandatory or regular training for staff and/or students follow in the list, with 10 to 20 actions each. Actions that are less represented include those related to mentoring and coaching services, the creation of prizes and awards acknowledging gender-related works, public manifestations of institutional commitment, and the establishment of collaborations (e.g., participation in other gender-related projects, or forging external alliances).

Given the diverse contexts and distinct objectives of the implementing institutions, the GEPs were uniquely tailored, resulting in a varied distribution of proposed actions across the abovementioned typologies. This variation is clearly illustrated in the graph below, which demonstrates how each GEPI prioritised different typologies of actions in their respective GEPs:

Graph 3. GEARING-Roles: Percentage of GEP actions by typology, per institution



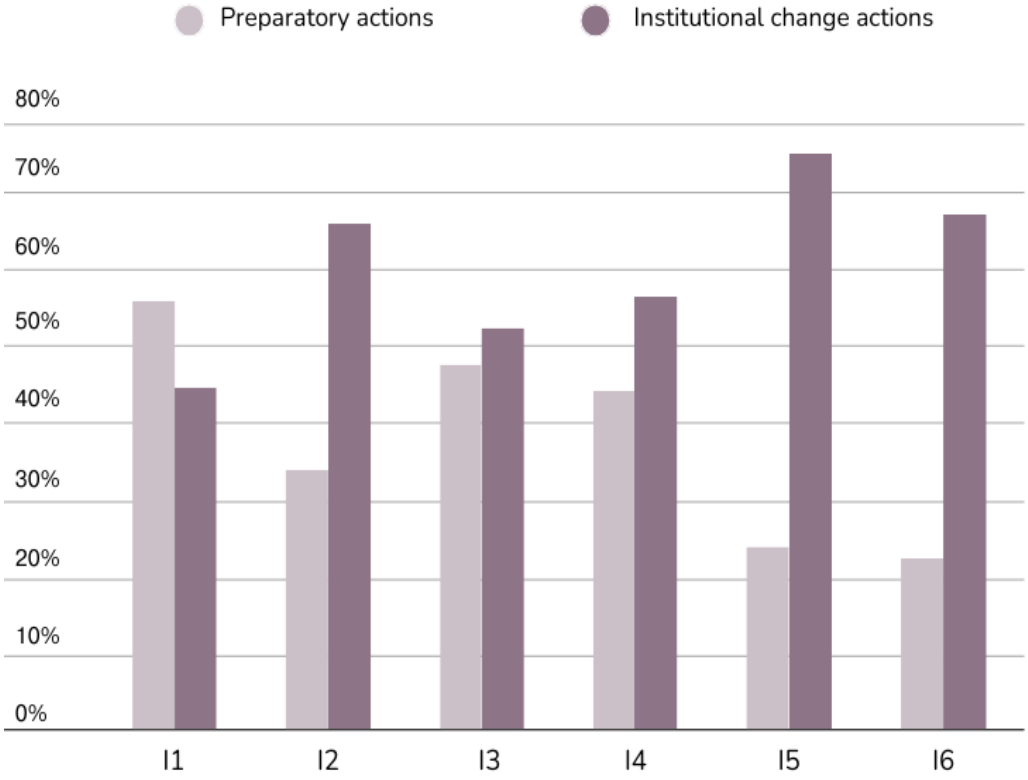
Note: self-elaborated, based on information available in Appendix F.

The graph reveals that four out of the six GEPIs (specifically Institutions 2, 4, 5, and 6) prioritise actions aimed at revising existing policies, services, and procedures. Concurrently, the creation of new policies, services, instruments, and procedures is also a common action, yet these actions are notably less frequent than policy adaptation. In this context, the creation of new structures is significantly less represented, which may point to a more cautious, gradual approach in the change processes. Such an approach indicates a strategic preference for enhancing and updating existing frameworks over complete overhauls.

In addition to that, the graph shows a relatively balanced representation of actions focused on producing further evidence/data/research, alongside those aimed at raising awareness and training. This twofold strategy – merging empirical support with efforts to evolve organisational culture and awareness – indicates an overarching aim to foster a more informed and receptive environment for GE measures. It signals the strategic necessity of addressing both the remaining lack of awareness about gender issues and the need for increasing institutional recognition of GE interventions.

Continuing this line of analysis, we now shift our focus to the distribution of "preparatory actions" versus "institutional change actions" within the GEARING-Roles's GEPs. An initial review of the data shows that the majority – 62% – of initiatives fall under the category of institutional change actions. This denotes a general inclination towards actions aimed at substantive modifications to institutional structures, policies, and practices. This trend is not universal, however; in particular, as evidenced in the graph below, Institution 1 displays a slightly higher incidence of preparatory actions.

Graph 4. GEARING-Roles's GEPs, per institution and category of actions

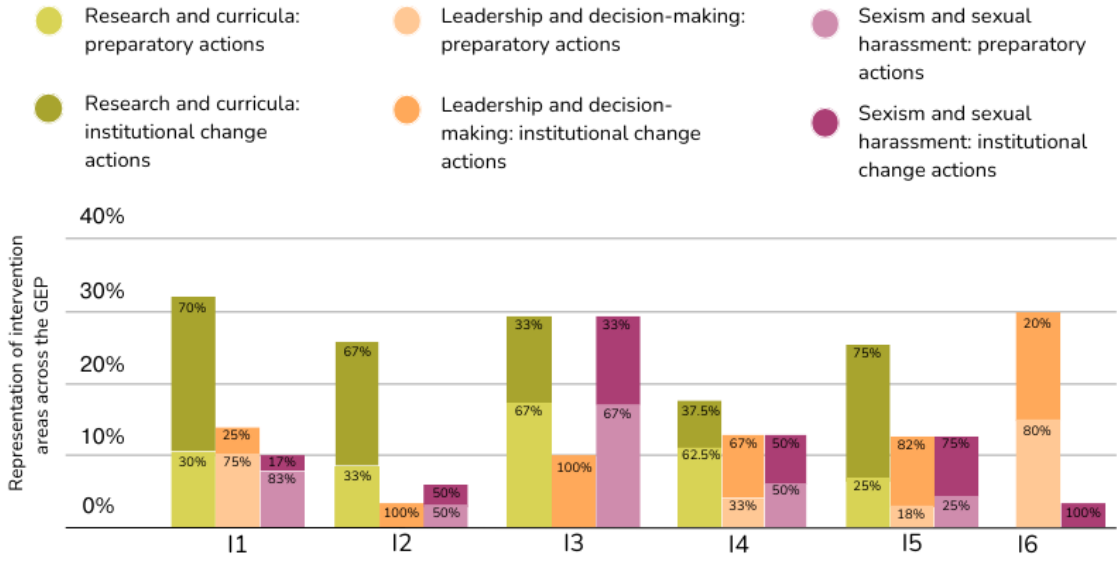


Note: self-elaborated, drawing from information compiled in Appendix F.

Narrowing our perspective, the distribution of preparatory and institutional change actions differs across the various areas of intervention within each GEP. Here, once again it is crucial to remind that, although having commonalities, each GEP was tailored to cater the unique circumstances of the corresponding organisation, thereby shaping the configuration of these documents and strategically prioritising actions based on with their individual needs and capacities.

Given the impracticality of conducting an exhaustive comparative analysis of the six documents, the subsequent graph presents an example of these variations.[33] I selected three intervention areas – research and curricula, leadership and decision-making, and sexism and sexual harassment [34] – to identify patterns, disparities, and commonalities among the GEPIs. The graph illustrates how each intervention area is represented across the entire scope of each GEP (per institution), and the distribution of actions categorised as either preparatory or as institutional change actions within each of these three areas.

Graph 5. GEARING-Roles's: GEP comparison, per intervention area, institution, and category of actions [35]



Note: self-elaborated, drawing from information compiled in Annex G.

As the graph shows, apart from Institution 4, all GEP-implementing RPOs participating in GEARING-Roles placed a considerably high emphasis on actions aimed at research and curricula, accounting for approximately 30% of their respective GEPs. Among those, institutional change actions were more prominent in Institutions 1, 2, and 5. Here, it is noteworthy that Institution 4, despite its extensive experience with GE interventions through its longstanding involvement with the Athena SWAN Charter, had not previously

[33] Graphs showcasing a complete overview of the proportion of preparatory and institutional change actions proposed in each area of intervention of each of the six GEPs can be found in Appendix G.

[34] The three intervention areas were chosen for inclusion in this graph because they represent the most comparable areas across the six GEPs. In the graph, the terminology describing the areas is standardised, yet they are formulated differently in the original documents (as detailed in Annex G).

[35] Due to its nature as an administrative institution, Institution 6's GEP lacks an intervention area dedicated to "research and curricula".

addressed research and curricula in its institutional GEP. This may elucidate the reason why there is a greater proportion of preparatory measures in this area for an organisation with long experience in GE policies, suggesting an initial strategy of laying the groundwork for more substantial transformations.

When it comes to leadership and decision-making, the emphasis given to this area differed more notably across the observed institutions. While this area formed about 10-15% of the GEP actions for Institutions 1, 3, 4, and 5, a stark contrast is observed with Institution 2, where it comprised merely 3%. On the other hand of the spectrum, Institution 6 allocated a substantial 30% of its GEP actions to this area, indicating a considerable aspect. At this point, a detailed analysis of the GEP documents reveals distinct approaches in addressing leadership and decision-making. The GEP-implementing RPOs primarily concentrated their efforts on promoting gender balance within internal leadership structures and increasing the capabilities and awareness of institutional leaders and managers through training. Conversely, the strategy adopted by Institution 6 (the only RFO) encompassed a broader spectrum of administrative practices, which were not only internal but also directly extended to influence external experts, as well as funding applicants and beneficiaries. This indicates, on the one hand, a clear variation in approach from RPOs and RFO and, on the other hand, it reveals a holistic strategy where leadership and decision interventions can be designed to foster GE both within the organisation and in its wider interactions and influence, thereby potentially shaping the broader research and funding landscape.

Finally, the area of sexism and sexual harassment exhibited a more even distribution across the institutions. Exceptions are Institution 3, where actions under this area represent 29% of its entire GEP, and Institution 6, which lacks a designated area for sexism and sexual harassment in its GEP. Here, it is particularly noticeable that, except for Institutions 2 and 5, GEPIs exhibit a predominance of preparatory actions over institutional change actions within this domain, which may signal a more cautious approach to intervening in this area due to the sensibility of the topic.

In conclusion, the observed divergence reflects the heterogeneity in strategic approaches to GE within the consortium, highlighting that the pathway to institutional transformation can vary significantly depending on the specific context and needs of each institution. As previously argued, the comparative notes provided above are inherently limited and offers only a glimpse into the general aspects of the GEP documents.

2. BROADENING THE PERSPECTIVE: SISTER PROJECT EXPERIENCES IN FRAMING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

After examining the GEARING-Roles case, I now broaden the analysis by contrasting its findings with insights from sister projects. This expanded analysis is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives from various European-funded GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020. To facilitate comparison with the findings from the GEARING-Roles project, this section will: i) investigate whether sister projects defined a shared conceptualisation of institutional change among consortium partners; ii) consider how the interviewed change agents define institutional change; and iii) explore whether the ambiguities observed in the reporting process of GEARING-Roles were also present in other sister projects.

2.1 SISTER PROJECTS' APPROACHES TO INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The examination of the process adopted by various consortia to establish an approach to institutional change point to a common theme: the initial absence of a standardised approach. This phenomenon is attributed to the nature of GEPs in the context of European projects, where they often serve as experimental platforms. These projects are described metaphorically as "laboratories" (I23_SP) or spaces for "trial and error" (I13_SP), where strategies are both piloted and refined through practical application. As part of a learning process, the solidification of more structured methods and definitions typically unfolds during the project lifecycle, with initial ideas adapting in response to new insights and shifting priorities (I10_SP; I19_SP).

> When you put in motion the process of change, then is this is when you see the structure, because the structure is silent, it goes unnoticed. But when you go there with a stick to tease it, then you see the structure. That's the one occasion when you see them in action (…) You really need a project to know how (…) male domination exerts its power, you need to try and change (I11_SP)

Contributing to this discussion, I21_SP notes how the understanding of the very idea of GE matured through the lifecycle of a H2020 project. While initially the concept of GE was approached with relatively simplistic views, primarily focusing on gender representation, over time, it evolved to a more nuanced comprehension of its multifaceted nature:

> I think the different institutions had very different understandings of what it is that they wanted to achieve, and that changed throughout the project. I would say there was a whole learning process for the participating institutions that was developed throughout the process

> of structural change. So, for example, a very basic idea of what is gender equality: at the beginning of the project, it was thought about in terms of mainly equal representation of men and women, and as the project developed that became more complex and recognised the different facets to gender equality that went beyond representation (I21_SP)

The development of a unified approach for implementing GEPs is complicated by several factors. Foremost among these is the recognition that contextual disparities – here including geopolitical, cultural, and internal institutional aspects – presents a substantial obstacle to creating a uniform starting framework (I12_SP; I16_SP; I17_SP; I20_SP; I21_SP; I23_SP). Moreover, the varying levels of expertise among GEP teams, along with their different disciplinary backgrounds, highlight the necessity for flexible and adaptable strategies in the face of such diversity and the potential for divergent views on GE issues and change strategies (I12_SP; I13_SP; I17_SP; I16_SP; I19_SP; I20_SP).

Illustrating the case of an FP7 project, the narrative of I12_SP exemplifies the challenges of aligning partners from different sectors and national backgrounds – comprising partners from physics, sociology, and business sectors, each originating from significantly distinct national contexts and holding variant degrees of previous experience implementing GE measures. This consortium composition meant that the starting point for each GEP-implementing institution was markedly different, hence formulating a shared theory of change was impractical in that project. Similarly, I13_SP contributes insights from a H2020 project in the field of physics, illustrating how divergences in disciplinary logics, institutional cultures, and national factors influenced the execution of the project, as detailed in the following extensive quote:

> In the beginning there was hardly any definition about what a GEP is, what structural change means, what organizational change means (…) And then imagine a room full of 60 people, old physicists, some younger social scientists, women in gender studies, feminists. It was a lot of fight. The first half year we only fought; it was so exhausting. You know, they are so used to explain you how the world works, but they couldn't solve the problem of those inequality within physics. So, they needed us from social science. But first we needed also to establish a communication and a working culture to even discuss concepts and make them aware that we need a concept, and that we don't just make a five-step plan, we follow the plan, and then we have more women in the system, and they will stay there forever (…) So, in the beginning, there was no definition (…) It was just a very strong, a huge wish to have more women in the field and to also allow them to stay (…) We had beginners and then we had quite like superstars from the Northern countries especially. So, I would say it took us at least six or eight months before we were able to sit down and say, “What is gender equality? And what has to be in there [the GEPs]? What is structural change? How do we guarantee we not only write this plan, but also monitor it and sustain it?” (…) So, we defined some very

> simple things: "What is the difference between sex and gender? What are the different approaches here? (…) Do we have a sameness approach, different approach, transformative approach? And what are potential fields of action we can dig in?" (I13_SP)

When it comes to the explicit establishment of a theory of change to be followed at the consortium level, most respondents state that the consortia did not take such a structured approach. Yet, similarly to what we observed the GEARING-Roles case, considering the case of another H2020 project, I17_SP explained that, while not explicit, there was a theory of change implicit in the project approach:

> It's about really taking stock of the inequalities in each of the areas that I mentioned [GEP dimensions], understanding what steps could be taken to make improvements, and build the strategic alliances that are necessary, and mobilising the capacities and the skills, the right expertise that can be also very specific for each area (I17_SP)

In other cases, respondents shared experiences of project consortia that explicitly articulated a common theory of change at the project's outset, which each implementing organisation subsequently adapted to their respective contexts. I16_SP reflects on such an experience within a H2020 project, reporting that there were extensive deliberations among partners to establish such a theory of change, and then determining its practical application. I16_SP explains that this process was initially marked by intense discussions due to varying conceptions of change and its implications across different national settings: *"what that meant at the end of the day was that while everyone worked within this broad institutional change framework based on four pillars, each person then adapted those four pillars to suit their context"* (I16_SP).

Other interviewees reported an even more structured approach, recounting experiences within consortia that, from the outset, organised the types of actions to be included in the GEPs into categories. Specifically, I10_SP and I17_SP mentioned two H2020 projects where GEP actions were categorised into preparatory/soft and structural measures. I10_SP pointed out the advantage of this early categorisation, arguing that it represents a strategic method to ensure that the efforts invested in the GEPs translate into meaningful and lasting advancements in GE, rather than superficial or short-lived actions:

> These are pretty broad categories, but with these categories in mind, the partners have tried to develop their GEPs in a way that the categories are addressed in a balanced way. So, they should not focus all their efforts of all the resources in one only category; the aim was to spread them. And we had them in tables with different colours, and we saw it from all the partners, so there was some pressure also towards the more structural efforts (…) I would do it for future projects, i.e., start with the model and do this exercise in the beginning, point out where the weaknesses are and say clearly: "This is where your efforts and your priorities

> should go". Then automatically they would direct efforts towards structural change impact, rather than staying at the superficial level of awareness raising, *ad hoc* training activities, which then, evaporate in terms of impact (I10_SP)

I17_SP also stressed the significance of incorporating a balanced mix of both preparatory/soft measures and structural change actions within GEPs. Additionally, they noted that these categories should be seen as flexible, with the potential to evolve throughout the implementation process:

> Since the very beginning, I clarify that not all what they are putting into the GEP can be defined as institutional change, but we need to go to that direction, and we need to have a good share of the measures that can be defined in that way (…) In the GEP design phase, we asked partners to classify, or at least to try to have a provisional classification of their actions, in the awareness that this is not fixed in stone, and that can be changed in the course of the implementation. Certain soft measures could become institutional changes towards the end of the project, if this is relevant, and maybe some of the measures that are designed to be set up as structural then do not succeed in that sense. Then, we want to look at how these definitions change along the implementation, what dynamic is there, to what point the structural change measures tend to increase during the second implementation phase, and also what is staying in the sustainability plans that we are going to start preparing as well (I17_SP)

In turn, I20_SP offers a slightly different perspective, describing a H2020 project where GEPIs distinguished actions based on their temporal scope: short-term, midterm, and long-term. By categorising actions through a strategically structured timeline, I20_SP argues that it is possible to tailor strategies to fit immediate needs while also setting in motion plans for sustained progress and lasting impact:

> You need to have "quick wins", as we call them, to show people that you are a project doing something immediately. But you should not stay there; you should not do quick actions all the time. With quick actions I mean brown bag seminars (…) or you have some work-life balance seminars, or things like that. That's really nice and it sets the right tone. (…) The short-term things are important for a project, but for a GEP to really be implemented, you need a long-term vision (I20_SP)

Interestingly, the insights from various respondents underscore the evolution of strategies over time, influenced by the collective experiences and accumulated knowledge from previous sister projects. On one side of the spectrum, some respondents noted that the initial FP7 projects placed an emphasis on discussing and defining what constitutes institutional change at early project stages. This was particularly pronounced in these pioneering projects, as they lacked precedents to guide their approaches (I14_SP). A similar pattern was noted in projects within areas where GEP teams possessed less

familiarity with gender issues and change initiatives, notably in projects targeting STEM fields, during both the FP7 and H2020 periods (I13_SP).

Conversely, other respondents who had experiences spanning from both early FP7 to subsequent H2020 projects observed that the early FP7 projects often proceeded without a solid foundation, lacking a clear, pre-established line of action. This lack of clarity was seen by some as a stumbling block for the effective implementation of GEPs. As a result, informed by these earlier experiences, they emphasised in their subsequent projects the critical need to establish a consensus and a precise roadmap at the onset of the GEPs. They argued that a well-articulated strategy from the start would lead to a smoother flow and more substantial outcomes, guaranteeing that the insights and lessons from prior projects were effectively harnessed to improve the implementation and success of future GEPs (I12_SP; I13_SP; I14_SP; I20_SP).

> Between [early FP7 project acronym] and [mid-late H2020 project acronym] there was really a difference. In the former there had not been a meeting to discuss our approach, nor had there been any real reflection on theory of change (…) In the latter, from the beginning, we proposed a clear reflection on the theory of change, and yes, we had it much more controlled, let's say (…) We had out defined principles, that is, it was much clearer what we wanted to achieve and how we wanted to achieve it (…) I think there is also a question of generations of sister projects; I think we have been learning a lot. In fact, in [mid-late H2020 project acronym] we had the idea that we were not starting from scratch and that we were not trying to reinvent the wheel, but rather what we were doing was collecting everything that others sister projects had done (I12_SP)

In summary, the contrast between the earlier FP7 projects and the subsequent H2020 initiatives reveals a noteworthy progression that reflects a shift towards more established and strategic approaches, informed by the lessons learned from the challenges and successes of earlier projects and leveraging the collective wisdom of the structural change community. This generational learning, as discussed by I12_SP, highlights an iterative process where each project contributes to the evolving understanding of how to enact institutional change more effectively.

Yet, this progression also brings to light concerns about inclusivity and representation within the community of scholars and practitioners engaged in these projects. Some respondents expressed worries about the dominance of a relatively small group of institutions – often from Western European countries – that have been influential in shaping the initial frameworks for institutional change. This dominance raises questions about the diversity of perspectives and experiences contributing to the existing models

(I19_SP; I23_SP). As newcomers adopt these established frameworks, there is a risk that they may inadvertently side-line institutions and countries that were less involved in the initial discussions, potentially overlooking their unique interests and challenges.

2.2 CHANGE AGENTS' DEFINITIOS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Shifting our focus from the project consortia perspectives to establish an approach to institutional change, we now engage in a deeper exploration of how change agents define the notion of institutional change. The insights gleaned from the interviewees reveal a nuanced and multifaceted understanding, highlighting the complexity involved in crafting a universal definition, which is significantly influenced by diverse contexts and regulatory environments.

Reasoning on a common foundation, I10_SP defines institutional change as:

> The changing of the procedures, the processes, the values of the organisation, formally and informally. So, formal and informal values, the ways of dealing with each other part, institutional culture as well, so it's rather a broad concept. So, the changes towards gender equality, of course, in all these formal and informal elements of the organisation (I10_SP)

Complementing this perspective, I11_SP and I24_SP outline that institutional change shall be linked to comprehensive strategies that address the interpretive, symbolic, institutional, and operational dimensions of change. Furthermore, I11_SP expands the concept of institutional change, placing it within the broader scope of social change. From this approach, institutional change transcends the confines of organisational structures to both influence and be influenced by wider societal norms and structures:

> We really gave a lot of importance to the agency side of change. And so, we said: "Okay, this notion is so wide that we cannot avoid equating it a bit to the notion of social change, because we are talking about gender, which is a basic structure of human and social identity of people, and it permeates all levels of social life". So, you are not saying: "In this institution we are going to do a structural change about gender equality, and this is a policy, or this is just some measure we are doing". If people are involved, if change is really structural, this will be social change, so it's much broader (I11_SP)

These contributions converge on the idea that effective transformation requires attention to both the tangible elements of an organisation and the intangible aspects, such as cultural symbols and meanings, that underpin its functioning. Nevertheless, while these perspectives offer essential insights for constructing a theoretical framework on institutional change, it is necessary *"to make a distinction between a theoretical understanding and a practical understanding"* (I10_SP), recognising that *"it's a practice-based approach"* (I22_SP).

Reasoning on more practical terms, I12_SP, I20_SP, and I22_SP describe institutional change as recognising the shift from seeing gender issues as isolated challenges facing individual women to framing them as broader institutional and systemic concerns. In this view, change is not about temporary fixes or surface-level adjustments but a profound, systemic overhaul aimed at rectifying the embedded inequalities within institutional logics. The focus is on reforming the entire system to ensure that gender inequalities are addressed at their structural roots, fundamentally altering the institutional mechanisms and cultural norms that sustain them instead of focusing solely on matters such as descriptive representation.

There is a recognition that institutional change in academia holds a twofold objective: on one hand, altering organisational logics and structures, and on the other, transforming the broader the academic system beyond the organisational context (I17_SP; I20_SP; I21_SP; I22_SP). These perspectives respond to the various strategies adopted at the European level, such as "fix the numbers", "fix the women", "fix the knowledge", and "fix the institutions".

> The aim is to stimulate inward and outward change at the same time, and to set up synergies with targeted external stakeholders so that, at the same time, there are certain actions in the GEPs that are both favouring internal change and triggering change in the European Commissionosystem (I17_SP)
>
> So, we touch on everything at an organisational level, but also at the level of knowledge production more globally. So, structural change has to do with that for me: how can we change knowledge production processes and administrative processes? (I22_SP)

In a slightly different yet interconnected vein, a number of respondents explicitly articulate a vision of institutional change as lasting, sustainable transformation, that is, enduring alterations that extend beyond transient initiatives or short-term projects (I13_SP; I14_SP; I15_SP; I16_SP; I18_SP). In their view, institutional change implies deep-seated reforms that become embedded within the institution's core ethos and routine operations, ensuring their permanence over time: *"you add something in the system; this is going beyond the lifetime of a project"* (I13_SP). Enduring changes are exemplified through consistent monitoring and reporting of gender metrics, dedicated budgeting for GE, and modifications in strategic documents and organisational procedures. Such an approach contributes for the progress made not to be eroded but rather built upon, leading to a cumulative effect that drives continuous improvement.

In more operational terms, I9_SP articulates institutional change as closely intertwined with the intervention areas typically covered by GEPs. The interviewee proposes a

strategic sequence for implementing institutional changes, starting from tackling GE on more objective and measurable terms before approaching the most sensitive issues:

> I have the feeling that the understanding of what institutional change is moves from understanding it as a career instrument for women in the organisation to something that also is relevant for decision-making, which is often the second step – so, women in diverse groups need to be represented in decision-making bodies. And then it should be part of education and research. And then, finally, I see attention for social safety, sexual harassment, and the use of language, which is probably most complicated to start with and most sensitive to talk about. And only if the other dimensions of women in decision-making and careers have been covered, and also, when there's more knowledge about general related topics in research and education, then people are able to see how violence is also visible in language, and how it's reproduced through culture (I9_SP)

I17_SP expands on this by portraying institutional change a combination of equal opportunities, positive, and gender mainstreaming actions aimed at transforming the entire operation of research institutions through an intersectional perspective.

The explorations above suggest that both theoretical and more practical-oriented definitions provided by change agents to the notion of institutional change portray it as a dynamic and incremental concept (I18_SP; I22_SP). While these insights help forge a shared understanding of the notion, as previously observed in the GEARING-Roles case, the change agents representing sister projects also emphasised that institutional change is context-dependent. They highlighted existence of a "grey zone" (I17_SP) between the overarching policy framework and the specific interpretations of institutional change in different contexts. This "grey zone" marks the intersection between policy and practice, revealing the challenges and variability in applying the concept across diverse contexts.

Elaborating on these intricacies, I22_SP provides insight into the challenges of achieving a consensus on what institutional change entails, even with a solid policy framework as the backdrop for organisations to base their strategies upon:

> It's often taken for granted that more or less everyone understands what it entails. Well, one of the first reports from the European Commission, published in 2011, I believe, on structural change, serves as a kind of foundation, like "know your institution", monitoring things, top-level commitment, the typical aspects that are always repeated. But then, in the day-to-day of the project, I think that, initially, everyone assumes that the others have more or less the same idea, and gradually, you realise that things might be a bit more complicated, especially depending on the national context of the different partners: the legal context changes quite a bit, so does the framework in which things can be done, and the resources that are available in universities. Then, you realise that maybe people are talking about very different things. And this starts with the term "gender", where often we're not necessarily talking about the

> same thing when we discuss gender (…) And what happens within the project happens in the institutions as such, with all the people you want to invite to be part of this process. Sometimes, of course, they don't know what gender is and how it's different from sex, and all the terms that we more or less handle well… (I22_SP)

The respondents noted that differences in understanding institutional change are evident across various dimensions, including geopolitical contexts, fields of specialisation, and institutions' types and size. Geopolitical differences were the most frequently mentioned factor influencing perceptions of institutional change For example, as noted by I13_SP, the presence of GE officers in universities varies dramatically across countries. In countries like Germany, such roles are standard, whereas in countries like Bulgaria or Hungary, they are virtually non-existent. This disparity reflects differing national priorities and legal frameworks but also underscores the need to advocate for foundational structures in settings where GE is less established, thus changing considerably the very meaning of institutional change for each of them in practice.

Echoing this sentiment, I14_SP and I19_SP point out that some European countries share a considerably common cultural background regarding GE rights, meaning that it may be easier for them to have a shared understanding of the basic idea of what institutional change means. This ease contrasts starkly with regions where such a cultural perspective is so significantly different:

> Thinking of institutional change in all these very diverse institutions, we still of course had a common ground, and that's a common ground defined by the European agenda for responsible R&I and the pillars which are there and we all address them (…) that's how the very strategies and measures are defined. But then what's the outcome would hugely be different, having in mind huge differences among the particular context (…) These [cultural] things are usually not quantitatively, easily graspable, but are equally important (I19_SP)

In this regard, I19_SP illustrates how concepts of gender and institutional change, formulated within the context of Western European countries, may appear peculiar or unfamiliar, for instance, to Eastern European backgrounds:

> You have very different situations in Tunisia or Israel or in Slovenia, regarding how their roles of women and men are perceived and dealt with. And we cannot ignore that when we think of how to make any change in the field of gender equality in these institutions (…) there is a slight problem with these institutional change mechanisms, as they assume certain normality or starting point typical for Western European countries that is then universalized in something that should be applied everywhere. And that's not the case. Not only because it's difficult to do that, but very often simply certain legacies make things very different. I remember from the [FP7 project acronym] project, when we were working in the field of work-life balance, that we had discussions because we had difficulties to come to the

> common ground, for instance, with partners from Switzerland or the Netherlands, because the welfare state provisions we still have in Eastern Europe thanks to the socialist period, make the situation also for researchers much different. So, usually we have no need to establish kindergartens, breastfeeding rooms or any of these facilities in our institutions because we still enjoy one year of paid leave, maternity leave or parental leave (I19_SP)

In addition to geopolitical and cultural factors, the differences between fields of specialisation also arose as a crucial element in the understanding of institutional change. I13_SP observes how projects tailored for physics institutions, for instance, might unexpectedly attract more participants due to the specific approach or perceived novelty, demonstrating how disciplinary contexts can influence the receptiveness to and success of GE initiatives. Therefore, *"to make a structural change and a sustainable change, it also helps to work with the logic and the known rules of the academic field you wanna make a structural change in"* (I13_SP).

Lastly, the type and size of implementing organisations introduce another layer of complexity. I18_SP discusses the challenges of linking structural changes in universities with the activities of RFOs, while I19_SP points out the difficulty of applying a unified reporting system across organisation of diverse sizes and types:

> There was a lot of debate actually about how these [universities and RFOs] are connected, and it first seemed to be like two projects in one, you know, it's like a satellite project inside a larger project (I18_SP)
>
> It's very difficult, for instance, in our [H2020 project acronym] to think of ways to report in a unified way; changes that would happen in a small NGO with a couple of employees struggling a lot dramatically with financing, and a huge university where there is a very different reality; not to talk about then national differences and he ways how things are done and so on (I19_SP)

2.3 REPORTING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE ACROSS SISTER PROJECTS

Moving from how change agents understand institutional change to explore how institutional changes were reported by project partners to the European Commission, we now focus on the mechanisms and challenges of reporting practices in the context of transnational initiatives.

Echoing the perceptions of GEARING-Roles's respondents, representatives from sister projects also expressed concerns about how the European Commission communicates the concept of institutional change, noting a general absence of clear guidelines and a specific vision for what institutional change actions should encompass. I9_SP shares a balanced critique of the perceived bureaucratic process with recognition

of the significant support and impetus towards transformational change provided by the Commission's funding mechanisms:

> I don't think that the European Commission has any clear guidelines of what institutional change entails. (…) I consider them very bureaucratic, it is the box ticking issue. We have to confirm their language and refer to the gender dimension of research, and show that our research teams are gender diverse and that we have clear objectives, and that these objectives can be measured on certain moments in time. But I don't think it's a clear vision on what structural transformation entails. On the other hand, with financing projects like these, they are contributing tremendously to transformational change. (…) So, they're contributing, I would say, through procedures rather than by giving content-related input (I9_SP)

In a similar vein, while appreciating the Commission's effective approach in funding projects and entrusting experts to define concepts and create resources like the GEAR tool (I10_SP; I18_SP; I23_SP), some interviewees expressed a need for more support, remarking *"a little bit more guidance would've been for sure appreciated"* (I11_SP). This view underscores a broader sense of ambiguity among sister project representatives concerning the Commission's expectations regarding the actual goals of GEPs, particularly regarding report and evaluation processes. These concerns spotlight the challenge of effecting structural changes within the constraints of project timelines and point to a perceived disconnect between the support provided by the Commission and the needs of project implementers:

> To be honest, we didn't have any sort of control, because what we reported definitely wasn't institutional change. I mean, the project's lifetime was just, I think four years or three years and it took them a year and a half before I started to set everything in place, et cetera (…) we cant's see structural change in that timeframe (…) So, I don't think they [the European Commission] scrutinise it at all, if I'm honest. And because I would've had a lot of criticism on our own work, and that never came from the Commission on a qualitative level, I think we might have been confronted with very well-meaning people who just said, "You're doing something good for women, good for you", and tap on the back. And that was it (I15_SP)
>
> I don't want to be rude or anything, but I didn't get any idea that I got help from the European Commission. I mean, of course in the European Commission, there are a lot of experts and they have guidelines and reports, et cetera, and those are very helpful, I don't mean that. But when you have a grant agreement, you have to do with the project officer, and the longer in this game (I'm in EU projects since 2004), I can see that the project officers now have less and less interest in the topic you're dealing with; I mean, it depends always on the person. But there used to be project offices really proud of your project, really interested in the topic, and who could really tell you something (…) I don't see that as a strong suit of the system right now (…) And we had luck with the one or the other project officer, but I really think that's luck. So, the system as it is now, I find it not very helpful (I20_SP)

Amidst this context, GEPIs reported changes in ways that lack consistency, with reporting mechanisms being viewed as procedural rather than substantive, and evaluation processes falling short of truly assessing the depth of institutional transformation.

> They [GEPIs] have to report back what they promised at the beginning of the project and if they achieved that at the end. And the point is: for a critical evaluator, that doesn't relate to transformational or institutional change at all; it just relates to effectiveness of a project. So, they report in a very instrumental way and reporting mechanisms don't stimulate, *per se*, that we have a very good overview of our institution's transformation (I9_GR)

The challenges in the evaluation process were further elaborated by I12_SP, who noted that *"there are a number of actors within the European Commission who do have a clear understanding of the structural change approach, and then many, many others who do not. This is completely reflected in everything, from how proposals are evaluated to how follow-ups are conducted"*. I12_SP criticises, for instance, the problematic focus on gender balance within project teams – particularly the perceived issue of insufficient male representation – and the reliance on quantitative KPIs for evaluations. Emphasising the essence of the matter, I12_SP argues that *"structural change is a matter of process, and it's necessary to define it as such and then look for intermediate results and impact, etc."*.

Still with attention to potential discrepancies between how GEP-implementing teams and the Commission's actors understand the structural change approach, I17_SP and I18_SP reminded that external experts with potentially varying understandings of what constitutes structural change are brought in to assess the project's progress, and that their interpretations may be stricter and not fully align with the broader, more inclusive definitions envisioned by project implementers:

> I remember that in [H2020 project acronym] – and this came quite late after the project was concluded – we received by the project officer a post-project review where they took the entire table of the changes that we reported in each organisation, and they were marking what they considered structural and what they didn't consider structural. And we came to an understanding that they had a more restrictive definition probably of what was to be considered structural and what was not (I17_SP)

To conclude this section, recommendations were put forth by I24_SP, who suggested that the Commission could enhance its support for GEPs by more effectively harnessing the wealth of expertise accumulated across various projects. This would involve establishing a systematic repository of knowledge and supporting communities of practice beyond individual project consortia. Additionally, the creation of a readily accessible database of experts was suggested as a particularly valuable resource for

countries lacking national-level support. By pooling the expertise from structural change projects, I24_SP believes this could significantly aid countries without such support mechanisms, to easily access experts to assist organisations in their GEP implementation efforts.

3. INTERSECTIONALITY (DIS)REGARDED

Before moving on to the concluding discussions of this chapter, we now examine the practical incorporation of intersectionality as an approach to institutional change. The data gathered from the GEARING-Roles case and observed sister projects unveil varied levels of incorporation and comprehension, highlighting the challenges of integrating such an approach into GEPs.

Looking at the case of GEARING-Roles, while intersectionality was part of the project proposal and overall actions, the depth of implementation of such an approach in institutional GEPs varied greatly across the participating organisations. This was attributed to the variation in demographic characteristics of each GEPI, as well as to the experiences – or lack of thereof – of the different teams in incorporating an intersectional lens to change-oriented interventions.

For example, Institutions 1, 3, and 6 encountered obstacles or deemed it less crucial to implement an intersectional approach, especially regarding race and ethnicity. This stance largely stems from the homogeneous composition of their institutional and wider social environments – with Institution 1 operating as a private Spanish university, Institution 3 as a Slovenian university, and Institution 6 as an Estonian RFO. While all three GEPs introduced a diversity approach, it was somewhat limited, focusing more on aspects like age and language. For instance, in Estonia, the relative lack of racial diversity rendered intersectionality less applicable to daily operations. Nevertheless, the inclusion of age considerations in grant applications illustrated an attempt to weave more inclusive practices.

In contrast, at Institutions 2, 4, and 5, the adoption of intersectionality as a transversal approach was more pronounced. This commitment is initially evident in Institution 2's GEP document, which explicitly incorporates considerations beyond gender into its goals. The institution's activities and analyses throughout the project paid special attention to the GEP's effects on various groups, particularly migrants. Similarly, Institution 4, located in the UK, benefited from more developed frameworks and the capacity to gather data through an intersectional lens. Institution 5, for its part, actively pursued feminist

and queer agendas within its GEP initiatives. This divergence underscores the varied degrees of engagement with intersectionality across the institutions, influenced by their unique contexts and the specific challenges and opportunities these contexts present.

Reflecting on the overall experience of GEARING-Roles, I6 reflected on the omnipresence of intersectionality in project materials and guidelines but questions the depth of its realisation, noting a tendency to default to a binary perspective on gender. The respondent emphasised the consortium's openness to expanding perspectives on intersectionality and the dedicated efforts to incorporate intersectional analysis and implementation at various levels. Yet, they also acknowledged the limitations set by the project's initial proposal and EU call in fully integrating intersectionality into the project's theoretical and methodological framing, suggesting that more explicit guidance and examples could enhance practice.

When it comes to the insights from the experiences of sister projects, the data reveals that they mirror that of GEARING-Roles in several aspects. These insights trace a trajectory from the FP7 projects to the later H2020 ones. Interviewees shared that during the FP7 era and the early stages of H2020 projects, intersectionality was largely absent from discussions surrounding GEPs: *"it was not really coming into the conversation around GEPs (…) there was an awareness among the consortium that not all women are the same, and that some are more disadvantaged than others, but we didn't write it into the programme as something to address"* (I16_SP; also, I11_SP, I14_SP; I15_SP, and I20_SP).

While mid-late H2020 projects began to consider intersectionality more transversally, as seen with GEARING-Roles, intersectional practices were skill rare and varied significantly across institutions, highly depending on the context, willingness, and capacity of different GEP teams (I13_SP; I20_SP; I22_SP; I23_SP; I24_SP).

Several challenges in incorporating an intersectional perspective into GEPs were identified. I21_SP's statement draws attention to the reality that GE issues have not yet been fully addressed, suggesting that the introduction of an effective intersectional approach might be premature at this stage:

> I think the problem or the issue of gender inequalities in research and innovation has not been solved yet. So, it's not something that "Well, despite all of these resources, we've got this now sorted, so we'll move on to intersectionality." I think the institutions are grappling with developing a sustainable and effective GEP, and I think that's a, a very big task in itself, and I think it's almost unrealistic to expect this kind of institutions to all of a sudden take on an effective intersectional approach. I think there's much more awareness within the different

> universities or organizations, and especially the research funding organisations that there needs to be more of an intersectional perspective, but I think that it will take time to develop something that will really affect change (I21_SP)

Following this line, many interviewees pointed out the complexity and lack of knowledge about how to translate it into effective practices (I10_SP; I11_SP; I12_SP; I20_SP; I21_SP; I22_SP; I23_SP; I24_SP).

> I think this idea of including intersectionality could be dangerous because it's very difficult to *do* intersectionality. Intersectionality has been very much developed in research activities, and here we have projects that *are not* research focused. So, it is really unclear what people have to do (…) And also, when people think they understand, they understand the parallel discrimination, but intersectionality is not having a parallel or a multiple discrimination, it's totally different (…) My perplexity is not about intersectionality, but the way it has been forced in a system that there has already difficulties in thinking about a binary perspective. Diversity is a science fiction, so with intersectionality we move to a parallel universe (I23_SP)

> I know that we all like to talk about the concept as a general concept, but when it comes to how you implement it actually, how do you adapt it? How can you make a continuous gender monitoring in your institution using also other categories? (…) In our institution, we try to do that. We combine gender with other categories, but we can do that because we are a very small institute, we are always only between 15 and 30 people, so you can do that very easily. It's interesting to take a look at who has care responsibilities, for instance (…) but also what kind of disciplinary background people have, what academic status people have, et cetera. Nevertheless, if you wanna do it on the largest scale, it'll be demanding (I20_SP)

This lack of knowledge is further exacerbated by the little data available from an intersectional perspective. Respondents refer to regulatory concerns as significant barriers to adopting an intersectional approach, with institutions struggling to collect relevant data due to privacy issues and national regulations (I11_SP; I15_SP; I17_SP; I20_SP).

Additionally, there appears to be a concern that prioritising intersectionality might inadvertently obscure gender issues, and conversely, that engaging with gender could overshadow the broader scope of other inequality causes:

> It's not happening, that's the simple question. In the projects that I see, I don't see anyone really doing it, like in a systematic manner (…) there's a fear on both sides in this particular instance that one initiative would be subsumed in the other. For example, the students mobilising around Black Lives Matter are afraid to cooperate with the structural change or the GEP implementing team because they would fall under the project and not be visible, and the same way around (I24_SP)

The concern over potential backlash, especially from anti-gender movements and criticism from influential stakeholders, is also underscored as a significant challenge. This

concern seems to be particularly acute when it comes to expanding the GE agenda to encompass a broader, more inclusive agenda that integrates intersectionality, as the case illustrated by I17_SP:

> I also see that several partners are facing resistances precisely when they try to introduce an intersectional approach (…) In one case in particular, there was a member of the National Parliament who issued an inquiry to a parliamentary commission to criticise a public research organisation making use of public funds to spread gender ideology in the academic world. This was clearly connected to the spread of anti-gender movements in the country. This was raised by external stakeholders, and influenced the internal discussion very heavily, "How far are you going with these topics? We need to stick to inequalities between men and women. Uh, this is the focus of what we are doing and you shouldn't go further", just to give you an impression. "Be satisfied with this". And then, of course, the partners want to know how much or how intensively we should continue pushing or how much we should risk blocking the few smaller steps that we could make in the meantime, while still being beginners in this field, so not having pretty much anything in place. And these are quite tough questions to be answered (I17_SP)

In response to this context, recommendations for future actions emerged. Key among these was the importance of raising awareness about intersectionality, acknowledging its complexity in the context of policy implementation. This entails educating change agents and stakeholders on the concept, while embracing the nuanced challenges it introduces in practical applications (I13_SP). Another recommendation was to ensure diversity within teams implementing GEPs, incorporating individuals with diverse traits to promote an intersectional perspective from within (I11_SP).

Adding to the discussion, I10_SP advocated for pilot initiatives and experimentation with various dimensions of intersectionality beyond legal discrimination variables (such as race and ethnicity), suggesting a need for mapping and practical work with intersectionality in institutional change projects including other relevant aspects to academia, like those related to language and care responsibilities.

Changing the focus to the need for an analysis of privilege, I12_SP emphasised the need for a shift in focus from those who suffer from inequality to those perpetuating it:

> To think that intersectionality is not a matter of vulnerability; it's a matter of power relations (...) And when I talk about privilege analysis, not only because it's a way to work on the issue of privileges with men – which is of course necessary (...) Dismantling privileges, understanding and dismantling them (…) I's easier to research the victims than tackling directly the centre of power, it's easier to surround the problem than addressing its root cause (…) And, of course, it's not only questioning privilege, but also developing policies that reduce them (I12_SP)

Finally, some interviewees called for more explicit guidance from the European Commission on implementing intersectionality in GEPs, highlighting the need for examples and best practices that can be adapted to different institutional contexts.

> I have the impression they (the European Commission) don't know, they don't have a concept of it and some of our colleagues who do have a concept of it you know how it started with multiple discriminations according to race, class and everything, that's just not implementable because universities don't gather data on ethnicity, religion, et cetera (I15_SP)

> With the additive model of inequality and the nine discrimination grounds, you will have the grounds listed, but if the policy does not necessarily work with the fact that specific vulnerable groups will face multiple forms of inequality that add up in, you know, or that makes or intersect in ways that needs to be taken into account, and we don't really see that. I think it's difficult for people to understand the concept; there will definitely be a need for the commission to develop guidance (I24_SP)

4. FINAL REMARKS

This chapter has focused on the definition of institutional change in the context of GEP implementation in academic organisations. It looked at how the concept was articulated to be translated into concrete actions in the context of GEARING-Roles, but also within other GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020. I explored mainly three points: first, the approaches used by different projects to establish an understanding of institutional change for the projects' scope; second, change agents' definitions of the notion of institutional change; and third, how institutional changes were reported by GEP-implementing partners to the European Commission.

By analysing how the concept of institutional change is articulated by those responsible for its practical implementation, I aimed to determine whether a shared understanding of the concept exists. In turn, examining the reporting process to the European Commission provided insights from two angles. Firstly, the reports submitted to the European Commission revealed how GEP teams defined institutional change, as these reports outlined the changes they claimed to have achieved. Secondly, considering the Commission's assessment of these reported actions offered further insight into the Commission's interpretation of what constitutes institutional change.

An initial analysis of the findings reveals that, when comparing FP7 and early H2020 projects to mid-late H2020 ones, a notable evolution in the development of GEP strategies is evident, marked by a transition from broad, undefined goals to more precise, actionable

plans. Such a progression is characterised by an iterative learning process, wherein initial understandings of GE – often confined to simplistic notions of numerical representation – gradually evolved into more sophisticated strategies to pursue institutional transformation through multiple approaches. This maturation process is reflective of a deeper engagement with the multifaceted nature of gender issues, acknowledging that effective GEPs must extend beyond surface-level changes to foster genuine systemic transformation.

When it comes to the processes adopted by GEP teams to establish their approaches to institutional change, during the early funding periods, it is evident that project consortia dedicated significant effort to developing strategies from the ground up, frequently drawing inspiration from international initiatives such as Athena SWAN and ADVANCE. However, with the creation of tools specifically tailored to the European context, notably the GEAR tool, subsequent projects have been able to build upon these prior foundations. Rather than reinventing the wheel, they have adapted and refined existing frameworks to suit their specific circumstances, streamlining the process of implementing GEPs.

This transition towards actions grounded in early consensus-building and strategic planning marks an increasing acknowledgement of the critical role of reflexive planning and the value of collective knowledge in driving successful transformations. This strategic orientation not only aims to anticipate potential obstacles but also to leverage lessons learned from past initiatives, thereby establishing more robust frameworks for GE. This evolution reflects a significant maturation in the field, moving towards practices that are more thoughtful, evidence-based, and enriched by accumulated experiences, setting the stage for more impactful achievements across divers institutional landscapes.

When it comes to how the notion of institutional change is articulated by those responsible for its practical implementation, the findings reveal different yet interconnected responses. In the context of GEARING-Roles, most respondents defined institutional change by associating it with the intervention areas typically addressed in GEPs, with special emphasis on those recommended in the GEAR tool, and provided operational articulations about the processes needed for enacting change (e.g., employing participatory approaches). Meanwhile, participants from other projects presented a more diverse range of responses that included both theoretical and practical insights. Overall, representatives from both GEARING-Roles and sister projects described institutional

change as encompassing both the tangible and intangible aspects of an organisation, such as its procedures, processes, values (both formal and informal), and institutional culture.

In this context, there undoubtedly exists what might be termed an "operational common basis" that change agents can leverage, which is mainly reliant on the provisions of European policies.[36] Nevertheless, a closer examination reveals considerable inconsistency in how various actors comprehend the idea of institutional change. As previously discussed in the scholarship (e.g., Ní Laoire et al., 2021), despite operating within a unified European policy framework, distinct differences arise based on the type of organisation (e.g., RPO versus RFO), disciplinary field, and contextual background, all of which significantly influence the development and execution of GEPs.

The empirical findings underscore a fundamental challenge in the interpretation of European policies on GE: translating broad, policy-level objectives into targeted, context-specific initiatives within academia. This challenge echoes FI's articulation of institutions as both structures and cultural entities, where formal and informal institutional rules are deeply intertwined with broader gendered social norms and dynamics (Krook & Mackay, 2011). In this regard, the experiences of GEARING-Roles and observed sister projects illustrate the nuanced processes through which policy ideas are internalised, adapted, and operationalised by change agents. The journey from policy to practice encapsulates a multifaceted engagement with the concept of institutional change, which involves a dynamic interplay between existing institutional norms, the agency of individuals pushing for change (and that of other institutional stakeholders, including resistant actors), and the overarching goals set forth by European policies.

This necessity for customisation of change interventions speaks to the core of the adaptive strategies employed by GEP teams. It acknowledges that a "one-size-fits-all" model is insufficient for addressing the nuanced and complex nature of institutional change. Instead, GEP teams are required to engage in a continuous process of assessment and adaptation, allowing their strategies to evolve in response to ongoing changes within their institutional environments and the broader socio-political landscape. The variation in approaches not only between different project consortia but also between individual GEP-implementing institutions illustrates the deeply individualised nature of these efforts, thus highlighting the importance of local knowledge and expertise in shaping effective interventions.

[36] Refer to Figure 3 for the current baseline depiction of institutional change in European R&I.

Notably, there is an expressed concern from Eastern European institutions regarding the fact that European policy frameworks have been predominantly shaped by Western and Northern experiences, arguing that such an approach may overlook the social, economic, and historical realities of other regions. This perceived imbalance contributes to a sense of exclusion and raises questions on the applicability and relevance of applying these models across diverse settings. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a strategy that not only acknowledges but actively engages diverse viewpoints and insights from all regions in the very development of new approaches, ensuring they are not merely viewed as "recipients" of universally established European models but are appreciated as core contributors in the creation of genuinely diverse and inclusive strategies for change.

These discussions remind us that "implementation" holds different meanings in various contexts (Ní Laoire et al., 2021). This contextual variability is precisely what hinders the direct and uniform translation of general action plans to the reality of distinct institutions, requiring the creation of tailored plans that can respond to the capacities and challenges encountered within concrete settings (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). In this context, the absence of a rigid definition of institutional change offers flexibility and encourages innovation, allowing for tailored approaches that can be more closely aligned with the specific needs, cultures, and challenges of individual organisations. This adaptability is particularly valuable when it concerns GE, where the historical, cultural, and structural contexts can vary significantly between institutions, even within the same country or sector.

Nevertheless, it is essential to recall that while offering a rich tapestry of strategies and outcomes, this variability also poses challenges for standardisation and comparability of efforts across different settings. It may complicate collaborative efforts, benchmarking, and the evaluation of overall progress. Without a consistent understanding, it becomes difficult to measure outcomes, ultimately leading to inefficiencies or the reinvention of strategies that may or may not have been successful elsewhere. Moreover, this ambiguity can also hinder the ability to secure support and buy-in from stakeholders who may be sceptical of initiatives that seem ill-defined or demonstrate inconsistent effects.

It is worth noting that, besides inherent organisational, disciplinary, and contextual differences, the lack of a shared definition of institutional change is also attributed by the change agents to the insufficient guidance from the European Commission. Despite resources like the GEAR tool being valuable operational aids, there persists a sentiment that the Commission does not fully delineate the overarching objectives of institutional

change initiatives. Policy descriptions often fail to provide clear and monitorable goals that accurately capture the nuances of institutional change *as a process*, thereby introducing a degree of uncertainty in both the planning and implementation stages of GE projects.

Added to this is the fact that the evaluation of change actions by the Commission is sometimes seen as inconsistent, further muddying the waters on what constitutes successful institutional change. This lack of clarity presents significant challenges for those leading transformative efforts, who find themselves in need of defining actionable and measurable objectives for achieving change within their institutions. Without a clear understanding of the realistically expected outcomes of change interventions, change agents often navigate a landscape where success criteria are ambiguous, complicating the task of devising effective, targeted strategies that can be recognised and validated by all stakeholders involved.

In the European context, where policies concerning GEPs in R&I are increasingly harmonised and yet applied to a broad spectrum of cultural, political, and institutional settings, establishing a more consistent understanding of institutional change within academia could be useful in ensuring a more uniform approach to progress. This is not to suggest a one-size-fits-all model, but rather to emphasise the need for a more comprehensive and critical examination of how policy ideas are framed and translated into practice in specific settings. As highlighted by Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019), "a difficult balance is needed to be found between flexibility and adaptation, on the one hand, and the need to outline a path and provide indications for action, on the other" (p. 324).

Analysing the findings of this research through the lens of complexity reveals that the cases examined conform with the parameters characterising complexity, as identified in previous literature: i) holistic view of institutional change; ii) multidimensional approach to power; iii) an understanding of institutional change as social change, with a focus on both structures and agency activation; iv) a balance between institutional change versus preparatory actions; v) the consideration of non-linearity and unpredictability; vi) the need to address the dual logic of academia – the organisational and the epistemic; and vii) context-sensitivity (refer to Section 2.1.2, Chapter 2). It thus positions initiatives implementing GEPs in academic organisations as complex social interventions within a complex system (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020). The discussion below navigates

through these parameters, offering insights into how they manifest within the research findings.

Firstly, the findings underscore the imperative for a holistic strategy in implementing GEPs, tackling various targets and facets within academia. This aligns with understanding gender inequality as an issue that permeates different aspects of institutional life and which is influenced by broader societal norms (Mackay et al., 2010). The research indicates that focusing exclusively on singular approaches, such as mentoring programmes or efforts to boost women's representation in leadership bodies, is insufficient. Looking at the GEARING-Roles GEPs, it is evident that all six documents incorporate actions that span across multiple approaches: "fix the women", "fix the numbers", "fix the institution", and "fix the knowledge". Likewise, insights from other sister projects indicate that such an approach is widespread.

Secondly, aligning with previous literature (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020), the GEARING-Roles case, alongside insights from related projects, validates the need for a multifaceted strategy – encompassing interpretive, symbolic, institutional, and operational dimensions – to address the complexity of institutional change. Effective interventions extend beyond altering formal regulations to engaging with the deep-seated cultural and symbolic underpinnings of gender inequalities. For example, efforts to enhance the visibility of women in STEM fields and dismantle stereotypes are pivotal in shifting symbolic perceptions, essential for fostering enduring cultural transformation.

As the third parameter characterising complexity, the need to focus concurrently on structural adjustments and agency activation emerged as a critical theme in both the GEARING-Roles case and sister projects. As the findings indicate, all GEP initiatives under observation took into consideration that substantial change is contingent not just on altering institutional structures but also on engaging the individuals and groups capable of championing and sustaining these changes. The identification and empowerment of internal change agents was highlighted as a core strategy by all respondents in this research, with the recognition that institutional actors play a pivotal role in shaping the institutional culture and conforming to existing structures. Our findings thus reaffirm what was previously argued by scholars such as Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) and Linková and Mergaert (2021) that institutional change unfolds through ongoing negotiation processes and dynamic interactions with institutional actors.

Fourthly, as effective change is not a monolithic process but rather a series of interconnected transformations that affect the organisation at multiple levels, it transcends mere procedural adjustments to include shifts in the organisational and systemic ethos and culture. Reflecting on our findings, a strategy employed by some GEPIs involves categorising actions into "structural/institutional change" and "preparatory" and seeking a balanced presence of both in their GEPs. As the findings have shown, this strategy helps delineate foundational changes from those actions that serve as stepping stones towards more significant transformations and enables a more nuanced approach to initiating change, providing a mechanism for GEP teams to strike a balance between achieving immediate, visible improvements with long-term, foundational shifts. Preparatory actions – such as awareness-raising and training – create the conditions necessary for fostering an inclusive culture. This, in turn, facilitates further structural changes, which may encompass policy overhauls, the adoption of gender-sensitive recruitment practices, or the creation of support frameworks for equality and diversity.

In the GEARING-Roles case, the analysis has revealed a relatively even distribution between institutional change and preparatory actions across all GEPs. However, a closer examination of the documents indicates certain areas where deeper institutional change seems to face more challenges. Notably, interventions addressing sexism and sexual harassment often fall into the preparatory action category. As Sangiuliano et al. (2019) argued, this tendency might signal an institutional resistance to engage in more decisive actions against such issues.

Maintaining a balance between different types of actions is imperative. An exclusive focus on actions labelled as "institutional change" may not only be impractical but also might neglect the transformative potential inherent in preparatory measures to lead to significant shifts over time. Furthermore, the mere presence of numerous "institutional change" actions within a GEP does not assure that their implementation will automatically result in meaningful change. The efficacy of these actions, once operationalised, is shaped by a myriad of factors, highlighting the intricate process of converting strategic intentions into concrete outcomes, as explored in greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

Fifthly, the findings also bring to light the non-linear and unpredictable trajectory of change projects, accentuating the need for adaptability and responsiveness from change agents. Many respondents noted that even promising initiatives could encounter unforeseen obstacles, while fortuitous opportunities for progress might unexpectedly

arise. Although these considerations appear to have been factored into the planning and design phases of change interventions, as complex social projects within a complex system, the actual implementation and resulting outcomes of change initiatives are often unpredictable. In this regard, further discussions will be developed in the next chapter, which focuses on the actual implementation of actions.

Sixthly, the need to address the dual logic of academia – the organisational and the epistemic – emerged as another significant factor in the complexity of institutional change. As noted in both the GEARING-Roles project and sister projects, GEPs are not only concerned with reforming organisational structures and practices (e.g., policies, recruitment, promotion criteria) but also with challenging the epistemic culture that shapes how knowledge is produced, valued, and disseminated. This dual logic requires that change initiatives consider not only the operational aspects of academia but also the deeper norms that underpin the academic system as a whole, especially those related to the ideals of academic excellence and meritocracy. In many cases, GEPs focus on shifting the culture of knowledge production by promoting gender-sensitive research practices, ensuring diverse representation in decision-making processes related to research funding, and critically evaluating the ways in which traditional academic metrics may disadvantage certain groups. However, the findings reveal that while organisational reforms are often the primary focus, there remains a gap in addressing the epistemic aspects of institutional change, suggesting that further efforts are needed to integrate these two dimensions more holistically within GEP strategies.

The seventh parameter characterising the complexity of institutional change is context-sensitivity plays a critical role in shaping how GEPs are designed and implemented. All respondents acknowledged that institutional change does not occur in a vacuum but is influenced by the specific socio-political, cultural, and organisational contexts in which it is embedded. The findings emphasise that GEPs must be adapted to align with the unique characteristics of each institution, recognising that what works in one context may not be applicable in another. This context-sensitivity extends beyond simple localisation of strategies; it requires a deep understanding of the institutional history, power dynamics, and cultural norms that shape how change is perceived and enacted. Moreover, the success of GEPs is often contingent on the ability of change agents to navigate these contextual factors, tailoring interventions to resonate with local actors while maintaining alignment with broader GE objectives.

Finally, this thesis proposes an extension to these initial seven parameters defining complexity, as outlined in the theoretical framework, by introducing an eight parameter that aligns with current policy priorities: the need to introduce intersectionality as a transversal lens to GEPs. This addition acknowledges the layered and multifaceted nature of gender inequality, underscoring the importance of addressing the intersecting dimensions of identity – such as race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status – that exacerbate experiences of discrimination within academia. By weaving intersectionality into the complexity framework, the approach to institutional change interventions becomes more comprehensive, accurately mirroring the varied experiences within academic settings.

It is worth noting that the inclusion of an intersectional perspective in GEPs has only recently become a policy requirement at the European level, with the requirement for "inclusive GEPs" becoming mandatory under Horizon Europe (2021-2027). Considering the case of GEARING-Roles, at the time the project was implemented, the intersectionality approach was not mandatory and transversal but rather considered "complementary to the standard approach" (Mergaert et al., 2016, p. 20). While GEPIs in GEARING-Roles did incorporate an intersectional approach in the development of project documents and GEP initiatives whenever possible, a systematic intersectional perspective in the strategies was not feasible, especially due to the national legal limitations that restrict the collection of certain data such as colour, race, and sexual orientation. Moreover, the findings indicate that the situation was similar in other sister projects, reflecting an overall limited practical application of an intersectional lens in GEPs across European academic organisations, in part due to a lack of knowledge and expertise on effectively incorporating intersectionality into these plans.

Integrating intersectionality as a fundamental component of complexity not only corresponds with the intricate and diverse nature of gender inequality but also meets the current focus of European policy. The significant gap in actionable strategies for embedding intersectionality within GEPs reflects a broader dilemma: the urgency of addressing gender inequality is undiminished, yet the inclusion of intersectionality requires more than just superficial acknowledgment. Academic institutions are thus tasked with the delicate task of harmonising these priorities, balancing the advancement of GE with the incorporation of intersectional considerations.

In conclusion, looking back to the research question that oriented these discussions – how is institutional change defined in the context of GEP implementation within

academic organisations? – the insights from both the GEARING-Roles project and change agents representing sister projects reveal that while the lack of a shared definition of institutional change poses challenges, it also offers opportunities for a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to GE efforts in academia. This reflects the inherent complexity of change projects, where diverse interpretations must be understood and embraced to enhance the adaptability of GEPs. However, this adaptability must be accompanied by a concerted effort to promote communication and learning across diverse contexts, alongside the establishment of a clear, shared overarching goal to ensure that progress is consistently monitored and aligned on a broader scale.

CHAPTER 6. CROSSING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN PLAN AND ACTUAL IMPLEMENTATION

The preceding chapter explored how the notion of institutional change is translated from policy to practice, with a specific focus on GEP planning and evaluation. The discussions revealed that defining institutional change involves significant complexities, both in the case study project and across the wider community of GEP-implementing projects, with inconsistencies emerging between different contextual settings and stakeholders. As previously argued, these inconsistencies and the challenges in establishing a common and systematic definition for institutional change may, at least in part, explain the gap between policy intentions and GEP outcomes. However, to fully understand why change processes may succeed or fail, it is essential to not only examine how GEPs are conceptualised but also to analyse their actual implementation and sustainability over the long haul.

This is precisely the scope of the present chapter. In the subsequent discussions, my aim is to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder effective GEP implementation (that is, the actual execution of GEP actions) and explore the conditions to sustain changes over time.

These discussions will contribute to addressing Research Question 2: “What are the main facilitators and barriers for promoting institutional change through GEPs in academic organisations?” and Research Question 3: “What factors influence the long-term sustainability of institutional changes promoted by GEPs in academic organisations?”. To guide these explorations, the following sub-questions are considered:

- (RQ2) What factors contribute to the effective implementation of GEPs?
- (RQ2) What are the primary institutional barriers that hinder the effective execution of change processes?
- (RQ2) What strategies have been identified as effective in overcoming these barriers?
- (RQ3) How is sustainability planning integrated into GEP processes?
- (RQ3) What factors determine or condition the long-term sustainability of these changes?

I structure this chapter into three sections. Section 1 delves into the GEP implementation processes of the GEARING-Roles case study. I begin by examining the conditions for promoting effective institutional change, verifying what factors change agents at each implementing institution identify as crucial for effective GEP implementation. I then explore manifestations of resistance in the GEP-implementing organisations, on the one hand, and strategies employed by change agents to counteract resistance, on the other.

In Section 2, I consider the factors identified in the previous section to explore their role in sustaining changes over time. Here, I broaden the scope of the analysis by incorporating insights from both the GEARING-Roles change agents and those involved in other GEP-implementing projects. I examine how different factors either contribute or hinder the sustainability of achieved changes. Additionally, I provide a practical perspective by detailing strategies identified by change agents to sustain changes.

In Section 3, I conclude this chapter by discussing how the findings from the GEARING-Roles case study and other sister projects align with and contribute to the broader body of literature.

1. IMPLEMENTING GEPS: FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS WITHIN THE GEARING-ROLES INSTITUTIONS

This section examines the key conditions for effective GEP implementation identified in the GEARING-Roles implementing organisations, as well as the challenges and resistances faced by each and the strategies employed to overcome them. The findings are initially presented by institution, forming the basis for a subsequent collective discussion.

For each institution, I begin by exploring the conditions for effective GEP implementation, identifying key facilitating factors related to structural, processual, agency, and transversal elements, as outlined in our theoretical framework and compiled in Table 4.

Next, I address the challenges and resistances faced at each institution. Precisely, I identify: (i) the forms of resistance (e.g., denial of the need for change, policy inaction); (ii) resistant actors;[37] (iii) types of resistance (individual, group, or institutional; explicit

[37] Notably, following Mergaert and Lombardo (2014), as manifestations of resistance by key stakeholders such as leadership members are particularly significant due to their visibility and influence on the broader

or implicit); and (iv) the factors enabling resistance. Additionally, to minimise the risk of misrecognising or misidentifying resistances, I follow Clavero and Galligan's (2020) recommendation and trace identified resistances back to specific gendered institutional rules. To enhance visualisation, at the conclusion of each institution's sub-section on resistance, I adapt tables from Tildesley et al. (2022) and Verge et al. (2018) to provide a concise summary of the data on resistance. The categories within these tables reflect key aspects identified in our theoretical framework (i.e., the forms, actors, types, gendered institutional norms, and enabling factors of resistance). This structured approach allows for a clear comparison across institutions and highlights patterns or unique challenges within each context.

At the conclusion of each institution's section, I examine the strategies utilised by the various GEP teams to address and counteract the resistance they encountered.

1.1 INSTITUTION 1

1.1.1 Conditions for change at Institution 1

According to the respondents representing Institution 1, the main facilitating factors for effective GEP implementation were structural aspects: the supportive national legal framework mandating GEPs in all Spanish universities and the resources provided by participation in the GEARING-Roles project, coupled with the financial incentives from the Basque Government for equality-related actions. I2_GR affirmed, *"without this legal obligation on GEPs and the political incentives by the Basque Government to fund actions related to the GEP, the institutional attitude would be radically different"*.

As the national legal framework is concerned, Institution 1 *"is highly compliant with the established legal framework. Therefore, if the legal framework favours equality principles, the university will assume responsibility, whether it believes in them or not"* (I1_GR). Based on participant observation, it was evident that the supportive national legal framework played a role in helping institutional leadership recognise that structural inequalities, such as the gender pay gap, are not isolated to their institution but also part of broader societal problems. As could be seen during participant observation, this perspective helped ease resistance that was initially rooted in the sentiment of "this does not happen here".

institutional community, resistance exhibited by these individuals will be categorised as "institutional" rather than "individual".

In addition to the national legal framework and the financial support, the participation of Institution 1 in GEARING-Roles also enhanced the institution's accountability for GE. The obligation to comply with the commitments required to secure the financial incentives and periodically report progress to the European Commission was considered crucial for ensuring the effective implementation of the GEP (I1_GR; I2_GR).

Regarding resources, Institution 1 benefited from funding from both GEARING-Roles and incentives provided by the Basque Government. The latter came through "programme-contracts" signed between the university and the regional government, which offered annual funds to support equality-related activities. While an Equality Unit was already present at the university before its participation in GEARING-Roles, with this increased financial support, it became feasible to develop a significantly more robust team by hiring personnel with dedicated responsibilities for GE. Precisely, before GEARING-Roles, the Equality Unit consisted of just one person – the Head of the Unit. Participation in the project enabled the hiring of a project manager and an assistant researcher, who contributed to consortium-level project activities and institutional GEP efforts. Additionally, other institutional actors who engaged in GEP activities were appropriately compensated for their contributions. As I1_GR articulated, *"this has been crucial because the unit was under-resourced (…) its capacity for action was substantially limited; this is why the previous GEP was much more minimal"*.

In addition to such structural factors, agency-related aspects emerged as key facilitators at Institution 1, especially top-leadership support and bottom-up participation. Although leadership engagement in GEP implementation was not proactive, there was notable receptivity, particularly from key stakeholders on the Board of Directors and faculty deans (I1_GR; I2_GR). As I1_GR stated, *"clearly, [vice-rector's name] role has been key; while he has not been proactive in the sense of driving or promoting initiatives, he has been very supportive and has trusted what we are doing. He never questioned our efforts and always facilitated them (…) helping us reach the highest institutional layers"*. Simultaneously, I1_GR and I2_GR emphasised the significance of bottom-up participation as particularly effective in building trust and fostering a collaborative environment for the GEP progress. According to I2_GR, the core group acted as a driving and leading force, while an expanded group of actors (consisting of both administrative and academic staff) served as an honorary, legitimising element, promoting much more co-creative participation.

One relevant example of this bottom-up approach at Institution 1 was a pilot action to create self-tailored guidelines for integrating the gender perspective into teaching and research. Designed as a space for reflection and collective building, the initiative saw higher-than-expected community interest (over 60 participants from all university faculties). This high level of participation fostered active engagement and a sense of ownership among participants, prompting individual and collective reflection processes. Consequently, the group's efforts received official institutional recognition, validating their time and efforts, an outcome not initially anticipated.

Still looking at agency-related factors, in addition to leadership support and broad participation and buy-in, respondents from Institution 1 identified another crucial factor for the successful advancement of GEP activities: the social capital of the GEP coordinator. Her well-established professional trajectory and solid reputation, both within the institution and beyond, played a fundamental role in bringing GEP priorities to decision-making tables, enabling the influence of key stakeholders and gaining their support. I2_GR commented on this: *"at the end, her recognition is not just from the university but also reflected in her role as the former director of [institution's name] and her academic career. This makes her position indisputable (...) Without someone like her, I believe it would be much more difficult"*.

In addition to securing structural factors and internal agency activation, Institution 1's respondents also mentioned processual and transversal factors that contributed to the GEP progress. One key factor was the internal gender expertise of various university members – particularly academic staff – who acted as change agents support specific GEP activities, such as developing the guidelines for introducing the gender perspective into teaching and research, as described above. Their gender competences were highly beneficial in bringing together a range of skills and perspectives that facilitated the process through interdisciplinary collaborations, delivering internal training programmes, and leveraging their collective experience to facilitate internal advocacy and negotiation processes with key institutional gatekeepers.

Participatory techniques were also identified as crucial in fostering both leadership engagement and broad-based participation. Participatory activities promoted inclusive decision-making and open dialogue among diverse institutional stakeholders, effectively bridging gaps across different levels of the institution. It was evident through participant observation that, on the one hand, these activities helped leadership become more closely involved in the GEP process, alleviating concerns about the potentially "disruptive

feminist objectives". On the other hand, they provided other university actors with the space to openly discuss their perspectives on the priorities that should be embraced by the institution in terms of GE.

Further, the GEP team also leveraged synergies with other initiatives and external networks. Firstly, participation in the GEARING-Roles project integrated Institution 1 into a broader European community of academic organisations undergoing transformative processes toward GE. As reported in several observed events and project reports, this involvement provided a valuable space for learning and exchange, allowing the GEP team to share best practices, gain insights from other institutions, and refine their strategies based on collective experiences not only among the different partners of the consortium but also among sister projects. The visibility and credibility gained by framing the GEP under a European initiative helped to dismantle initial scepticism and potential resistance.

Moreover, engaging with national stakeholders, including other Spanish universities, research centres, the Quality Agency of the Basque University System, the Basque Institute for Women (Emakunde), and networks such as the Spanish Network of Gender Equality Units for University Excellence (RUIGEU), also enhanced the GEP team's efforts. As I1_GR noted, *"being part of networks and sharing a manifesto that wasn't signed just by our equality unit but by other many universities greatly helped to promote specific measures, because it was supported by a significant network of universities"*. This collective endorsement provided further legitimacy and momentum for GEP implementation, especially because it emphasised its priority at the national level.

Finally, in consideration of the need for change agents to negotiate with institutional gatekeepers and gain broad participation and buy-in, I2_GR recalled the importance of not only formal exchanges but also informal spaces:

> It isn't just the participatory dynamics during the formal part of meetings, but also the lunch organised afterward, the coffees we have, and the pastries brought to the meetings. Beyond the anecdote of 'bringing a cake to the table', having an informal space around a coffee or some pastries has, I believe, been fundamental in ensuring the design and implementation of the plan at the end (I2_GR)

Tracing the facilitators at Institution 1 back to the categories established by the broader literature, this is the overall picture:

Table 24. GEP facilitators at Institution 1, by category

Institution 1

Category	Facilitating factors
Structural	(national and European) Governance framework (external) Resources Structured, well-positioned, and stable GE body
Agency	Top-leadership support Bottom-up participation Social capital of change agents
Processual	Networks and synergies with other initiatives Participatory processes Informal negotiation spaces
Transversal	Gender competence Accountability system

Note: self-elaborated.

1.1.2 Challenges and resistance at Institution 1

Regarding challenges and resistance, Institution 1 encountered issues on multiple levels. First, concerns emerged about whether the facilitating conditions described earlier would remain in place following the conclusion of GEARING-Roles. Second, despite the presence of the necessary conditions for enacting change, resistance surfaced during the implementation of the GEP.

The primary concern related to the fact that, with the termination of European funding, the GEP would likely be scaled back due to limited resources. As I1_GR explained, *"without GEARING-Roles, the figure of project manager, who also led the GEP progress, does not exist, it disappears; at least a priori, it seems that there is no possibility to have a trained and skilled person with full dedication to the coordination and follow-up of equality actions"*. This highlights the ongoing challenge of securing sustainable support and resources for gender equality initiatives beyond the project's lifespan, as reliance on external funding introduces uncertainty regarding the long-term impact of GEP actions.

Another concern cantered around the lack of sufficient accountability mechanisms after the project's conclusion, both at the national and European levels. During the project, the institution was required to report on its progress, which provided a form of oversight and momentum for GEP initiatives. However, the absence of such mechanisms after the project's end risks undermining the continuity and effectiveness of these efforts. I1_GR explained: *"there will be a GEP because the [national] law mandates it, but we don't know what will be its scope and real impact"*.

As resistance is concerned, respondents stated that actions perceived as more transgressive encountered greater resistance (e.g., actions related to the pay gap), while those that were less ambitious faced less opposition (e.g., training and awareness campaigns) (I2_GR). Additionally, there was a marked reluctance to generate or apply measures that involved higher costs or the creation of stable structures, as well as actions perceived as *"going against the principles or values of the institution"* (I1_GR).

Generally, resistance was evident through the refusal to assume responsibility for GE actions and a lack of ownership of the process. Despite efforts to foster a bottom-up and participatory process, securing consistent engagement and creating ownership proved challenging, especially because the GEP was implemented at the college level: *"the fact that it is a comprehensive plan for the entire university raises questions such as: Who is responsible for it? Who oversees it? Who takes ownership? Who leads it? Who initiates this process?"* (I2_GR). The lack of clarity regarding the GEP's position within the university, coupled with the absence of institutional legitimisation of GE work, led to bureaucratic hurdles that hindered the implementation of actions and diminished the broader community's interest in engaging.

As reported by the GEP teams in follow-up meetings, challenges in engagement were sometimes connected to individual perceptions that GE actions are associated with a tyrannical imposition of so-called "gender ideology", combined with an assumption that GE has already been achieved. Arguments in this sense revolved around an "overexposure" of feminist ideas in the public opinion, resulting in a sense of "gender fatigue", which in turn leads to the trivialisation and banalisation of GE efforts.

As a result, responsibility for implementing actions largely fell on the GEP team, which led to further resistance from some individuals. As I1_GR declared, these individuals, despite not being actively engaged in the process, expressed concerns that *"it is always the same group behind equality actions. You need to sensitise more people and give voice to others"*. Instead of valuing the efforts of the GEP team, there appeared to be an attempt to dilute and dissolve the central group who had been working on GE issues, which might have been a strategy to weaken the group's influence (I2_GR).

At this point, it is important to note that while the GEP coordinator's social capital was undoubtedly beneficial for the GEP progress, resistance and personal attacks against her were also reported during the interviews and through the observation process. Instances were noted where her presence was perceived as a threat, or where individuals expressed "fatigue" towards what her efforts represented. In this context, the personal costs incurred

by those involved in the process, particularly the GEP coordinator, who defended the work and shielded the team from numerous setbacks, were significant and led to a sense of frustration and marginalisation. Nevertheless, this situation underscores a broader concern: it indicates a scenario where GE progress may overly depend on individual figures rather than being firmly rooted within the institution itself, thereby placing a burden on committed individuals and potentially undermining long-term efforts.

Additionally, engaging the student community also proved difficult at Institution 1. Interviews highlighted that the profile of the university is "quite homogeneous, upper class, and fundamentally Basque" (I1_GR), with "students less engaged with social movements" (I2_GR). The few feminist student groups within the university were reluctant to engage with GEP activities, as they perceived them as too closely aligned with the institutional logic. This reluctance reflects the disconnect between grassroots activism and feminist institutional activism, emphasising the importance of developing interventions really through participatory processes that allows an alignment of different perspectives and represents everyone.

Looking at the specific GEP dimensions at Institution 1, the primary areas facing resistance related to recruitment and promotion, leadership and decision-making, the wage gap, and gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

Concerning recruitment and promotion, actions addressing this area were not solely within the purview of the GEP team but rather depended on the human resources department and the Joint Commission for Equality. Notably, Spanish regulations mandating GEPs in universities require trade unions' participation in negotiations and registration of the document. During interviews and observed events, GEP team representatives noted that trade unions and the university administration frequently clashed on various issues beyond GE, which then hindered smooth negotiations of the GEP due to conflicts of interest (I1_GR; I2_GR). As trade unions exclusively focus on work conditions issues, conflicts emerged over the prioritisation of actions. For example, measures related to integrating the gender perspective in teaching and research, which were outside the trade union's primary interests, encountered difficulties in negotiations. As I1_GR explained, it appears that some actors within the trade unions used their role in GEP negotiations to pursue unrelated interests: *"at this moment, I think the trade unions see the opportunity that it is not possible to register the GEP without their approval to force the administration to provide more data concerning the salaries and promotion procedures for the administrative personnel"*.

Still concerning recruitment and promotion, resistances emerged at Institution 1 due to the prevalence of traditional notions of meritocracy and a high resistance to positive actions by institutional stakeholders. These traditional views often resulted in scepticism towards GE initiatives, with some stakeholders perceiving them as unfair advantages rather than necessary measures to address systemic inequalities. This resistance was particularly strong among senior faculty and administrators who believed that merit-based systems alone should determine recruitment and promotion decisions.

This situation was further reinforced by resistance to transparency in recruitment and promotion processes. Interviewees explained that *"the university considers that transparency creates a much worse atmosphere and social climate than keeping the results of a process hidden"* (I1_GR). Furthermore, *"there is tremendous secrecy around the recognition of merits at the university. Therefore, it is very difficult to define the institutional culture around meritocracy because we do not know what the institution rewards or does not reward"* (I2_GR). What is known is that promotion criteria at Institution 1 value seniority and the assumption of certain management roles, in addition to "alignment with institutional values", which are however intangible and difficult to gauge.

Looking at leadership and decision-making, resistance to challenging stereotypical gender roles in management styles was evident. There was a tendency to reproduce traditional management models, reflecting the cultural traits of an old Catholic institution that perpetuates rigid hierarchies and male power structures. While Institution 1 remains highly hierarchical, resisting change and the adoption of new management styles, it also *"endorses an Ignatian leadership model, which emphasises respect, human dignity, and active listening (...) that is, it shares many elements of equitable, equal, and fair leadership (...) However, the actual practice of leadership by some individuals in the institution remains as lip service and does not fully embody these principles"* (I1_GR).

Additionally, members of the Board of Directors manifested resistance towards measures to increase the representation of women in decision-making bodies. Resistance emerged especially from women, *"because some of them have taken the position that we are questioning their personal worth, and this happens with many successful women"* (I1_GR). This indicates an internalised adherence to traditional gender norms, where some successful women may feel that GE initiatives undermine their individual achievements.

Regarding actions addressing the wage gap, resistance emerged in the form of institutional inertia, manifested in delays and hesitations from departments outside the direct influence of the GEP team. While the GEP team actively worked to advance planned actions under this dimension, only one-third was completed during the GEP's lifespan. Specifically, an initial initiative was undertaken to define the different "categories" (roles) of staff to facilitate an adequate analysis of possible wage disparities among professionals with the same functions and responsibilities. However, measures that aimed to address the wage gap in practice were postponed and ultimately not implemented (I1_GR). Since these actions were not within the purview of the GEP team but dependent on the human resources department and the Joint Equality Commission, the GEP team had limited capacity to resolve these issues.

Finally, regarding gender-based violence and sexual harassment, even though Institution 1 had protocols in place to address such cases prior to their participation in GEARING-Roles, these documents were not easily accessible and were not properly disseminated, and a proper reporting structure was missing. Through the GEARING-Roles GEP, new measures were proposed, such as raising awareness and creating a more structured process for handling potential cases. However, partly due to the religious nature of the institution, which tries to avoid dealing with certain themes, the topic continued to be perceived as a "non-problem", with a widespread assumption that such incidents do not occur within the university. As reported in the observed meetings, proposed actions to create a contact point and structure reporting mechanisms were not implemented, and there remains a prevailing belief that not addressing cases is a way to protect the institution.

Table 25. Manifestations of resistance: Institution 1

Form of resistance	Example	Resistant actor(s)	Gendered informal rules	Type of resistance	Constraining factors
Denial of the need for change	Scepticism towards GE initiatives, particularly positive actions, perceived as unfair advantages	Senior faculty and administrators	Culture of individual responsibility; traditional merit-based systems	Institutional (explicit)	Deep-seated belief in traditional meritocratic principles
Denial of the need for change and policy inaction	Reproduction of traditional management models, even within an expressed leadership culture that favours equality	Senior administrators	Adherence to traditional male power structures	Institutional (implicit)	Cultural traits of a religious institution
Denial of the need for change and reactance	Resistance to measures to increase female representation in decision-making; GE actions perceived as undermining personal worth	Senior administrators, including women	Culture of individual responsibility; traditional merit-based systems	Institutional (explicit)	Internalised traditional gender roles
Denial of the need for change and selective enforcement	Measures for addressing gender-based violence and harassment not properly disseminated and weak reporting mechanisms	Decision-making bodies	Gender roles; GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Cultural traits of a religious institution
Refusal to assume responsibility	Lack of ownership and engagement in GE actions	Academic and administrative staff	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of clear responsibility and legitimisation of GE work

Inadequate resource allocation and selective enforcement	Reluctance to generate or apply measures involving financial investments or creating stable structures	Decision-making bodies	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of accountability systems
Policy inaction	Planned actions to address wage gap postponed and shift responsibility to third parties	Decision-making bodies and Joint Equality Commission	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of accountability systems
Active dismantling and bureaucratic hurdles	Use of GE negotiations to pursue unrelated interests, hindering smooth negotiations of the GEP and prioritisation of actions	Joint Equality Commission	Instrumental use of GE	Group (explicit)	Conflict of interests between feminist groups
Non-legitimisation of gender-related work	Undervaluing of GE work	Decision-making bodies	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Change claims alien to the hegemonic ideas of the institutional context
Non-legitimisation of gender-related work and trivialisation of GE	Dilution of GEP efforts and connection of feminist ideas with a supposed "gender ideology"	Academic and administrative staff	Prejudice, misinformation or lack of knowledge about gender or feminist theories and proposals.	Individual and group (explicit and implicit)	Conservative/anti-gender stances Lack of awareness and gender knowledge
Resistance to transparency	Opaque criteria for merit recognition	Decision-making bodies	Departmental autonomy; seniority rules	Institutional (implicit)	Organisational gendered subculture and hierarchies

Note: self-elaborated, drawing from Verge et al. (2018) and Tildesley et al. (2022)

1.1.3 Strategies to overcome resistance at Institution 1

In face of the resistances encountered, a multifaceted approach was employed to overcome resistance during the GEP implementation at Institution 1, combining internal reflections, incremental change, strategic communication, leveraging institutional reputation, and external validation.

Firstly, the GEP team adopted a structured reflection process to view potential resistances not merely as barriers but as opportunities for improvement and deeper engagement with the university community. This process began at the project consortium level, where discussions on resistance to institutional change took place among the different GEP teams involved in the project. These discussions then evolved into more focused debates on resistance at Institution 1. In practice, this involved the core team of supportive actors regularly meeting to identify resistances and anticipate potential barriers to implementing specific measures through participatory processes.

Together, the GEP team and supportive institutional actors at Institution 1 collaborated on a document that identified the various types of resistance arising within the university. They then subsequently developed an "Argumentarium", a tool designed to compile theoretical arguments to counter the resistance encountered during the implementation of the GEP, categorising these arguments based on the specific types of resistance. This proactive approach offered valuable insights for addressing concerns collectively and structuring strategies in an anticipated, well-organized manner, thereby strengthening the cohesion of the working team. As I1_GR explained, *"it was important to formalise these discussions within the core group, document them, and consciously consider the most feasible and beneficial ways to implement our interventions"*.

Further, to avoid and counteract resistance, an incremental change approach was adopted, recognising that a radical shift would be counterproductive in their context. Given the religious nature and conservative logic of Institution 1, there was evident fear regarding feminist ideas and distrustful regarding what the GEP would mean to the university at the start of its activities. This distrust often stemmed from a lack of understanding and a view of the GEP as a potential threat or contradiction to the university's identity and mission. A number of strategies were employed to address this issue. Firstly, the GEP team avoided highly radical feminist discourses that could provoke backlash and instead emphasised ongoing education and sensitisation efforts to slowly build support for GE initiatives. In practice, the strategy was to rely on *"the persistent drip of recurring discourse, continuous insistence, ongoing training, awareness-raising,*

and long-term actions in the same direction that manage to sensitise the entire institution to achieve change" (I2_GR).

In this context, strategic communication played a vital role alongside an incremental change approach. The GEP team worked to reduce fears and misconceptions about feminism and the GEP by aligning their demands with the institution's identity. Initially, the GEP was presented institutionally through the lens of social justice and equity, principles that align with the Ignatian values of the university. By framing their arguments in terms that resonate the institutional values, the GEP team was able to gradually mitigate the initial fear of feminist ideas, gaining trust and reducing resistance. As I1_GR declared: *"softening the discourse or finding common ground is a way to approach the institution and resistant individuals, showing them that you are not as threatening as they assumed, and that there are indeed points of agreement and elements that can benefit the organisation itself."*

Moreover, members of the Board of Directors were engaged in key meetings with the GEP team and the broader project consortium, where specific objectives of the project were presented and actions discussed. Their presence in such discussions helped dismantle initial fears of a "radical feminist discourse that could threaten the university's identity" (I2_GR) and fostered mutual understanding, thereby building alliances between the GEP team and leadership bodies. As a result, this approach opened the way for broader acceptance and support within the institutional community. Gradually, the effectiveness of this approach became evident. A notable example was the explicit adoption of feminist discourse by the university leadership, particularly in the inclusion of GE in the rector's public speeches against violence towards women, which marked a significant step forward, demonstrating a commitment to GE that had not been previously observed.

Further, evidence-based approaches were also employed to address resistance effectively. For example, after identifying resistance related to leadership parity indicators, the GEP team convened a meeting with the vice-rector to discuss these issues. In this meeting, data was presented in comparison to European-level benchmarks, and the team recalled the institution's initial commitments as part of the GEARING-Roles project. This approach positioned the university within a broader context and highlighted areas needing improvement through constructive dialogues, thereby fostering a more inclusive and cooperative environment for GEP implementation. Engaging in evidence-based discussions helped to depersonalise resistance by focusing on data and shared goals rather than individual opposition, thus enhancing the credibility and acceptance of the

GEP initiatives. Although it is challenging to determine the exact extent of the impact of such dialogues, it is noteworthy that a woman was elected as dean of social science faculty a short time after the meeting in question: *"It's difficult to talk about a direct cause-and-effect relationship, but the discourse does eventually take hold" (I1_GR).*

Furthermore, the GEP team also leveraged institutional reputation to motivate change at Institution 1. By highlighting successful initiatives at other universities, particularly Spanish and Jesuit institutions, they illustrated the tangible benefits and positive outcomes in institutions either within the same national context or sharing similar values. This approach not only touched upon the institution's objective of maintaining prestige but also provided a clear roadmap and inspiration for stakeholders. Additionally, by aligning examples from other institutions with the institution's values and mission, they reinforced the message that GE is not only the commitment of a few but also integral to their identity and success.

Similarly, participation in external networks, such as synergies with sister projects implementing GEPs, was instrumental in overcoming resistance. Hosting events within the framework of GEARING-Roles at Institution 1 helped demonstrate to the institution that GE measures were a priority at the European level. This external validation not only provided additional legitimacy and urgency to the GEP actions, but also inspired confidence and helped to counteract scepticism. Moreover, the presence of international speakers and attendees at these events underscored the importance of GE on a global scale, fostering a sense of pride and responsibility within Institution 1 to align with these broader trends. As noted by I2_GR, *"seeing other universities take these steps and succeed created a sense of urgency and legitimacy for our own efforts, making it harder for internal stakeholders to dismiss or resist the changes"*.

Situating the equality unit work within a wider community of GEP-implementing teams provided spaces for mutual recognition and collective empowerment, where formal and informal exchanges contributed significantly to legitimising and enhancing credibility of GE work. The project consortium represented a safe space for discussing challenges, sharing best practices, and offering mutual support, which was crucial for sustaining motivation and resilience, even against unfavourable circumstances especially during the Covid-19 crisis. As I1_GR noted, *"being part of the project consortium felt like having a safety net; we knew we weren't alone, and this mutual care and support made our work feel validated and less daunting. It was empowering to have colleagues*

to lean on and share the journey with, and this made our initiatives more persuasive and impactful" (I2_GR).

1.2 INSTITUTION 2

1.2.1 Conditions for change at Institution 2

As with Institution 1, structural factors were identified as the most critical for the effective implementation of the GEP at Institution 2. Foremost among these were the resources provided through participation in GEARING-Roles, which enabled significant progress that had previously been unattainable. Prior to the project, initial efforts to assess GE at the institution were had been conducted on a voluntary basis and by a small group of committed individuals. Earlier attempts to advance GE initiatives were fraught with strong resistance and mobilising financial resources was particularly challenging in the context of Portugal's economic crisis (I3_GR). The support from the project allowed for the formal recognition of working hours for those involved in GEP activities, ensuring they had the time and capacity to fully engage. It also provided essential technical resources and assistance, crucial for the effective implementation of GEP actions.

Further, the participation of Institution 2 in GEARING-Roles from 2019 to 2022 coincided with important changes in national legislation on gender-related issues. This national governance framework, coupled with European policy, was thus another crucial factor ensuring institutional commitment to the GEP. Precisely, at the national level, the creation of a State Secretariat for Citizenship and Equality in 2019 significantly raised visibility of GE issues and created a quota system for gender balance in decision-making bodies. As a result, Institution 2's Board of Directors achieved 50% female representation for the first time. In addition to that, changes in national legislation imposing mandatory paternity leave further supported GE efforts institutionally by emphasising the importance of co-responsibility at the national level. Added to this, European orientations were *"fundamental for people to finally accept the topic as relevant"* (I3_GR).

Together, national and European legislation and policies signalled the priority of these issues, thus helping create internal agency-related conditions for change, such as fostering leadership commitment. I3_GR noted, *"the GEP was approved under the leadership of a person who does not even consider the existence of gender inequality; however, they obey the law"*. The backing from these authoritative bodies provided external validation and pressure, serving as external accountability systems that reinforced institutional commitment and action. This external support made it difficult for internal stakeholders

to ignore or undermine GEP initiatives, thereby facilitating smoother implementation and greater institutional buy-in. As further noted by I3_GR, *"some resistant actors in leadership and influencing positions accept GEP activities because they know it will be assessed in the evaluation of the research unit"* (I3_GR).

Achieving support for the GEP also hinged on the social capital of the change agent responsible for its coordination, as *"it involves a lot of political work and influence"* (I3_GR). At Institution 2, the GEP coordinator's reputation within the institution and understanding of GE challenges were crucial in navigating the political landscape and garnering support for the GEP. Her position within the Scientific Council and her long-standing career within the institution provided her with the necessary legitimacy to effectively advocate for the GEP. In this regard, I3_GR commented how having a GEP coordinator at the top of her academic career and committed to GE projects without personal gain motivations can be beneficial: *"I am fully aware that even if someone is a great expert in gender equality issues, without recognition from the institution, and if their efforts are perceived as a career self-promotion strategy, nothing can be achieved"*.

Similar to Institution 1, at Institution 2, *"the easiest measures to implement were those directly dependent on the GEP team or institutional bodies where the team held more influence"* (I3_GR). Given the widespread unawareness of gender inequality in the context of Institution 2, fostering community-wide consciousness and collaboration was essential for initiating a change process that touched beyond the small group of individuals committed to GE. Awareness-raising and training initiatives were integral to gaining support from all institutional groups for the GEP. Extensive workshops, webinars, and distribution of toolkits helped educate staff and students about gender issues. Coupled with the development of gender competences for stakeholders to integrate the gender perspective into their functions, this approach was essential in changing mindsets, especially in the initial phase of GEP activities.

To enhance the reach of awareness raising efforts, the GEP team relied on the support of certain governance bodies. The endorsement of the GEP by the School Council and department heads legitimised the efforts and ensured continuity, even as leadership changed (I3_GR). For instance, distributing training offers through the official channels of the School Council resulted in higher attendance. Moreover, in the area of curriculum development, the collaboration of the Pedagogical Council was crucial. The body contributed in raising awareness among faculty about the relevance of including gender-related content in their courses, distributing a "Toolkit for Integrating Gender Sensitive

Approach into Research and Teaching" to guide faculty and recommending its implementation in course syllabuses. According to I3_GR, *"the GEP team alone could not have achieved these outcomes"*.

Finally, relying on a strong evidence-based process, which involved systematic data collection and monitoring, also proved a crucial factor for the success of the GEP at Institution 2. By demonstrating where the institution was lagging behind in relation to the commitments acquired, the GEP team was able to build acceptance over time. Regular monitoring and reporting of GEP progress provided tangible evidence of success and areas for improvement, making it harder for detractors to dismiss the initiatives. This evidence-based approach not only justified the need for the GEP but also showcased its positive impacts, thereby encouraging broader institutional support. Results from such an approach were seen, for instance, in that the Scientific Council now requires a well-founded justification when thesis defence boards do not meet a gender balance. Similar practices have been adopted for organising events at the institution and overseeing recruitment and promotion processes.

Here, it is worth noting that, while the collection of sex-disaggregated data on recruitment and promotion was initially conducted by the GEP team, this responsibility has since been transferred to the human resources department. In addition to serving as the basis for a monitoring system, this data is incorporated into the institutional annual equality report, reflecting a more integrated and sustained approach that maintains the information available for future consultations.

Table 26. GEP facilitators at Institution 2, by category

Institution 2	
Category	**Facilitating factors**
Structural	(national and European) Governance framework (external) Resources
Agency	Top-leadership support Social capital of change agents
Processual	Evidence-based approach
Transversal	Awareness raising Gender competence Monitoring system Accountability system

Note: self-elaborated.

1.2.2 Challenges and resistance at Institution 2

The major challenge faced at Institution 2 was a generalised denial of gender inequality. Many faculty and staff members believed that existing gender differences were natural and that the institution already operated on meritocratic principles. This belief made it difficult to initiate changes, as there was a lack of recognition of the need for GE measures. I3_GR argues, *"without that recognition, it is impossible to change values, rules, behaviours, or the way institutions operate"*. Additionally, the notion that "gender mainstreaming cannot be imposed and professors have academic freedom on course design" (observation notes) highlighted resistance from faculty who viewed initiatives as infringements on their professional autonomy. These arguments underscored a broader reluctance to embrace institutional changes perceived as externally imposed or misaligned with traditional merit-based values.

Resistance to the GEP at Institution 2 was also particularly pronounced among individuals in positions of power, including both men and women. Some argued that the gender imbalance at the institution was merely a reflection of broader societal inequalities, thus questioning the need for institutional intervention. A common sentiment was that "by creating and imposing a quota, you are imposing an inequality by over-representing women in management boards" (observation notes). This perspective framed GE measures as potentially unfair and counterproductive, reinforcing the *status quo* rather than challenging it.

The lack of institutional legitimisation of GE work further complicated the implementation process. The perception that equality-related activities were not valued within the scientific community deterred many from actively participating. Moreover, in a context where GE initiatives are seen as a threat to merit-based principles and unnecessary by individuals in leadership positions, the broader institutional community resisted in engaging in GEP activities, faced with fears of career repercussions: *"there is a perception that advocating for GE is a career risk, and people fear reprisal"* (I3_GR).

Looking at specific dimensions of the GEP, similar to what occurred at Institution 1, strong resistance emerged at Institution 2 regarding the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making positions, often justified by the argument that it contradicted merit-based principles. The national obligation to meet gender balance in decision-making bodies through quotas was thus implemented reluctantly and in minimal terms, "without a general belief in the benefits of its implementation" (observation notes). Similarly, explicit and implicit resistance emerged from actors in senior positions towards actions

aimed at recruitment and career progression, who perceived these initiatives as threats to established meritocratic norms and personal advancement.

Work-life balance measures encountered significant resistance from decision-makers, who were concerned these measures might be exploited for purposes other than intended. This resistance was exacerbated by the absence of an institutional culture that promotes co-responsibility. I3_GR highlighted instances where male colleagues expressed reluctance to take paternity leave due to concerns that it would *"disrupt team dynamics and interfere with the academic schedule"*. This situation reflects deeper cultural and institutional barriers to achieving genuine work-life balance in a way that does not consider care as an individual responsibility of women.

Table 27. Manifestations of resistance: Institution 2

Form of resistance	Example	Resistant actor(s)	Gendered informal rules	Type of resistance	Constraining factors
Denial of the need for change, reactance, and trivialisation of GE	Gender inequality dismissed as a non-issue at the institutional context; denial and hostility towards the topic; gender mainstreaming seen as an imposition	Senior faculty	Gender roles; culture of individual responsibility; traditional merit-based systems; academic freedom;	Individual (explicit)	Widespread unawareness of gender inequality; internalised traditional gender roles; change claims alien to the hegemonic ideas of the institutional context
Denial of the need for change and refusal to assume responsibility	Strong resistance to positive actions; GE initiatives viewed as threats to meritocracy and transparency; belief that time alone will fix inequalities	Senior administrators	Culture of individual responsibility; traditional merit-based systems	Institutional (implicit/ explicit)	Deep-seated belief in traditional meritocratic principles
Non-legitimisation of gender-related work	Undervaluing GE efforts by not providing it with due institutional recognition	Decision-makers	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Non-validation of GE work in the scientific culture
Refusal to assume responsibility and policy inaction	Poor implementation of work-life balance actions, perceived as being instrumentalised for other purposes	Decision-making bodies	Care as a women's issue	Institutional (implicit)	Neoliberal tendencies and internalised traditional gender roles
Policy inaction and superficial compliance and selective enforcement	Formal compliance with national legislation without cultural change. Fulfilling quotas reluctantly and in minimum terms	Decision-making bodies	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of accountability systems

Note: self-elaborated, drawing from Verge et al. (2018) and Tildesley et al. (2022)

1.2.3 Strategies to overcome resistance at Institution 2

The primary strategy to address resistance at Institution 2 involved strategic negotiations between the GEP coordinator and decision-makers. The GEP coordinator leveraged her extensive career and reputation to engage with stakeholders, relying heavily on informal spaces and personal relationships of trust to build support for the GEP. Through informal interactions, such as casual meetings and social gatherings, it was possible to foster a more receptive environment for GEP activities. At this point, it is important to note that while this strategy proved useful, over-reliance on a few individuals to advance the GE agenda, as also observed at Institution 1, may indicate a lack of broader institutional commitment and engagement, potentially mitigating long-term results. At times, this individual dependence resulted in the overburdening of those committed agents, placing undue pressure on them.

Engaging men in GE initiatives was identified as another effective approach to mitigate resistance at Institution 2. Efforts were made to involve male staff members as allies, leveraging personal relationships to gain support. This informal and behind-the-scenes approach proved effective in building a coalition of supporters who could influence broader institutional attitudes towards GE, thereby allowing the GEP team to address some of the gender biases and resistance more effectively (I3_GR).

Finally, increasing the visibility of the GEP and its outcomes was another key strategy for counteracting resistance. Publicising the plan and its results helped to keep GE on the institutional agenda and ensured continuous awareness among stakeholders. This included sharing successes and progress reports through official channels, organising events, and highlighting the achievements of the GEP in various forums. This visibility helped normalise GE initiatives within the institution and demonstrated their alignment with institutional goals and values.

1.3 INSTITUTION 3

1.3.1 Conditions for change at Institution 3

Unlike Institutions 1 and 2, Institution 3 lacked a robust national governance framework for GEP implementation. Institution 3 implemented its GEP within a context where GE initiatives were not widely established at the Slovenian national level, and the institution itself was in the early stages of addressing these issues. While national resolutions addressing gender inequality in academia were in place during the GEP implementation at Institution 3, these were considered soft law rather than legally binding

instruments, meaning that they influenced and guided policy-making and institutional practices without imposing mandatory compliance. In this context, participation in the GEARING-Roles project was crucial as it provided direct pressure at the European level and the necessary resources to put structured measures in place.

Departing from a context where GEPs were unusual, the GEP team relied on a strategy that placed a strong focus on raising awareness across the institutional community, combining both top-down and bottom-up approaches. For Institution 3, awareness raising was not only about increasing individual recognition of gender inequalities within the institution but also progressively shifting the institutional culture; *"it was more than that, because it could lead to other actions (…) Because when people are aware, they are open and agreeing with and willing to work on that"* (I4_GR). A significant activity implemented under Institution 3's GEP was the "Days of Gender Equality" initiative. It consisted of a large series of events, including talks, round tables, lectures, presentations of publications, and research projects, involving the various departments within the faculty. The aim was to showcase the diversity of content and methodology across the faculty's many academic disciplines. Due to high participation and positive reception, this initiative has become an annual event, extending beyond the European project and becoming a core institutional practice.

The successful implementation of the GEP at Institution 3 was also significantly facilitated by top-down support. I4_GR described that at the early stages of implementation, the GEP team was aware that without making decision-makers a part of the change process, activities would not succeed. They thus strategically gathered to identify *"key stakeholders with whom to cooperate to make the changes sustainable and made them as an institutional change"* (I4_GR). This support was essential in ensuring that the GEP was adopted as an institutional policy rather than being viewed as an external project initiative. To secure continuous support and engagement from leadership, the GEP team organised capacity-building events to enhance the knowledge of high-profile stakeholders on gender-related topics. By raising their awareness and equipping them with gender competences, the team fostered a sense of ownership in the implementation of GEP initiatives. As a result, *"the management of the faculty accepted and integrated the GEP proposals as their own (…) the ownership of these ideas as their own ideas and now own plans"* (I4_GR).

Combined with top-leadership support, a bottom-up approach was employed through the establishment of three working groups for GEP implementation, each focusing on

different dimensions of the GEP. These groups were composed of members from various departments within the faculty, including academic and support staff, students, and managers, and formed part of the Quality Assurance Committee at the faculty. They collaborated within their respective groups but also actively engaged the broader community in various GEP activities.

For instance, the group responsible for "gender in curricula and research" conducted focus groups with department heads to gather viewpoints and evaluate the feasibility of integrating the gender dimension into actual practices in curricula and research. Based on the gathered information, guidelines were drafted to aid departments in these efforts, and co-creative and participatory sessions were used to involve the pedagogical staff, students and researchers to discuss the practice of recommendations. Additionally, focus groups and surveys engaged the broader institutional community in prioritising actions in the "work-life balance" dimension. For example, a priority list for institutional policy changes was created based on survey results to improve the conditions for young scholars with small children, establishing a "parent room" at the institution, organising child care on faculty premises, and approving a shorter working day to allow for breastfeeding.

The student community was also actively included in these participatory processes. Students cooperated in developing the GEP from the outset, thereby enhancing the integration of diverse perspectives and experiences and fostering a more holistic approach to activities. Students with a keen interest in gender issues joined the working groups for GEP implementation, mainly focusing on gender in the study process, gender in research, and addressing sexual and other types of violence and harassment. They also participated in the "Days of Gender Equality" events and conducted a questionnaire on GE in the study process at the institution, providing insights that supplemented departmental surveys and informed future activities.

These inclusive and participatory processes contributed to Institution 3 in fostering a sense of shared responsibility across the institution and allowed for community discussions to be translated into material actions that reached decision-making levels.

Table 28. GEP facilitators at Institution 3, by category

Institution 3	
Category	**Facilitating factors**
Structural	(European) governance framework (external) Resources

Agency	Top-leadership support Bottom-up participation and buy-in
Processual	Participatory processes
Transversal	Awareness raising Gender competence

Note: self-elaborated.

1.3.2 Challenges and resistance at Institution 3

Within a broader national political context *"facing the reinstitution of gender roles"* (I4_GR) by right-wing conservative governmental leaders, addressing GE issues institutionally was primarily challenged by the lack of resources and the absence of a supportive national governance framework.

I4_GR stated that *"the lack of resources is, of course, the main problem"*, highlighting that, as a State-funded institution, the faculty is unable to allocate substantial human or financial resources for GEP implementation. While the GEP examined in this thesis was supported by European project funds, therefore covering most costs, the GEP team at Institution 3 expressed concerns about securing sustainable support and integrating these initiatives into the institution's long-term strategies.

The absence of comprehensive national legislation on gender mainstreaming in the R&I sector at the time of GEP implementation posed another challenge. Slovenia lacked specific legislative support with well-defined objectives and indicators, thereby complicating the institutionalisation of GE measures: *"there are only general wishes regarding gender mainstreaming in the field of education, but these are only at the really general level"* (I4_GR). As previously noted, in the absence of a robust national regulatory framework, the European policy framework played a crucial role in highlighting the importance of addressing these issues.

In addition to the lack of resources and a supportive national framework, obstacles in establishing a functional database for collecting and evaluating GE data also arose at Institution 3. Resistance from support services and the rectorate in mapping common fields of data collection at the college level made it difficult for those implementing the GEP to establish a consistent data collection approach. The GEP team noted that, while they managed to gather the necessary data for the faculty, they lacked official institutional support, relying instead on voluntary assistance. Again, this limited structure raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of data collection efforts.

In addition to these factors, participant observation revealed that resistance at Institution 3 was evidenced by the leadership's "lack of time" to engage in the implementation of actions consistently. Although the leadership expressed support for the GEP, support was predominantly passive and active participation was limited.

Looking precisely at actions aimed at integrating a gender perspective into curricula and research, it was reported that the willingness to implement changes depended largely on individual interests. This resulted in selective and/or superficial compliance with measures, often limited to the creation of guidelines and recommendations that were not consistently followed by an actual shift in academic practices, revealing a "problem of discrepancy between sensitivity and implementation in practice" (observation notes). This limited engagement was often attributed to factors such as gender fatigue and Zoom fatigue, alongside the realisation by many academics that participating in the process would necessitate additional learning—an effort seen as both unacknowledged and burdensome. Furthermore, several departments explicitly stated that *"there was no need for the introduction of the courses on gender"* (observation notes).

Finally, as with Institutions 1 and 2, the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on in-person contact significantly limited the GEP team's ability to utilise informal spaces for negotiating with relevant stakeholders and engaging a broader range of actors in GEP actions. Consequently, a significant portion of the tasks fell to the GEP coordinator alone, which was described as *"a kind of a burden"* (I4_GR).

Table 29. Manifestations of resistance: Institution 3

Form of resistance	Example	Resistant actor(s)	Gendered informal rules	Type of resistance	Constraining factors
Inadequate resource allocation	Lack of resources for implementing GE initiatives; reliance on voluntary assistance	Decision-making bodies	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of comprehensive national legislation; political context of reinstitution of traditional gender roles; lack of accountability systems
Refusal to accept responsibility, superficial compliance, and policy inaction	Leadership's "lack of time" to engage in GEP implementation; passive support without active engagement in implementation	Senior administrators	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Individual interests dictating engagement; non-validation of GE work in the scientific culture
Refusal to accept responsibility and superficial compliance, and selective enforcement	Discrepancy between sensitivity and engaging in implementation in practice	Academic staff	GE as a non-priority	Individual (implicit)	Individual interests dictating engagement; gender fatigue; perception of additional learning on GE unrecognised and burdensome; non-validation of GE work in the scientific culture
Denial of the need for change and trivialisation of GE	Unrecognition of the need for installing courses on gender.	Academic staff	Gender roles; androcentric notions of knowledge production	Individual (explicit)	Unawareness of gender inequality issues; non-validation of GE work in the scientific culture

Note: self-elaborated, drawing from Verge et al. (2018) and Tildesley et al. (2022)

1.3.3 Strategies to overcome resistance at Institution 3

The challenges reported by the Institution 3 are typical of institutions with limited experience in implementing GEPs, especially those in national contexts lacking a robust regulatory framework on these issues. The GEP team employed several strategies to overcome these challenges and resistance. These included leveraging internal networks to benefit from the support of committed groups, creating synergies with external networks, strategically planning applications for other GE-related European projects, and increasing the visibility of the faculty GEP within the college-level context.

Precisely, the GEP team found significant support from student groups and associations, as well as student representatives in decision-making bodies. This internal support was crucial in fostering a sense of pressure from the younger generation at the institution, providing insights and viewpoints that made the initiatives adopted much more comprehensive, in a way that would not have been possible without their direct involvement. At an external level, in addition to relying on the support of the GEARING-Roles consortium, the GEP team collaborated mainly with local NGOs and the national Commission for Equal Opportunities in Science at the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (internal report – source owned by the author). These collaborations provided valuable resources, expertise, and advocacy support, helping to enhance the implementation of the GEP initiatives internally.

Further, as a means to keep an international network alive and avoid the lack of resource allocation after the termination of the GEARING-Roles project, the team planned to engage in other European projects. For Institution 3, continuing to participate in European-funded projects would mean building a sustainable base to support long-term efforts, while also providing opportunities to further develop their expertise and expand their network (internal report – source owned by the author).

Finally, a strategy to increase institutional commitment in the long-term was to make the faculty GEP visible at the college level so that it could be integrated into broader institutional policies and practices. This involved presenting their findings and progress at college-wide meetings, organising events and workshops for the entire institutional community, and engaging in continuous dialogue with decision-makers (internal report – source owned by the author).

1.4 INSTITUTION 4

1.4.1 Conditions for change at Institution 4

In the UK context, the GEP process at Institution 4 exhibited distinctive characteristics compared to the other implementing organisations, particularly because it was integrated into the institution's application for renewing its Athena SWAN award.

While the UK does not have national regulations mandating GEPs in the R&I sector, widespread engagement with the Athena SWAN Charter acts as an indirect forcing mechanism. At Institution 4, engagement with Athena SWAN ensured that GE was embedded into institutional structures and strategic documents even before its participation in GEARING-Roles. Beyond the Athena SWAN Charter, the institution was also engaged with the Race Equality Charter. Furthermore, it counted with the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Advisory Group, and the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice, which provided in-house EDI expertise.

In this context, engagement with Athena SWAN was reported as the primary accountability mechanism for advancing GE, crucial for securing ongoing institutional commitment. Given that nearly all institutions in the UK now have action plans linked to the Athena SWAN award, it serves as a crucial framework for ensuring continuous progress in GE initiatives. In this context, the award not only enhances commitment but also provides a structured approach to implementing and monitoring GE strategies across the institutions.

Institution 4's engagement with Athena SWAN played a pivotal role in ensuring continuous involvement of senior leadership and management in the GEP process. While the GEP was developed and coordinated by the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice, the responsibility for its implementation was shared across the institution, with strong support from senior leadership and faculty stakeholders, including Athena SWAN's Committees and Self-Assessment teams. Regular meetings brought together senior human resources representatives, EDI specialists, and representatives from both the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice and each of the university's faculties, ensuring a blend of top-down and bottom-up approaches. In this context, the dedicated GE advisor within the human resources department played a crucial role. With extensive experience in GE initiatives and a deep understanding of the institution, the advisor facilitated smoother coordination between departments and ensured alignment with institutional policies.

This inclusive approach was complemented by a strong emphasis on data, with *"data monitoring and evaluation [being] at the core of the evidence-based approach"* (I5_GR). An evidence-based process was indeed a dedicated dimension of Institution 4's GEP, with a working group being specifically dedicated to it. It was institutionalised through the creation of the EDI Analyst position – responsible for producing annual and *ad hoc* data supporting all university reporting on gender and other equality grounds (I5_GR). Analytical work and data system reviews, including data linkages, were carried out by the human resources information and processes advisor, the university's EDI Advisor, and gender/statistics experts from the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice. This groundwork underpinned further analyses, such as gender pay gap and promotions data, and prepared reports for the annual university-wide EDI report and the forthcoming Athena SWAN submission.

Further, since previous GE activities at Institution 4 primarily focused on meeting Athena SWAN requirements – which did not cover the "gender in curricula and research" dimension – with participation in GEARING-Roles, the institution made concerted efforts to raise awareness, build capacity, and engage the university community on these specific issues. Precisely, a mandatory training programme on how to include the gender dimension into research was established for all new staff with a research role. The programme served as both a strategy to raise awareness and build capacity: *"these sessions raise awareness of the need to include a gender and diversity lens in research, not only to produce better science, but also to respond to the increased demands by national and international research funding organisations"* (I5_GR).

Additionally, an internal gender research network was created, chaired by the Associate Dean for Research and Knowledge Exchange of the GEP leading faculty, and supported by a dedicated part-time administrator. With participants including women professors, senior lecturers, research fellows, and PhD students, this network fostered cross-disciplinary collaboration among researchers and practitioners working on EDI themes across the university (internal report – source owned by the author).

Finally, external networks were leveraged to expand the scope of institutional actions and facilitate knowledge exchange. As I5_GR described, participating as a GEP-implementing institution in the GEARING-Roles itself *"contributed to learning from other institutions throughout Europe"*. Likewise, participating in the pilot survey for the H2020 UniSAFE project ("Gender-based violence and institutional responses: Building

a knowledge base and operational tools to make universities and research organisations safe") further situated the institution within the European community.

Table 30. GEP facilitators at Institution 4, by category

Institution 4	
Category	**Facilitating factors**
Structural	Structured, well-positioned, and stable GE body GE embedded in existing structures and strategic documents
Agency	Top-leadership support Bottom-up participation Skilled change agents with a formal GE mandate
Processual	Networks and synergies with other initiatives Participatory processes Evidence-based approach Public commitment to GE
Transversal	Awareness and gender/EDI competence Accountability system

Note: self-elaborated.

1.4.2 Challenges and resistance at Institution 4

Despite being the institution with the most experience and strongest background in institutional commitment to GE, Institution 4 faced significant challenges, including resistance, during the implementation of its GEP. A major obstacle was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which diverted senior management's focus towards emergency responses, often relegating equality and diversity issues to a lower priority. Although the pandemic affected all observed GEP-implementing institutions (as considered further in this chapter), the particularly strict restrictions in the UK significantly hindered progress, as the prolonged absence of physical presence disrupted key initiatives.

While the GEP team had access to the broader EDI units and management departments at the university, they lacked horizontal engagement with the broader institutional community. I5_GR argues, *"I suspect that many, many people in the university haven't heard anything about the GEARING project. It's not on their radar at all because we haven't been able to physically be there"*. For example, although the student communities were initially planned to be active stakeholders in GEP activities, this became unattainable due to the lack of on-campus life. Even among those who were aware of the project, *"they know it's there, they know it exists, but they take it for granted and they don't really quite understand"* (I5_GR). In this context, when events were organised,

"attendance was a disaster" (I5_GR), and the inability to foster a sense of community and engagement hindered the project's overall impact at Institution 4.

It is important to note, however, that while the pandemic was indeed a hindering factor in GEP implementation at Institution 4, I5_GR remarked that *"we have always struggled to include GE on the agenda, so nothing has changed there; the pandemic is just another parameter in this"*. The respondent raised concerns that the initiatives usually taken at Institution 4 to advance GE have historically focused largely on achieving numerical representation, rather than tacking deeper, structural changes.

> "[Institution 4] is quite progressive just when it comes to GE and it was very known for this (…) it was regarded for a long time as just one of the kinds of institutions doing it very well. It was ahead of its time when it came to Athena SWAN, but I don't think it is anymore. And I don't think they've realised that; I think they just think: Oh, we do so well, we have 46% women professors all time (…) And they don't realise the agenda has shifted. They don't realise what else needs to be done." (I5_GR)

In the specific context of the observed GEP, the simultaneous implementation of the GEP for both the GEARING-Roles project and Athena SWAN created operational ambiguity. The overlapping objectives and lack of coordination between the initiatives undermined the effectiveness of the GEP actions, as I5_GR remarked: *"we're implementing actions onto a GEP, looking at another action [Athena SWAN], which is supposed to be the same with overlapping, but different set of actions with just no idea of how the responsibility is shifting or no real allocation of this"*. This lack of clarity in roles and coordination resulted in inefficiencies, making it difficult to streamline efforts and fully leverage the potential of either initiative.

In addition to this lack of coordination and underdeveloped understanding of institutional change as more than just numerical representation, I5_GR also highlighted a sense of institutional inertia in actually implementing GE actions, despite the apparently genuine commitment of senior management and key stakeholders. While the rhetoric emphasised the importance of equality work, but actions were frequently postponed: *"the problem we have with [Institution 4] is that (…) nobody is saying gender requests are not important; it's just that people keep saying it's really the most important thing, but it's their only words, not actions; they're just not there, it's empty words"* (I5_GR).

In this context, (financial and human) resourcing also posed a problem. I5_GR recalled that formal institutional commitment was not followed by the necessary allocation of resources to ensure effective implementation, which in turn undermined the potential impact of the initiatives, further highlighting a disconnect between the institution's stated

priorities and its practical support. Although the GEARING-Roles project funded some initiatives, there were often insufficient financial and other resources to support the full implementation of actions, leading to delays and inefficiencies, especially during staff turnover or absences.

As was the case with Institutions 1 and 2, Institution 4 exhibited a heavy reliance on a few key individuals. For example, I5_GR commented on the limitations of depending so extensively on the GE advisor, stating, *"she's very experienced and very knowledgeable, very engaged. So, the problem is that one person like this cannot just do it all"* (I5_GR). While the GE advisor had access to various management departments and those related to diversity and inclusion issues, such as the unit in charge of racial issues, her reach did extend horizontally across all faculty departments. This limited the GEP team's ability to engage a broader range of stakeholders – already constrained by the lack of in-person presence due to the pandemic. As a result, certain groups, including the student community, were largely absent from the GEP process.

This lack of engagement was further compounded by the absence of formal recognition for EDI work in workload planning and performance and development reviews. Without institutional mechanisms to acknowledge and reward efforts related to GE, many potential contributors were either discouraged from participating or unable to dedicate the necessary time and resources. As a result, the burden of advancing the GEP remained concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. This dynamic not only slowed progress but also perpetuated the institutional inertia that had long hindered the broader integration of GE across the university.

Collectively, these challenges generated significant personal costs to the change agents leading GEP activities at Institution 4. The lack of recognition and support for their work, combined with the fragmented and uncoordinated nature of initiatives, created a sense of significant frustration and burnout, with these individuals often finding themselves struggling to maintain momentum and enthusiasm in the face of systemic inertia and limited engagement.

Table 31. Manifestations of resistance: Institution 4

Form of resistance	Example	Resistant actor(s)	Gendered informal rules	Type of resistance	Constraining factors
Refusal to accept responsibility and policy inaction	Side-lining gender and equality issues	Decision-making bodies	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	External crisis (Covid-19 pandemic)
Refusal to accept responsibility and policy inaction	Lack of community engagement in GEP activities	Academic and administrative staff, and students	GE as a non-priority	Individual (implicit)	External crisis (Covid-19 pandemic); overwhelmed with existing tasks
Inadequate resource allocation	Formal commitment to GE not followed by resource allocation for implementing actions	Decision-making bodies	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of comprehensive national legislation; lack of effective accountability systems
Non-legitimisation of gender-related work	Lack of recognition of EDI work in workload planning and performance reviews, coupled with inconsistent application across faculties	Decision-making bodies	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Non-validation of EDI work in the scientific culture
Superficial compliance or selective enforcement	Numerous initiatives in place not followed by coordination and a coherent vision	Decision-making bodies	GE as a non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of effective monitoring and accountability systems

Note: self-elaborated, drawing from Verge et al. (2018) and Tildesley et al. (2022).

1.4.3 Strategies to overcome resistance at Institution 4

In the case of Institution 4, overcoming resistance posed particular challenges due to the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions significantly limited opportunities for informal negotiations with key gatekeepers, as well as the ability to foster broader university engagement. Informal spaces, such as in-person meetings or casual discussions, which are often critical for building consensus and addressing resistance, were largely absent.

Despite these difficulties, Institution 4 did make some attempts to address resistance within the limits imposed by the pandemic. For instance, the institution relied more heavily on formal structures, such as virtual meetings and official channels of communication, to keep GE issues on the agenda. While this approach was less effective in facilitating spontaneous dialogue and engagement, it provided a structured way to ensure that GEP actions continued to receive attention of stakeholders who were key for the continuation of the intervention.

Moreover, Institution 4 relied heavily on the continuation of external networks, such as those established through the UniSAFE project, to help mitigate internal inertia and maintain progress. These collaborations not only provided a platform for addressing internal resistance but also reinforced the legitimacy of GEP actions, creating additional pressure for institutional stakeholders to remain committed to their GE goals. These external networks thus served as a critical avenue for sustaining momentum and facilitating strategic dialogue, especially in areas where internal engagement was more limited.

Further, as resistance was less likely to be addressed through personal interaction during this period, the team at Institution 4 also attempted to use data and formal reporting mechanisms to strengthen their case for advancing the GEP. Presenting clear metrics and benchmarks on GE, they aimed to counter resistance by demonstrating the gaps and needs within the institution, thereby creating pressure for action through evidence-based arguments.

1.5 INSTITUTION 5

1.5.1 Conditions for change at Institution 5

At Institution 5, despite the challenging political scenario and widespread anti-gender movements in Türkiye, the GEP team was *"well-equipped, well-resourced, and also well-respected to initiate the process"* (I6_GR). Prior to participating in GEARING-Roles,

although there was no gender-specific budget established, Institution 5 had significant budgetary commitments to GE. For instance, the university employed a part-time Gender Equality Officer, and internal resources were invested in the university's Gender and Women's Studies Centre for Excellence. This investment allowed the centre to grow and eventually become self-sustaining:

> "Initially, a larger portion of its budget was coming from the university itself in terms of the university funding people working in the centre and some of its projects like awards, but now the centre finds ten times more money from the outside and it brings money to the university (…) but still when you look at the books, every year the university allocates more money to [Centre's name] (…) it used to be in previous years that the university was investing in [Centre's name], now [Centre's name] is paying back" (I6_GR)

In this context, Institution 5 also had accumulated gender expertise through individual faculty members across different programmes and faculties and corporate governance involved in addressing GE concerns. This was complemented by the university's Gender and Women's Studies Centre for Excellence, which gathered *"a lot of expertise that goes along with a GEP development"* (I7_GR).

Additionally, Institution 5 holds a strong history of participatory decision-making and collaborative work is embedded in the institutional culture. Previous gender-related initiatives had been carried out from a bottom-up approach, as a result from collaborative efforts of students, administrators, and faculty. A notable example was the development of the university's sexual harassment policy, which actively involved students and faculty in a year-long initiative, ultimately delivering the first such policy in Türkiye (internal report – source owned by the author).

During the interview, representatives from Institution 5 noted that participation in the GEARING-Roles project allowed the team to further enhance their capacity in developing participatory processes. Thanks to the capacity-building sessions delivered by the technical support partner, the institutional community gained valuable insights into co-creation and participatory techniques, refining their methods: *"the methodologies used in these processes were appreciated by the participants for enabling a non-hierarchical, multidisciplinary, and constructive environment"* (internal report – source owned by the author).

During the entire GEP process, the culture of bottom-up approach was evident, supported by structured GE bodies. In addition to the GEP team, the Task Force and the GEP Committee were actively involved in the entire change process. The Task Force, providing direction and general advice, consisted of 24 stakeholders, including academic

and administrative staff, directors of centres and administrative units, two Vice Presidents, two Deans, two Vice Deans, the General Secretary of the University, a PhD student, and the Gender Equality Officer. The GEP Committee, composed of directors of main administrative units (Human Resources, Communications and Marketing, and Finance), top faculty representatives, the Gender Equality Officer, and the Gender in Research Contact Point, met more frequently to discuss practical issues regarding the potentials and challenges of implementation and the prioritisation of GEP actions (internal report – source owned by the author).

As demonstrated by the composition of these structures, Institution 5 had the support of top leadership, who viewed GE as "a significant part of the institutional values and future vision" (internal report – source owned by the author). This support was evidenced through the active presence of institutional leaders in the GEP process, as well as project events, showing an engagement that went beyond mere endorsement. Leaders participated in strategic planning sessions, provided essential resources, and publicly advocated for GE initiatives. Moreover, this commitment was demonstrated by the smooth creation of new and stable structures, such as the establishment of the Gender in Research Contact Point – a position operated within the Research Development and Technology Transfer Office. The Contact Point had considerable reach and autonomy, enabling effective implementation of GE measures, such as the collection of gender-disaggregated data for research projects, the inclusion of a gender section in the researcher registration system, tracking whether research projects incorporate a gender dimension, preparing guidelines on how include the gender dimension in research projects, and organising self-tailored training sessions to raise awareness among researchers about gender in research (internal report – source owned by the author).

Securing support from top leadership was achieved through strategic planning that leveraged the broader institutional interests and strengths. As I7_GR observed, the actions that were more easily implemented were those already aligned with the university's existing commitments, such as initiatives within the curriculum and research sections, where the university had already demonstrated significant strengths: *"if the administrators believe that actions will make it even stronger, then it makes it easier"*. This alignment not only facilitated smoother implementation but also ensured that initiatives were perceived as integral to the institution's core objectives, thereby garnering more robust support from other stakeholders. Consequently, this strategic approach enabled more efficient allocation of resources and fostered a culture of collaboration,

ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the GEP initiatives at Institution 5.

Another significant strength at Institution 5 was the active and close involvement of the student community in GEP activities. Their participation not only ensured that diverse perspectives were incorporated into the change process but also amplified the demand for greater institutional commitment to GE. The engagement of students brought fresh energy and accountability to the initiative, as their voices often highlighted gaps and areas for improvement that might otherwise have been overlooked. Additionally, the student body's active role reinforced the sense of urgency around GE issues, putting pressure on institutional leaders to prioritise and address these concerns more effectively. This grassroots involvement not only broadened the scope of GEP activities but also helped cultivate a culture of inclusivity and sustained advocacy within the university, ensuring that GE remained a visible and pressing issue across all levels of the institution.

Finally, Institution 5's GEP was bolstered by its extensive networks within the broader education sector and civil society, particularly with feminist and LGBTIQ organisations, human rights groups, and artists both in Türkiye and internationally. These connections enriched the institution's efforts, providing diverse perspectives and collaborative opportunities. For example, when appointing the Gender Equality Officer, the GEP team benefited from collaborating with external networks by consulting with other institutions to understand different structures and processes for such appointments. Additionally, participation in European projects, including GEARING-Roles, expanded Institution 5's research network across Europe, enabling access to additional resources, expertise, and collaborative opportunities. This international engagement allowed the institution to benchmark its practices against European standards, adopt successful strategies from other institutions, and enhance its own GEP implementation processes.

Table 32. GEP facilitators at Institution 5, by category

Institution 5	
Category	**Facilitating factors**
Structural	(internal/external) Resources Structured, well-positioned, and stable GE body GE embedded in institutional structures and strategic documents
Agency	Top-leadership support Bottom-up participation and buy-in
Processual	Networks and synergies with other initiatives;

	Participatory processes
Transversal	Gender competence

Note: self-elaborated.

1.5.2 Challenges and resistance at Institution 5

As described above, Institution 5's GEP enjoyed strong institutional support in many instances. However, it also faced challenges and resistance along the way. One significant obstacle emerged from the broader socio-political context, particularly the increasing gender backlash in Türkiye over the past years. This backlash has manifested in various forms, including growing resistance to transformative initiatives and public discourse that undermines the value of GE. Such societal-level landscape created a challenging environment for the implementation of the GEP, as institutional actors had to navigate not only internal opposition but also external pressures that questioned the legitimacy of their work. This context intensified the resistance faced by the GEP team and complicated efforts to sustain momentum in advancing GE within the institution.

Focusing specifically on the institutional context, resistance emerged from several angles. A key challenge was the increasing centralisation of decision-making throughout the GEP implementation period, coupled with the high turnover of key personnel in the human resources department, including the department director and the Gender Equality Officer, who was replaced four times within a single year (I7_GR). New hires were not only unfamiliar with university's internal processes but also lacked awareness of the ongoing GEP initiatives, creating significant disruption. This instability slowed the implementation of key actions, as the GEP teams had to repeatedly reintroduce and reorient new staff members to the programme's goals and processes, leading to considerable delays in some of the planned activities.

> For instance, we have not been able to have our trainings. We decided which trainings we would have together with the human resources and Vice-Rector, with all the people involved in deciding which trainings we would have, which trainings we should prioritise (i.e., human, Vice-Rector, the GEP Committee) but we are not able to go through because people have changed. The Gender Equality Officer changed, the human resources director, and we do not have a new one, and no one can decide (I6_GR)
>
> And I would also add that there are actions that are directly related to HR, like career progression and work-life balance, they are kind of waiting at the moment, because there is no HR director and there is more work in the HR (I7_GR)

This situation led to the bureaucratisation of the GEP implementation process and marginalisation of gender experts, including the GEP team. The frequent changes in key positions meant that the team had to repeatedly explain the project, leading to significant delays in action implementation. The constant need to reintroduce the GEP and its objectives to new personnel was reported as exhausting, time-consuming, and hindering productivity (I6_GR; I7_GR).

Additionally, at the time of the interviews, respondents also declared that securing budgetary commitments had become increasingly challenging. One respondent noted, *"right now, anything that needs budgetary commitment would be difficult to pass. The number of actions that do not need at least indirect approval of the highest administration is getting fewer and fewer, so no one can decide; this is the problem we are facing"* (I6_GR). This situation highlights that, although the institution supported actions that were already partly embedded into the organisation and represented a strength (e.g., curricula- and research-related activities), there was a growing difficulty in obtaining necessary approvals from top administration for implementing GEP actions that required financial resources (I7_GR).

In addition to that, bridging the academic-administrative divide posed a significant challenge at Institution 5. Certain GEP actions were perceived by academic staff as interventions on academic processes and freedoms, making it difficult to achieve consensus and cooperation between academic and administrative staff. This divide often hindered the smooth implementation of GEP initiatives, as actions that were crucial for GE were sometimes viewed as encroachments on academic autonomy (e.g., inclusion of the gender perspective into research and curricula). Furthermore, there was scepticism about positive actions, with some stakeholders questioning their fairness and necessity, seeing them as preferential treatment rather than essential steps toward equity.

Table 33. Manifestations of resistance: Institution 5

Form of resistance	Example	Resistant actor(s)	Gendered informal rules	Type of resistance	Constraining factors
Inadequate resource allocation and bureaucratic hurdles	High turnover of key stakeholders, including the GE Officer, and discontinuity of initiated work and expertise	Decision-making bodies	GE as non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of comprehensive national legislation; lack of effective accountability systems
Bureaucratic hurdles and refusal to assume responsibility	Increased centralisation of decision-making and lack of initiative by stakeholders	Decision-making bodies	Adherence to traditional male power structures	Institutional (implicit)	Neoliberal tendencies and internalised traditional gender roles
Non-legitimisation of gender-related work	Marginalisation of the GEP team and its efforts	Decision-making bodies	GE as non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Non-validation of GE work in the scientific culture
Inadequate resource allocation, superficial compliance, and selective enforcement	Postponing actions requiring additional budgetary commitments; instead, only prioritising actions that reinforce the institutional strengths	Decision-making bodies	GE as non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of comprehensive national legislation; lack of effective accountability systems
Denial of the need for change, reactance, and trivialisation of GE	Lack of consensus and cooperation between academic and administrative staff for the prioritisation of GEP actions, with certain actions (especially women-only actions and positive discrimination	Academic staff	Gender roles; culture of individual responsibility; traditional merit-based systems; academic freedom;	Individual (explicit)	Internalised traditional gender roles, deep-seated belief in traditional meritocratic principles, and change claims alien to the hegemonic ideas of the institutional context

	schemes) perceived as threats to academic autonomy and fairness				

Note: self-elaborated, drawing from Verge et al. (2018) and Tildesley et al. (2022).

1.5.3 Strategies to overcome resistance at Institution 5

As seen above, one of the primary challenges at Institution 5 was the high turnover of staff, which threatened the continuity and stability of GEP initiatives. To address this issue, the GEP team adopted a proactive approach by maintaining constant availability to engage with new staff. This involved one-on-one meetings, tailored onboarding sessions, and consistent communication to introduce new employees to both the institution and the GEP process. By building strong relationships with new staff from the outset, the GEP team cultivated early buy-in, effectively reducing resistance from individuals unfamiliar with the institution's GE commitments.

In addition to this, participatory processes were a cornerstone of Institution 5's strategy for mitigating resistance. By involving a wide range of stakeholders in the decision-making processes related to the GEP, the institution fostered a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the initiative's success. Through methods such as focus groups, task forces, and collaborative workshops, the institution ensured that the GEP reflected the diverse needs and concerns of the entire university community. This inclusive approach helped diminish resistance, as stakeholders felt their voices were heard and valued, which in turn led to greater engagement and support for the GEP's objectives.

Finally, respondents from Institution 5 highlighted that participation in the GEARING-Roles consortium was instrumental in managing resistance. The mutual support and solidarity within the consortium provided the GEP team with a valuable network of peers who were tackling similar challenges. Exchanging experiences and learning from other institutions not only offered practical strategies for navigating resistance but also bolstered the team's confidence in handling difficult situations.

1.6 INSTITUTION 6

1.6.1 Conditions for change at Institution 6

Institution 6 was the only RFO implementing the GEP in the GEARING-Roles consortium. Against a national regulatory context that recommends certain measures to address gender inequalities in the R&I sector, but lacks any accountability system to monitor it, previous efforts to advance the GE agenda at Institution 6 were essentially theoretical, consisting of provisions in institutional policies that had limited practical application. For example, although the institution incorporated gender considerations into certain regulations regarding grant evaluation processes and the composition of new decision-making bodies – mandating the selection of the underrepresented gender when

candidates are equally qualified – it remained uncertain whether these measures had a practical impact, given the infrequency of such situations occurring in practice (I8_GR).

A measure taken prior to participating in the project that was reported as a contributing factor for the implementation of the GEP implementation was the availability of sex-disaggregated data: *"it definitely helped that we didn't have to start collecting data from zero, but we already had quite a good overview of the current situation"* (I8_GR). Prior to GEARING-Roles, this initiative was however largely dependent on the individual willingness and efforts of a small group of data analysts who were committed to collecting and maintaining this data.

With the participation in GEARING-Roles, a more enhanced and structured data collection system was installed. This system facilitated the monitoring of sex differences among applicants and grant recipients, identifying success rates and pinpointing areas with significant issues. Moreover, a topic sheet addressing GE and the pay gap in academia was published and widely disseminated, marking the beginning of an annual publication cycle aligned with the release of new statistics. This topic sheet draws from various data sources, providing Institution 6-specific grant statistics, as well as national and international comparisons (internal report – source owned by the author).

This evidence-based approach contributed to initiating a process of increasing awareness about gender-related issues across the organisation. Prior to participating in GEARING-Roles, Institution 6's engagement in GE initiatives was minimal, and awareness regarding gender inequalities and their implications for the RFO's role was similarly limited. Thus, as an initial step, the GEP team prioritised the goal of increasing awareness throughout the organisation, emphasising the need for everyone to understand the actual issues, the GEP objectives, and the strategies being implemented. As I8_GR noted, this involved "*focusing that everybody knows what the issues actually are and what we are, what are the goals, and so on"*. This foundational step was deemed crucial for mitigating potential resistance and paving the way for the implementation of further actions.

During the interview, I8_GR stated that *"if it wasn't for the project, I don't think it would've gone through at all accepting this GEP. But since everybody knew that we had to take it, we had to compose it, and there was no question about that, the question was rather what we will keep in the GEP and what not"* (I8_GR). As observed, the external mandate arising from participation in a European project created a non-negotiable requirement to adopt the GEP, which suggests that without such external pressure, the

institution might not have embraced these changes voluntarily. The project thus served as an accountability mechanism, ensuring the institution followed through with its commitments.

The external pressure was recognised by the institutional leadership, including the executive director and director general, who expressed the need to align with broader European standards and avoid falling behind. As I8_GR explained, in Estonia, there is a strong desire to be seen on par with Scandinavian countries, which are often viewed as benchmarks for GE. This aspiration to match the standards of more progressive nations added another layer of accountability, further motivating the leadership to support GE actions.

While the implementation of the GEP primarily depended on the Department of Analysis, where members acted as activists to push the GE agenda further, the support from leadership, although largely formal, was essential for the project's progress. As I8_GR noted, the executive director was *"quite close to the project since the beginning (...) her support is definitely crucial in continuing with these measures"* (I8_GR). This leadership support, even if mainly formal, provided the necessary backing to take the actions further and engage the broader organisational community.

Indeed, from the design to the implementation of the GEP, Institution 6 employed a combination between top-down and bottom-up strategy, encouraging participation from all organisational members. To enhance engagement, meetings were conducted with management and each department separately, creating smaller groups where everyone could contribute. For those unable to attend these meetings, an avenue for submitting written feedback was provided (internal report – source owned by the author). This approach was further strengthened by offering stakeholders capacity-building opportunities, such as trainings, seminars and workshops tailored to specific roles – including institutional management, internal staff, the Evaluation Committee, and expert panels – on topics most relevant to each group. As a result, approximately 75% of Institution 6's employees participated in at least one GE training or seminar (internal report – source owned by the author). The small size of the organisation facilitated this inclusive approach, allowing for more personalised and effective engagement.

Finally, an interesting strategy used at Institution 6 to broaden the impact of the GEARING-Roles project was the creation of networks with external institutions, including Estonian universities. For example, when the GEARING-Roles project began, a national task force group was established, comprising representatives from nine

Estonian universities, including heads of personnel, researchers, and managers. This platform facilitated the sharing of the project's progress, good practices, training opportunities, and the raising of awareness of GE issues within the Estonian R&I landscape. Additionally, Institution 6 joined the AcademiaNet initiative to address the underrepresentation of women in top research positions. Through this collaboration, positively evaluated female researchers from Estonian R&I institutions are featured annually on the AcademiaNet portal, highlighting their achievements and emphasising the importance of improving the gender balance in the local research field (internal report – source owned by the author).

Table 34. GEP facilitators at Institution 6, by category

Institution 6	
Category	**Facilitating factors**
Structural	Resources GE embedded in institutional structures and strategic documents
Agency	Top-leadership support Bottom-up participation and buy-in
Processual	Networks and synergies with other initiatives; Participatory processes Strategic planning and communication Evidence-based approach
Transversal	Awareness and gender competence Monitoring and accountability systems

Note: self-elaborated.

1.6.2 Challenges and resistance at Institution 6

Reflecting on the barriers to change at Institution 6, the primary limitation reported was the organisation's lack of autonomy, as it operates under the Ministry of Education and Research. This dependency implies that no permanent changes can be taken without the Ministry's approval. As I8_GR stated, *"when we first started creating the GEP, we maybe had a little bit bigger ambitions, but we were constantly reminded that we cannot just do anything, we have to fill our role, we cannot out step out boundaries"*. I8_GR explained that the institution cannot take steps to address the gender pay gap or influence the procedures for electing heads of the organisation. Likewise, changes in statutes and working procedures are beyond the institution's control and can be significantly affected by the national political leadership and the government in power. This lack of autonomy

highlights the role played by external forces, especially national bodies, in ensuring the advancement of the GE agenda institutionally.

Furthermore, as I8_GR stressed, *"in some cases, it's not even that the Ministry wouldn't let us do some things, but our own organisation may also think that it would be too complicated to take on a different role, because the process is not so straightforward"*. I8_GR cited the example of hiring personnel under the GEARING-Roles project, noting that while it was technically possible to employ someone full-time using project funds, the organisation chose not to pursue this due to "very clear expectations" by the Ministry about the institution's allowable size. Moreover, bringing in new staff would require additional investments in infrastructure to accommodate them.

According to I8_GR, dedicated personnel are crucial for implementing and sustaining GE actions:

> What's most crucial is that there are people whose actual job is to be responsible for implementing these actions. Otherwise, this will just be all very vague and abstract if there's no one responsible, which can happen after the project ends, then it's a question whether these actions will be continued if there's nobody really pushing it (I8_GR)

At Institution 6, the lack of resources specifically designated to gender-related work seems to remain a "permanent problem" (I8_GR). While resource came from participation in GEARING-Roles, the expectation was that after the project's conclusion, GE work would be again *"one of the extra tasks of someone working at the Department of Analysis (...) So it comes down to that personal motivation of somebody"* (I8_GR). Despite being a small organisation, Institution 6 has a nationwide impact in Estonia. Hence, the insufficient resources and the limited number of people interested in GE issues within the institution could severely hinder the sustainability and effectiveness of GE initiatives not only institutionally but on a national scale.

Looking at specific GEP actions, those receiving most resistance were those requiring additional work for the grantees (e.g., including the gender perspective in the application forms for the grant applicants); *"it's just seen as increasing bureaucracy (...) the people who are most connected to the field think that this is something that's basically self-evident (...) and we're not in a place to tell researchers how to those their methodology and so on"* (I8_GR). Ultimately, this led the GEP team to decide not to change the application forms and instead just raise awareness on the importance of mainstreaming gender into the research content and process.

Meritocracy was also often used as an excuse for not taking certain actions, and there was a perceived conflict between promoting equality and maintaining standards of competence and suitability. As I8_GR noted, many in leadership positions, including women, expressed discomfort with the idea of being perceived as beneficiaries of quotas, preferring to be recognised solely for their "objective" qualifications. This attitude complicated efforts to integrate GE measures within existing meritocratic frameworks.

Another topic facing strong resistance was achieving gender balance among peer reviewers, which, according to I8_GR, is *"something that is basically refused to be seen as an issue"*. The inherent challenges in sourcing peer reviewers in general contribute to a widespread perception that striving for gender balance would only exacerbate these difficulties. Many within the institution believe that adding gender balance as a criterion would complicate the selection process and potentially delay reviews, given the already limited pool of available reviewers. The argument often centres around practicality, yet this stance overlooks the potential benefits of diverse perspectives in enhancing the quality and fairness of evaluations.

Table 35. Manifestations of resistance: Institution 6

Form of resistance	Example	Resistant actor(s)	Gendered informal rules	Type of resistance	Constraining factors
Bureaucratic hurdles, refusal to assume responsibility, and inadequate resource allocation	Not taking more ambitious measures, such as appointing an Equality Officer due to overcomplicated processes and additional costs	Decision-making bodies	GE as non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Lack of institutional autonomy; change claims alien to the hegemonic ideas of the institutional context
Inadequate resource allocation and non-legitimisation of gender-related work	GE work as an extra task of committed individuals instead of institutional priority.	Decision-making bodies	GE as non-priority	Institutional (implicit)	Change claims alien to the hegemonic ideas of the institutional context
Denial of the need for change and reactance	Conflict between promoting equality and maintaining standards of competence and suitability for evaluating grant applications, combined with a strong resistance against quotas	Senior administrators	Gender roles; culture of individual responsibility; traditional merit-based systems; academic freedom;	Institutional (explicit)	Deep-seated belief in traditional meritocratic principles
Denial of the need for change, refusal to accept responsibility, and bureaucratic hurdles	Avoiding action to panels due to the perception that incorporating a gender perspective would further complicate processes	Decision-making bodies	Gender roles; culture of individual responsibility; traditional merit-based systems; academic freedom;	Institutional (explicit)	Widespread unawareness of gender inequality issues, internalised traditional gender roles, and change claims alien to the hegemonic ideas of the institutional context

Note: self-elaborated, drawing from Verge et al. (2018) and Tildesley et al. (2022).

1.6.3 Strategies to overcome resistance at Institution 6

To overcome resistance at Institution 6, several strategies were implemented, focusing on enhancing communication, raising awareness through data, and leveraging the support of the project consortium.

A key strategy involved combining an evidence-based approach with informal, strategic communication to influence perceptions of the GEP amongst the institutional stakeholders. While there was significant resistance regarding the actual need for the GEP initially, once a comprehensive statistical overview was presented – detailing various aspects of peer review processes across different scientific fields – the importance of the project and its focus on GE issues became evident. The data was described as *"very eye-opening to many people and very surprising to some"* (I8_GR), effectively highlighting disparities that had previously been overlooked.

Additionally, I8_GR emphasised the importance of participating in training sessions on managing resistance within the GEARING-Roles consortium as key for the GEP team to deal with the challenges encountered on the ground. These sessions offered valuable insights and techniques for handling resistance without taking it personally and fostered a supportive environment among the consortium members. Sharing experiences and learning from others who faced similar challenges proved particularly beneficial, as it reinforced the understanding that these obstacles are common across institutions and contexts. This not only aided in managing resistance more effectively but also helped build a sense of solidarity and collective problem-solving among the different GEP teams.

1.7 INTEGRATING THE FINDINGS ON FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS IN GEARING-ROLES

Examining the findings from the GEARING-Roles GEP-implementing institutions from a collective perspective reveals that the conditions identified in the literature for effective GEP implementation – grouped into structural, agency, processual, and transversal factors – were consistently present across the case study. While the significance of each facilitating factor varied depending on the specific institutional context, notable similarities emerged across all institutions.

Since most of the observed institutions were located in countries without national obligations on GEPs, participation in the GEARING-Roles project was the primary strategy for change agents to develop a structured institutional change process in their organisations. Even for Institution 1, which is situated in a country with legal mandates

for GEPs, it was the involvement in the project that allowed for broadening the scope of the GEP and ensured adequate resources for effective implementation.

While legal and policy requirements mandate action, resources were highlighted as the backbone that enables these initiatives to function effectively. Our findings indicate that the resource capacity provided by participation in GEARING-Roles extended beyond financial support to include human capital, time allocation, infrastructure, and technical assistance. These factors were crucial for expanding the scope of the GEPs and ensuring their thorough implementation.

With regard to agency factors, leadership support and wide participation and buy-in emerged as mutually reinforcing. All GEARING-Roles GEPIs endeavoured in fostering a combined process involving both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Top-level leadership support was essential for legitimising GEP initiatives and facilitating resource allocation, while wide participation and buy-in from various stakeholders further validated equality-related efforts. Where present (e.g., Institutions 1, 3, and 5), broad engagement not only exerted pressure on institutional leaders to prioritise GE but also fostered a sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the initiatives. Yet, the study found that achieving this level of engagement proved challenging, even in institutions with a strong formal commitment to GE (e.g., Institution 4).

Continuing with agency-related factors facilitating GEP implementation, our findings identified an additional factor beyond those previously noted in the literature: the social capital of change agents. Respondents highlighted the importance of having change agents with established reputations and institutional influence involved in the coordination of GEPs. This social capital enabled change agents to navigate institutional hierarchies more effectively, build strategic alliances, and secure the necessary support to advance actions. However, it is important to recognise that this reliance on the social capital of a few key individuals also reflects broader gendered power dynamics within academia. This dependence places a disproportionate burden on these individuals to lead equality-related efforts, potentially highlighting a lack of broader institutional commitment to GE. It suggests that without such influential champions, GEP initiatives may struggle to gain traction, revealing an underlying need for systemic support and recognition of GE as a critical institutional priority.

Looking at processual and transversal factors, these elements also played a supportive and integrative role in reinforcing structural and agency factors across all institutions. In the specific case of GEARING-Roles, particular attention must be given to the role of

participatory approaches and the creation of networks and synergies with other GE initiatives. From the outset, the project consortium was provided with specialised training on how to employ participatory techniques in GEP implementation, delivered by the technical support partner. These trainings were designed to equip GEP teams with the skills to foster broader institutional engagement, ensuring that the design and execution of GEPs were not merely top-down processes but collaborative efforts that actively involved stakeholders across different levels of the organisation.

This emphasis on participation was vital across all institutions. The participatory approaches encouraged open dialogue and ongoing feedback, which allowed institutional actors to co-create and take ownership of GE actions. This participatory element was crucial in breaking down resistance, as it promoted a sense of shared responsibility and fostered greater buy-in from individuals who might otherwise perceive GE initiatives as peripheral or imposed externally. Moreover, these techniques helped to uncover hidden barriers and opportunities within each institution, leading to more context-sensitive and effective interventions.

In addition to participatory strategies, GEP teams benefited from building synergies with other European and national GE initiatives. By linking with external networks, GEARING-Roles institutions could draw on best practices, shared resources, and the collective experiences of a broader community of change agents. These connections amplified the impact of GEPs and ensured that institutional change efforts were not confined to individual institutions but were part of a broader, sustained push for gender equality across the academic sector.

Our findings also revealed two additional processual factors that facilitated effective implementation, which were not initially highlighted in the literature review: informal negotiation spaces and public commitment to GE. Informal negotiation spaces, though often overlooked in formal institutional structures, played a critical role by providing flexible and adaptive platforms for dialogue. These spaces allowed for smoother negotiations with key institutional gatekeepers, creating a more conducive environment for open communication and collaboration. In turn, public commitment to GE helped establish a visible and accountable stance on gender equality, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and urgency of GE efforts within the institutions. Together, these factors contributed significantly to the institutionalisation of GE actions, supporting not only their implementation but also their long-term sustainability.

Incorporating the factors facilitating effective GEP implementation identified across all GEARING-Roles GEPIs alongside those identified in the literature review (see Section 3.1, Chapter 2), the updated list is as follows:

Table 36. Structural, agency, processual, and transversal factors facilitating effective GEP implementation – updated list

Structural factors	Governance framework; Resources; Structured, well-positioned, and stable GE body; GE embedded in institutional structures and strategic documents;
Agency factors	Top-management support; Bottom-up participation and buy-in; Skilled change agents with a formal GE mandate; Social capital of change agents; *
Processual factors	Networks and synergies with other initiatives; Participatory processes; Evidence-based approach; Informal negotiation spaces; * Public commitment to GE; *
Transversal factors	Awareness and gender/EDI competence; * Monitoring and accountability systems.

Note: self-elaborated, adapted from Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019) and Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt (2019). * Factors emerging from our findings.

As for the challenges and resistance encountered across all institutions, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic during the GEP implementation period stands out as a shared and significant obstacle. The pandemic drastically limited the informal exchanges that are often critical in the early stages of institutional change initiatives. With restrictions on in-person gatherings, the opportunities for informal interactions, which are essential for fostering trust, collaboration, and momentum, were severely curtailed. These informal interactions typically help in building the relationships needed to push forward complex initiatives like GEPs, making their absence a notable setback.

To address this, the GEP teams had to pivot quickly, finding alternative ways to maintain communication and engagement. Virtual meetings became the primary mode of interaction, with regular check-ins replacing spontaneous conversations, while online collaborative platforms were used to share documents and track progress. However, while these digital alternatives were essential for keeping the process going, they could not fully replicate the depth and quality of face-to-face exchanges. The reliance on virtual spaces made it more challenging to cultivate the strong interpersonal bonds and shared

commitment necessary for driving institutional change. Despite these limitations, the teams worked diligently to ensure that GEP implementation continued, though the process was undoubtedly more fragmented and slowed by the constraints imposed by the pandemic (for an in-depth discussion on this, see Campanini et al., 2023).

A broader challenge that compounded these difficulties was the widespread sense of "gender fatigue" experienced across all institutions. In the face of the shifting priorities caused by the pandemic, GE issues were often relegated to a lower priority. Many stakeholders viewed GE initiatives as less urgent compared to the immediate crises at hand, leading to reduced engagement and support for GEP-related work. This shift in institutional focus exacerbated an already-existing issue: the tendency for equality-related work to fall disproportionately on a small group of dedicated individuals.

This "gender fatigue" led to a situation where, across all institutions, the responsibility for advancing GE fell heavily on the shoulders of a few committed change agents, particularly the GEP teams. The lack of on-campus presence made it even more difficult to galvanise broader engagement, as opportunities to build coalitions and foster a sense of shared responsibility were significantly diminished. As a result, the emotional and practical costs for change agents became particularly pronounced, as they were often working in isolation, juggling their regular responsibilities alongside the heavy burden of driving forward complex, systemic change without widespread institutional support. Many change agents experienced burnout due to the increased workload, the lack of broad engagement, and the emotional toll of pushing forward initiatives that, at times, felt side-lined.

In this context, the shared learning environment fostered by the consortium played a crucial role in normalising the resistance encountered by each institution, alleviating feelings of isolation and frustration. Mutual support activities were developed to create a dedicated space for teams to openly share their experiences, including both successes and setbacks. This collaborative approach reframed resistance, not as an insurmountable barrier, but as a common and manageable challenge inherent to the process of institutional change. Moreover, the sense of belonging to a wider network of institutions working towards similar GE goals enhanced the teams' resilience and problem-solving abilities. This collective solidarity made them better equipped to tackle both internal resistance from within their institutions and external opposition, reinforcing their capacity to drive change in a sustained and strategic manner.

An example of these collaborative practices was the development of workshops focused on the use of feminist humour as a strategy to counteract resistance to change. These workshops aimed to equip GEP teams with creative, non-confrontational approaches to diffuse tension and open up dialogue. Humour, in this context, served as a tool to challenge stereotypes and disrupt rigid attitudes towards GE in a manner that was engaging rather than antagonistic. As a result of these workshops, the consortium developed the Humorarium tool, an innovative resource designed to use humour in GE initiatives strategically (López et al., 2023). This tool encouraged institutional actors to reflect on gender biases through satire and irony, making it easier to broach sensitive topics in a way that lowered defences and encouraged openness to change. By leveraging humour, the Humorarium helped to transform resistance from an obstacle into an opportunity for learning and engagement, fostering a more inclusive environment for discussing GE.

Building on the key conditions and barriers identified for effective GEP implementation, it is crucial to examine not only how these factors influence the execution phase of GEP actions but also how they affect the long-term sustainability of changes, particularly after the conclusion of external funding, such as in the case of the GEARING-Roles project. This shift in focus is essential to understanding how institutional change can be sustained and embedded into the organisation's core structures and practices once project-based resources and support are no longer available.

2. LONG-TERM OUTCOMES: SEEKING SUSTAINABLE CHANGES

In this section, I shift the focus from effective GEP implementation to sustaining changes over time. Building on the findings presented above, this section examines how the presence or absence of the conditions identified as crucial for initiating change affects the long-term sustainability of those changes. Instead of concentrating solely on the case studies of GEARING-Roles GEPs, this section also incorporates insights from change agents who have participated in other European-funded GEP-implementing projects, whether as GEP coordinators, technical support partners, or evaluators.

2.1 ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINING CHANGES

Unsurprisingly, resource allocation was identified as the primary factor contributing to sustaining changes over time. This was followed by supportive governance frameworks

at the European and national levels; leadership support; bottom-up participation and buy-in; participatory processes; continuous capacity building; institutional recognition and legitimisation of equality-related work; structured, well-positioned, and stable institutional equality bodies; an evidence-based approach; transparency; networks; and clear goals aligned with strategic interests of the feminist agenda.

Resource allocation was consistently highlighted across all 24 interviews as the most important factor for ensuring the sustainability of changes. Respondents expressed concerns that *"once European money is not coming in anymore, that becomes the key issue"* (I19_SP) and equality measures either disappear or revert to minimal levels (I1_GR, I3_GR, I4_GR, I8_GR, I11_SP, I23_SP). The emphasis on securing continuous funding from external entities, as well as garnering internal budget support, underscores its critical role in maintaining and advancing GE initiatives beyond the initial project funding. While external funding from entities like European projects facilitates certain actions, the ultimate goal is to secure a stable base of internal funding dedicated to GE, ensuring that initiatives are embedded into the institution's core budget – an approach that is seldom implemented (I2_GR, I13_SP, 14_SP, I15_SP, I20_SP, I22_SP). As I1_GR noted, *"funding from external contracts is helpful, but it's crucial to have a guaranteed minimum base funded by internal resources, so we can ensure that certain essentials are covered"*.

An internal gender-specific budget is more likely to be secured when the provision for gender-specific resources is institutionalised within broader budgetary plans. This ensures that such funding remains in place regardless of changes in leadership or external funding variations: *"you need to have internal and regular (yearly) budget dedicated to GE provided for in institutional statutes"* (I14_SP). Additionally, designing GEPs that already account for the necessary costs of each action may be helpful: *"when defining the actions, the responsible stakeholders for their execution, and the indicators and targets for evaluation, we should include another section for the available financial resources, that is, how much the university will invest in that action"* (I1_GR). This may include allocating time for staff to work on the GEP, ensuring that there are dedicated resources not only in terms of direct funding but also of personnel and time commitment (I11_SP, I15_SP).

A good practice was mentioned by I23_SP for the Italian context, where public universities are required to produce an annual Gender Budget report (*Bilancio di Genere*), In addition to providing a detailed snapshot of gender distribution across various

components within the institution and tracking the participation of women and men in management roles, this document monitors the university's actions towards GE and evaluates the impact of these initiatives and policies, including financial commitments, on both women and men. I23_SP describes that *"those institutions that have the gender budgeting – because many Italian universities do – start from those to develop their GEPs"*.

Initiatives like these are not only useful for securing resources and embedding them into institutional plans but also for enabling continuous monitoring and accountability, thus ensuring the effective use of these resources. As I20_SP noted:

> You have to monetise GEPs, and then you have to monitor them (…) That's not very sexy, but I think this is the important part: to take care that the things you are promising are doable. Who is responsible for it? How much money do we have? How did it work out in the end? (…) only if you are monitoring it you can actually tell (I20_SP)

Following resources, supportive governance frameworks, including policy and legal requirements at both European and national levels emerged as the second most critical factor for ensuring the sustainability of GE initiatives. As one respondent noted, *"institutional change is always a political decision, so better if it's coming from the European Commission (…) any institutional change can be promoted only with a mandatory request"* (I14_SP). European policies, especially the GEP eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe, were highlighted as crucial in strengthening institutional commitment to GE: *"the continuation of the GEP will be conditioned by the requirements set by the European Union under Horizon Europe, which makes GEPs a mandatory requirement for participating in research projects"* (I2_GR).

European policies provide a solid foundation for ongoing efforts, on the one hand, and are seen as the most promising means to spread GEPs in across less advanced contexts, on the other (I2_GR, I3_GR, I6_GR, I8_GR, I10_SP, I19_SP, I23_SP): *"the fact that the European Union and Commission are involved in this is something that can be used as a lever to obtain that institutional changes, even if minor, should be somehow inserted into the local (even for an institution, very local) legislation"* (I14_SP).

At the national level, legal mandates and other indirect incentives such as Athena SWAN were also highlighted as essential for compelling institutions to take action and ensuring that they continue to implement measures after the conclusion of GEP-implementing European-funded projects conclude (I1_GR, I2_GR, I3_GR, I4_GR, I5_GR, I12_SP, I22_SP, I23_SP, I24_SP). National legal frameworks create a sustained

pressure for institutions to prioritise GE, embedding it into their long-term strategic goals and operations. However, their effectiveness may be limited in practice. For example, in countries like Spain, where GEPs are mandatory for universities, these requirements provide a solid foundation for sustained efforts. Yet the challenge often lies in the scope and depth of these plans, as I1_GR noted:

> The main challenge after the end of GEARING-Roles will not be whether there will be a plan or not, because the university cannot ignore the legal requirement to have a GEP. The challenge is the scope of that plan (…) Whether we will revert to what we had before the project, that is, a short-term plan with limited expectations and minor changes in the short to medium term, or if we will be able to maintain the high level of demand and long-term strategic scope of the current plan (I1_GR)

Looking at both the European policy landscape and national legal frameworks, it remains uncertain whether the current structures have the capacity to prevent initiatives like GEPs from becoming merely "box-ticking exercises" (I23_SP). There is a pressing need for robust internal and external accountability systems to ensure that GE becomes an integral part of the organisational culture, rather than "a nice thing for institutions to have and be recognised for" (I14_SP). Internally, I17_SP stresses that multiple-level accountability processes are essential. This means involving not only those directly responsible for GEP progress, such as GE Officers, but also senior and middle managers and decision-makers, ensuring that GE is considered in their regular evaluations. When it comes to external accountability systems, respondents highlighted the importance of the rigorous and continuous GEP oversight carried out by the European Commission during European-funded projects. They expressed concerns that, without these regular audits, institutions often fail to maintain their commitment to GE initiatives.

In sum, the intersection of European and national regulations, accompanied by robust accountability mechanisms, ideally creates a sustainable framework for embedding GE within institutional agendas. However, given that this comprehensive integration is not yet universally achieved, many change agents interviewed view reliance on European policies as the most promising strategy for maintaining the momentum and sustaining achieved changes.

Other factors considered as crucial for sustainability relate to the agency side of change processes: *"you might have resources, you might have the human resources, but if you are not cultivating agency, you will still fail in sustainability because it dries up at a certain point"* (I11_SP). Here, leadership support emerged as an *"obviously significant factor for sustaining change"* (I24_SP), as it sets strategic priorities, allocates necessary

resources, and influences organisational culture (I1_GR, I2_GR, I3_GR, I6_GR, I7_GR, I11_SP, I13_SP, I14_SP, I16_SP, I21_SP). However, while *"top-leadership support is crucial for keeping GE on the agenda, it is also a very vulnerable factor"* (I4_GR) in that change processes must withstand shifts in leadership and potential losses in the force for change (I10_SP, I12_SP, I21_SP, I24_SP). In such contexts, the lack of leadership support to GE efforts may be compensated by a robust legal and policy framework that persists beyond individual leadership terms, as described above, and participatory processes that engage the wider institutional community in change efforts.

Having the bottom-up participation and buy-in was indeed mentioned by all 24 interviewees as key for maintaining momentum, keeping initiatives dynamic and persistent, and exerting necessary pressure on leadership to prioritise and support these efforts. I2_GR notes, *"it has to do with the appropriation of actions by different bodies of the institution; not only assigning an economic resource, but assigning those responsible who truly take ownership of the actions, get involved and take them forward"*.

This does not necessarily mean that change processes should solely emerge from bottom-up strategies. Instead, they should be part of institutional responsibility and involve wide engagement, as I15_SP stressed: *"I don't think bottom up is always good because it [change processes] needs an institutional framework. I just think that people on the middle level need to be convinced because they're the ones who stay the longest in the institution, they're the ones who carry it"*. In practice, it means both creating groups of allies and making GE a responsibility of different departments within an institution, ensuring that it is not just a central directive but a collective endeavour integrated into the daily functions of various institutional sectors. This approach may foster the creation of an internal demand for change (I18_SP), thus increasing the likelihood that GE initiatives will endure despite leadership instability or external crises, as they become institutionalised around a broad base of stakeholders (I9_SP, I11_SP, I13_SP, I18_SP, I19_SP).

To foster wide engagement, participatory processes that promote inclusivity and dynamic involvement were argued as a means to enhance awareness and capacity building (I2_GR, I6_GR, I7_GR, I9_SP, I10_SP, I19_SP). As I10_SP stated, *"to ensure sustainability, ideally the culture changes (…) And how do you change the culture? The culture changes when people feel involved, empowered, and they have a sense of ownership over the change project, and that is what you can establish with participatory approaches"*. Once involved and convinced, stakeholders *"are not necessarily going*

away afterwards; they're going to be people who are highly sensitive to these issues and probably will keep pushing for change to happen in their institution, for their GEP to be revise or whatever else they do" (I16_SP).

To secure engagement and buy-in, respondents argue that continuous capacity building (I2_GR, I3_GR, I13_SP, I22_SP) shall be combined with institutional recognition and legitimisation of equality-related work (I4_GR, I7_GR, I8_GR, I10_SP, I11_SP, I17_SP, I18_SP, I21_SP). As I11_SP stresses, *"you need to find a way to sustain the human energy of people"* (I11_SP).

In this sense, capacity building extends beyond mere training; it involves raising awareness and addressing the fears and uncertainties of individuals involved in the change process. In practice, this may involve having contact persons and experts available in different institutional departments to support individuals, ensuring they feel confident and equipped to integrate gender perspectives into their daily activities (I13_SP). It also requires planning not just for immediate outcomes but for creating lasting capacities that endure beyond specific projects (I22_SP). Additionally, to reach not only those already committed to the importance of addressing equality issues but also other stakeholders who are not yet convinced, capacity building activities should be offered on a regular and mandatory basis (I2_GR, I5_GR).

Furthermore, these efforts *"must not be based on personal commitments"* (I14_SP). This involves, on the one hand, ensuring that responsibilities related to GE are part of the official duties of managers, GE Officers, and gender contact points in different departments, allowing them to be evaluated on these efforts (I17_SP). On the other hand, it also requires officially recognising the contributions of the broader community in such efforts: *"for example, teachers or professors taking their time to invest in developing the GEP, they have their time actually recognised and taken away from other duties, so it's not an extra duty but it's seen as an integral part of their job"* (I21_SP).

Still regarding the agency side of change processes, but now focusing specifically on equality bodies, having a structured, well-positioned, and stable equality body was identified as another crucial factor for sustaining changes (I1_GR, I2_GR, I5_GR, I6_GR, I13_SP, I14_SP, I18_SP, I19_SP, I22_SP, I23_SP, I24_SP). Equality units were mentioned as playing the role of repositories of gender expertise, providing support and guidance to stakeholders, and ensuring strategic direction for GE efforts through continuous monitoring (I6_GR, I17_SP). It is essential, however, that such structures have direct communication lines to both decision-making bodies and horizontal access to

the broader institutional community, and power to influence decision-making (I1_GR, I5_GR, I18_SP). Additionally, the stability of such bodies and transformational agents was highlighted as an important factor to keep the expertise and avoid losses of tactic knowledge (I10_SP, I 24_SP), and to build up trust between change agents and other stakeholders (I13_SP).

Ensuring that equality-related work is formally included in the official responsibilities of staff and that equality bodies and personnel are duly legitimised in their efforts prevents it from becoming *"an additional burden for those who should actually benefit from it – mostly women, who are already disadvantaged in academia and now are facing even greater disadvantage because they have to work for equality for free"* (I22_SP). Respondents highlighted that this issue has been observed in contexts like the Athena SWAN in the UK, where much of the application and related work is carried out voluntarily by dedicated individuals, usually women. Recognising this issue as a threat for enduring engagement and commitment, the importance of preventing this issue in other contexts of GEP mandates, such as the eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe, was emphasised as a means to ensure that equality efforts are not marginalised or undervalued (I22_SP, I23_SP).

Finally, to support the above factors and enhance sustained institutional commitment and agency mobilisation, four additional contributing factors emerged: first, having GE embedded in broader institutional structures and strategic documents; second, relying on an evidence-based approach through systematic data collection mechanisms; third combining such an approach with transparency; and fourth, leveraging networks.

Respondents argued that integrating the GEP into the institutional strategic plan and similar documents, as well as in structures like Quality Assurance Committees, is crucial for rooting it within the institution's core mission and long-term goals (I1_GR, I3_GR, I4_GR, I5_GR, I8_GR, I9_SP, I14_SP, I20_SP). When GE principles are embedded in the fundamental documents and structures that guide institutional operations, *"they become more easily part of the organisational culture"* (I3_GR) and are thus more likely to endure over time because *"you add something in the existing system; this is ongoing beyond the lifetime of a project"* (I13_SP). I20_SP explains.

> So, you have to change, for instance, recruitment procedures or, like in our institute, we changed the salary scheme. And when you're changing actual procedures, then it's done, you don't need a person, a specific person for that to go on. So, even if I'm gone from the institute, this salary scheme is staying there (…) There should be something where it's not important

> anymore that there is a person looking for it all the time (…) If there are procedures in place which are automatically used, that's perfect (I20_SP)

By creating an internal mandate that must be adhered to, this integration provides a stable foundation for the GE agenda. It helps align GE initiatives with the institution's broader objectives, ensuring they are considered in all major decisions and processes and making it harder for future leadership or departments to ignore or undermine these initiatives:

> The more they are formalised in the documents and strategic frameworks of the organisation, the more likely they are to stay in place. We also see how vulnerable things are when leadership changes; with the change of leadership, everything can collapse, but if something is on paper, there is a better leverage for the change agents in the organisation to bring this forward and mobilise again around these shared commitments (I10_SP)
>
> It is harder to change things once they are integrated in the administrative processes. For example, if you don't have a data collection system for registering the gender of your employees, once you create it, it will not be removed. The most integrated in the infrastructure and in the administrative processes, the more sustainable (I22_SP)

Additionally, this formalisation provides a clear, strategic direction that can be consistently referenced and upheld, facilitating a culture of accountability and sustained progress. This, in turn, can be directly connected to establishing mechanisms for systematic data collection and ensuring transparency in reporting. Regular documentation and availability of reports on GE actions help maintain focus and accountability through gender annual reports and mechanisms alike (I9_SP, I14_SP).

As with other equality-related responsibilities, while a shared system shall be in place, data collection should be distributed across different institutional departments, such as human resources, communication units, academic support services (I3_SP). *"Once a database is there and they are reporting about their numbers (...) it continues, people are in need of updates (...) and then it becomes longitudinal data collection"* (I9_SP). As I16_SP explains, *"it's through data that one can objectively demonstrate progress (...) quantitative and qualitative data"*.

Moreover, leveraging networks – internal/external; formal/informal – was identified as another factor contributing to the sustainability of GE efforts as it offers a range of interconnected opportunities. Networks facilitate resource sharing, allowing institutions to access funding, training materials, and technical expertise that might be difficult to obtain independently (I1_GR, I2_GR). They foster collaboration, encouraging innovative solutions and strategies that are more effective when developed collectively (I21_SP).

The legitimacy and support garnered from network participation pressure institutions to maintain their commitment to GE, providing a benchmark for accountability (I1_GR). Additionally, networks ensure continuity of efforts during leadership or funding transitions, preventing initiatives from being deprioritised (I12_SP). Through knowledge exchange, networks enable institutions to learn from each other's successes and challenges, building capacity and avoiding common pitfalls (I10_SP). They also amplify advocacy efforts, making it easier to influence policy changes at national and international levels (I24_SP). Collectively, these benefits strengthen institutional commitment to GE at the local level which is more likely to endure beyond specific projects or funding cycles.

Finally, the importance of setting clear and tailored goals aligned with the strategic interests of the feminist agenda emerged as critical for ensuring coherent and sustained progress. I1_SP expressed about a recurring tendency in prioritising short-term solutions or "patches" that address immediate needs, often at the expense of actions centred on long-term strategic objectives aligned with the broader feminist agenda. The following extended explanation by I1_SP further elucidates this point:

> When we talk about equality actions and institutional or structural change, it's important to distinguish between practical needs and strategic interests. Often, we focus on practical needs, which isn't inherently bad, but it doesn't lead to institutional change. (...) Perhaps we are dedicating too much time to the "meantime", and by applying these patches, we fail to generate structural or institutional change because we are not addressing a strategic interest. And I believe that our GEPs, even though they are very ambitious, are often still plans that address basic needs rather than strategic interests. They are patching up situations of inequality and injustice, but they do not remove the roots and causes that create them.
>
> (…) And it's extremely difficult for a GEP, on its own, to bring about drastic, radical structural change because organisations are highly resistant, and many of the actions respond to immediate needs rather than strategic interests. (…) To give a clear example, we see this with the issue of work-life balance measures. While they do address a need – women do need to balance these responsibilities – if the measures for work-life balance are only taken up by women, as we know happens due to the feminisation of work-life balance, it has an unintended effect on inequality, exacerbating inequality by limiting women's participation in promotion processes. So, a measure that addresses a need doesn't necessarily eliminate the inequality that caused the need in the first place.
>
> (…) That's why there's now talk of shared responsibility in work-life balance, but it's extremely difficult for a GEP within an organisation to achieve this, because shared responsibility affects areas beyond its scope of action. It impacts the intimate partners, family models, and an entire institution that is very difficult to change. What can challenge this issue

> then? Equal, non-transferable paternity leave is an example. Time will tell whether it actually generates equality frameworks or if it leads to unforeseen inequalities.
> (...) And I'm not saying that every GEP or action must aim to address the root of a problem and eradicate it entirely, because otherwise we would make no progress. (...) But at certain moments, I do think it's important to consider implementing at least some actions, like we discussed regarding the need to change promotion processes, incorporating much more transparent criteria to become aware of unconscious, and sometimes conscious, gender biases present in institutions. For this, much bolder, more challenging actions are needed, ones that question our models (…) acknowledging that you have a gender bias, recognising that you are not valuing certain things, and understanding that the concept of meritocracy is socially constructed and that the definition of talent is biased by a pre-existing notion of what is considered valuable and what is not (I1_GR)

Approaches addressing solely immediate needs reflect a reactive rather than proactive stance, which may inhibit the transformative potential of GEPs by concentrating on surface-level or urgent issues, rather than addressing the deeper, systemic structures that perpetuate gender inequality. This reactive tendency is further reinforced when long-term strategic goals are not central to evaluation processes by external bodies, such as the European Commission, which often take a "formalistic approach". As a result, change agents are frequently driven to meet technical requirements, diverting their attention away from the substantive work necessary to advance meaningful institutional change (I5_GR).

2.2 PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO FOSTER SUSTAINABLE CHANGES THROUGH GEP

To conclude the exposition of findings, I now offer a practical perspective by drawing on the recommendations of the interviewed change agents on practical strategies for embedding and sustaining GE initiatives to be implemented at both the institutional and broader national and European levels.

2.2.1 Institutional-level strategies for sustaining change

The first strategy emerging as effective for enhancing the sustainability of change efforts is to plan for "institutionalisation/sustainability" from the outset of change processes. Most respondents advocated for early planning as a way to lay a solid foundation for maintaining achieved results once specific projects and GEP timeframes are over (I9_SP, I10_SP, I11_SP, I17_SP, I19_SP, I24_SP). In this regard, I10_SP, a change agent holding extensive experience with several institutions implementing GEPs in different contexts, noted:

> It's my firm belief that sustainability should be built into the design of the GEPs. It's such a struggle to get people aligned to bring all the noises point in the same direction for the design of the GEP that people don't talk about sustainability when they're designing the GEP; it's something they tend to postpone or push ahead. And well, I think this is an error, because if you design your GEP in such a way that evaluation towards the end of the cycle is built and foreseen in your GEP, and the design of a new GEP is foreseen in your current GEP, then you embed the new cycle in a formalised way (…) you build in this assurance that there will be a continuation (I10_SP)

In a similar vein, I9_SP and I11_SP advocated for the creation of a formal sustainability plan alongside the GEP and explain its practical aspects:

> I think a sustainability plan is very clever. It may be even more helpful than a simple GEP with targets (…) because the sustainability plan has a kind of reasoning that's more about getting structures in place, making sure people are permanently involved with the topic, and making it part of education programmes, research programmes (…) you can adapt it to local contexts (…) even in a context where there's hardly an infrastructure in place on GR, you can still think about how to make the very first steps sustainable (I9_SP)

> You have to think about sustainability earlier, build it in a way that the action is the institutionalisation. So, the action and all the system of resources around it – the people, etc, everything needs to be secured (…) I was checking the sustainability plans of [project name] and the first thing was that: "Okay, we have to do these actions and these are the ones that we really go on after the end of the grant agreement. So, there was a longer list and the shorter list of those that really achieved sustainability (I11_SP)

Other respondents, in turn, contended that designing strategies with detailed actions to ensure long-term sustainability may seem complicated or unfeasible at the beginning of a change process, particularly in less experienced institutions and in changing contexts (I1_GR, I12_SP, I13_SP, I18_SP, I22_SP). In this sense, I19_SP reasoned on the experience of a European-funded project formed majorly by institutions with little experience with GEPs:

> In a way, having the majority of research organisations being newcomers, I think it would be extremely challenging to have them working on sustainability plans in a more substantial way since the beginning, when they still have to audit the organisation, assess the state of the art, design the GEPs… So, it's also a matter of really distributing the workloads in a reasonable way (…) They know that they will have to deliver a sustainability plan that will need to be approved by their management by the end of the project, and that we'll report the Commission within a dedicated task and deliverable. But we don't task them to put effort in that particular deliverable since the beginning of the project (…) I'm looking now at the due date of this deliverable and it will be submitted in month 33, when the project will end in month 48 (I19_SP)

It can be observed that whether or not a formal document on sustainability is created, it is essential to have a view of institutional change as something that must endure over time. Contextual factors must be considered, and a balance must be struck between immediate actions and long-term planning to ensure that achieved results are not easily undermined.

Alternative strategies for more comprehensive formal sustainability plans also emerged throughout the interviews. First, including "institutionalisation" as a key dimension in the GEP was highlighted as an effective strategy. As I3_GR explained, under such a dimension, actions may address the change of statutes and functioning rules of the organisation, *"allowing further intervention in specific domains, such as integrating the gender perspective in teaching and the curricula. This is only possible if there is this general orientation that is part of the guiding documents of the institution, and therefore both are interconnected"*.

Second, aligning the GEP timeframe with that of institutional documents, such as strategic plans, in a way that when strategic plans are reviewed and updated, both processes can occur in parallel, thereby facilitating the continuation process (I4_GR, I8_GR). This synchronisation helps maintain momentum and ensures that GE remains a priority during strategic planning cycles.

Third, establishing actions in the GEP document itself that provide for the GEP evaluation, institutional audit, and design of the next GEP (I1_GR, I2_GR, I10_SP). I1_GR explained, *"linking evaluation with diagnosis is important so that time does not pass, so there can be a continuity exercise with respect to the previous plan, trying to make the plan operational, focusing above all on those actions not carried out yet, on those new challenges that may arise from the diagnosis"*. This approach not only streamlines the transition between GEP cycles but also embeds a culture of continuous evaluation and adjustment, making it easier to address emerging challenges and sustain long-term progress.

Fourth, incorporating actions in the GEP that allow for regular monitoring of the change process has also proven to be effective (I8_GR). Regularly revising the GEP, for instance, on an annual basis, ensures that initiatives remain relevant and prioritised within the organisation. This ongoing review process reassures that GE efforts are aligned with emerging challenges and evolving priorities, thereby maintaining the momentum of change efforts and increasing the likelihood that the change process resonates with stakeholders and remains connected to their needs and capacities.

2.2.2 National- and European-level strategies for sustaining change

When considering practices to be implemented at the national and European levels to sustain changes, it is unsurprising that all 24 change agents interviewed emphasised the necessity of ensuring the continuity of European policies that compel institutions to adopt GEPs or similar initiatives. Concerns were raised about the potential for a backlash in the upcoming R&I funding period, with participants recalling the discontinuation of the GAPs between FP6 and FP7 (I22_SP, I23_SP). This historical precedent underscores the critical need to maintain momentum for GEPs to prevent similar setbacks and ensure sustained progress and the continuous advancement of national legal and policy frameworks.

Accompanying policy requirements, particularly the GEP eligibility criterion under Horizon Europe, robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms are essential to ensure that these initiatives are not mere box-ticking exercises (I15_SP, I23_SP). As participants highlighted, many institutions that received funds from FP7 and H2020 to implement GEPs currently have only formal documents in place, which however do not foster substantial changes (I12_SP, I14_SP, I23_SP). In this context, monitoring was identified as a significant missing link. I20_SP notes, *"there is so much money spent on the selecting of [project] proposals that in monitoring them – and I see it at the national level, but also at the Commission level – there are no resources spent for that"*.

It is argued that checks on GEPs as an eligibility criterion under Horizon Europe should not only verify the existence of a document and its formal approval criteria but also assess their quality in terms of implementation (I8_GR, I9_GR, I12_SP, I14_SP, I15_SP, I17_SP). Additionally, some respondents called for closer monitoring of institutions that previously received funds for implementing GEP to ensure they are held accountable for continuing progress (I12_SP, I17_SP):

> It's in a way a paradox that these checks will be set up for Horizon Europe applicants in general, and not for those who received dedicated funds to implement their GEPs via specific projects. (…) I think that it could be really argued for as an accountability measure, because you benefited from public funding to achieve certain objectives and you should be made accountable for those changes (I17_SP)

Acknowledging the complexities involved in implementing a comprehensive monitoring system, respondents offered insightful recommendations for potential strategies.

First, an agreed scheme for collecting data, allowing for comparisons and shared understanding across institutions, emerged as an essential step (I20_SP, I23_SP). Respondents raised concerns about the lack of a systematic way to gather information on what other institutions are doing, limiting knowledge sharing and monitoring for cross-comparison. They proposed the creation of a centralised platform for storing and sharing information about GEPs, where GEPs could be described in detail in a standardised but adaptable format. This platform would enable monitoring by both the European Commission and self-assessment by institutions, allowing them to benchmark their status and progress against other institutions in similar contexts (I13_SP, I23_SP). Additionally, such a system would enhance learning and collaboration at European level, providing a space for institutions to access examples and share experiences (I10_SP).

Furthermore, while some advocate for a monitoring scheme that adopts a positive and *"formative approach"* (I13_SP) to provide support for implementing institutions, others stress the importance of more strict accountability mechanisms such as imposing fines for non-compliance (I12_SP). Additionally, some respondents support the establishment of a European certification system for GE (I21_SP, I22_SP) and the funding of follow-up projects or large-scale studies to better assess whether the investments and efforts dedicated to GEPs so far have resulted in substantial and sustained changes at the institutional level (I13_SP, I18_SP).

Finally, as respondents considered the limited instruments and resources available to the European Commission, national responses emerged as a complement to European efforts (I18_SP, I19_SP). Beyond fostering the establishment of legal national frameworks that support GE advancements, emphasis was placed on the need to create national contact points. National contact points, in turn, would provide ongoing support and advice for institutions to comply with national and European guidelines (I8_GR, I24_SP). Such strategy at the national level would ultimately enable a more cohesive approach to GE across various contexts, helping to mitigate language and cultural barriers that may impede effective communication and implementation:

> This is something that is also important to be done in the national language. Because GEP implementers very often work not only with researchers; they work with administrative staff, and then language becomes a really important factor in how you can communicate easily. And very often where GEP implementers were the kind of pioneers in implementing these kinds of projects, they needed to do all the translation work, and I mean not only translating it from one language to the other, but to find words that seem to be appropriate in the context

> and that are saying the right things (…) That's also important in terms of sustainability (I18_SP)

3. FINAL REMARKS

This chapter has focused on two main objectives. First, it aimed to identify the factors influencing the implementation of GEPs within academic institutions, concentrating on the case of GEARING-Roles. The findings have provided critical insights into both the facilitators (structural, agency, processual, and transversal factors) and barriers (resistance) to effective GEP implementation, aligning with and expanding upon existing literature. Second, the chapter explored these factors in the context of their long-term sustainability, as a means to examine how the conditions that support or hinder GEP implementation can affect the institutionalisation of changes over time, even after the termination of specific project cycles.

3.1 FINAL REMARKS: FACILITATING FACTORS AND RESISTANCE TO EFFECTIVE GEP IMPLEMENTATION

Unlike a segmented approach that treats facilitating and hindering factors in isolation, our findings have revealed that the success and durability of GEP initiatives are shaped by the dynamic interactions between supportive conditions and various forms of which are often interconnected, with the same factors sometimes acting as both facilitators and barriers depending on the timing and contextual circumstances. This interconnectedness resonates with Palmén' and Kalpazidou Schmidt's (2019) argument that both enabling and hindering factors operate effecting implementation; they are not "binary contradictions or dilemmas" (p. 6) but rather complex dynamics that interact to either support or obstruct change processes. Similarly, the conditions for sustaining change over time overlap with those factors contributing to effective implementation, as also highlighted in previous studies (Beranek & Walker, 2023; Caprile et al., 2023; Hofman et al., 2023; Myers & Baisner, 2023). Understanding facilitators and barriers as intertwined is crucial for comprehensively capturing the realities of change processes in academic settings.

Specific facilitators and barriers in GEP implementation emerge based on particular institutional and broader societal contexts (Anagnostou, 2022; Ní Laoire et al., 2021). Still, as our findings have shown, despite their commonalities can be identified across different settings. In our case study, structural and agency factors were the most cited as

facilitators to the implementation of GEPs. Precisely, all respondents have highlighted the crucial role played by supportive national and European governance frameworks and resource allocation (structural factors), and leadership support and wide participation and buy-in (agency factors). Processual and transversal factors, in turn, often emerged as complementary to structural and agency factors, helping to reinforce and sustain GEP efforts.

It is important to note that while categorising facilitating factors is useful for theoretical analysis, in practice, these factors rarely function in isolation. Instead, they tend to operate in interdependence with one another. For example, resource allocation (a structural factor) is often closely linked to leadership support (an agency factor), as leaders typically influence how resources are distributed. Likewise, the effectiveness of participatory processes (a processual factor) is contingent upon the presence of a supportive institutional culture and buy-in from key stakeholders (agency factors). This interdependence means that change initiatives require a holistic and integrated approach, where facilitators work in tandem to create a conducive environment for GEP implementation.

In this context, our findings highlight the importance of adopting a "contribution" approach rather than an "attribution" approach when assessing the impact of GEPs. Instead of attributing specific changes to isolated actions or interventions, the contribution approach recognises that institutional change is the result of a cumulative process involving multiple, interacting factors. This perspective acknowledges the complexity of change processes and underscores the need for long-term, iterative strategies that address both immediate and systemic challenges. By viewing facilitators and barriers as part of an interconnected ecosystem, institutions can better navigate the complexities of GEP implementation and sustain progress over time.

As regards resistance to institutional change, our findings indicate that it manifests in multiple forms across different levels within institutions, often reflecting the underlying power dynamics and cultural norms that resist change. While instances of individual and group resistance were observed in some cases – such as at Institution 1, where trade unions resisted GEP initiatives due to perceived conflicts of interest – change agents most often identified institutional resistance as the primary challenge. This is likely because resistance stemming from a lack of institutional support and commitment to GE has a pervasive impact on the broader institutional community; it reinforces entrenched organisational cultures and norms that maintain the *status quo*, thereby posing significant

obstacles to the effective implementation of GEPs, as previously argued by Mergaert and Lombardo (2014).

Moreover, our findings reveal that resistance more often manifests in subtle, implicit ways, rather than overt opposition to GE. This tendency may be explained by the contemporary social and political climate, where it is generally deemed politically correct to outwardly support equality principles. As a result, resistance to GE initiatives often takes less visible forms, which can still significantly hinder the progress and effectiveness of transformative efforts. In our case studies, the primary forms of resistance included passive non-compliance or a lack of engagement, denial of the need for change, inadequate resource allocation despite formal commitments to GE, and the non-legitimisation of gender-related work. It is noteworthy that even in situations where there is no outright hostility to GE itself or overt denial of the need for change, issues such as low engagement in GEP activities and insufficient resource allocation persisted.

Precisely concerning engagement, across all observed institutions, the GEP teams were disproportionately composed of women, as were the extended working groups within the implementing institutions. This composition highlights a persistent perception that issues of inequality remain primarily the responsibility of women, despite the clear shifts in policy approaches recognising a structural problem and the need for institutional responsibility. Furthermore, equality-related work often goes unrecognised and unpaid, reflecting broader systemic issues of undervaluation. The lack of bottom-up participation and buy-in is directly related to this undervaluation. Fostering engagement cannot rely solely on a commitment to GE. As GE is increasingly recognised as an institutional responsibility, it is essential that all equality-related work – not only that of GEP coordinators and GE Officers – is both legitimised and formally recognised by the institution, ensuring that individuals are adequately rewarded for their contributions. Achieving this necessitates a fundamental shift in the hierarchical valuation of work within academia, addressing the structural aspects of the academic system that perpetuate inequality.

Examining the causes of resistance, it is helpful to consider the concept of the "dual logic of academia" – the organisational and the epistemic (Wroblewisky & Palmén, 2022), as resistance often arises in response to which specific logic is being challenged by transformative efforts. As the organisational logic is concerned (for example, actions addressing resource allocation or the establishment of dedicated GE units), resistance is often grounded on the lack of prioritisation of GE over other institutional goals. When it

comes to challenging the epistemic logic, this research aligns with Clavero and Galligan (2020) in that resistance to GE in academia often stems from a perceived conflict with established norms and values that define value in the academic system. Such resistance it frequently rooted in deeply ingrained norms about meritocracy and academic freedom, which are perceived to be threatened by GE measures.

The study also identified that resistance was more pronounced when initiatives aimed at more transformative and stable changes, such as addressing power structures or challenging traditional leadership models. This observation echoes the concepts of "preparatory" and "structural change" actions proposed by Sangiuliano et al. (2019a), who suggest that an overemphasis on preparatory actions (i.e., less transformative actions) may indicate an underlying institutional resistance to more substantial, transformative change.

Overall, there remains a deeply internalised adherence to traditional gender norms, with a strong attachment to conventional ideals of academic excellence and meritocracy, as well as to traditional leadership models that are based on gendered hierarchical structures. Despite the existence of policies aimed at promoting equality and the efforts of a few committed individuals, the fundamental objectives of these policies have not yet been effectively communicated or embedded across the broader academic community. This suggests that these initiatives have not permeated the broader institutional culture, which continues to be one of the most difficult aspects to transform, as previously noted by Albenga, 2016; Picardi et al., 2023.

In sum, this study confirms that institutional change through GEPs occurs through bounded agency, that is, through the interdependency and interplay between structure and agency, shaped by the dynamics of gendered power relations (Mackay, 2014). While agency is critical in driving change, it operates within the confines of existing institutional structures, which can either enable or constrain action. This dual role requires from change agents a careful balance between conforming to institutional expectations and pushing for transformative change. In the context of GEPs, this means that while structural interventions (such as policy changes and formal procedures) are necessary, they must be complemented by efforts to mobilise agency and foster a culture of inclusivity and equality. In this context, the sustainability of these efforts often hinges on the ability of change agents to navigate and, at times, challenge the institutional structures that may resist transformation.

3.2 FINAL REMARKS: SUSTAINING CHANGES OVER TIME

Examining our findings through the lens of sustaining changes beyond GEP cycles, it is evident that the long-term sustainability of GE initiatives remains a central concern across most institutions, regardless of the geographical contexts. This is especially given the heavy reliance on external funding and the variability of institutional commitment once such funding ceases, as also highlighted by Sangiuliano et al. (2019b). Our findings from this chapter indicate that sustaining gender change requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses both structural and cultural dimensions of institutional life. This dual focus is crucial to ensure that the changes initiated under GEPs are not just temporary adjustments but become ingrained in the institutional fabric.

While European funding is instrumental in kickstarting GEP initiatives, relying solely on external resources creates a fragile foundation for long-term change. Institutions need to integrate GE into their core budgetary planning to avoid disruptions once external funding ends. This approach includes securing internal funds, which can be augmented by external resources, incorporating specific budgets for GE into broader financial plans (as suggested by Addabbo et al., 2020), and establishing robust monitoring and accountability systems to track progress and ensure the longevity of GE efforts.

Importantly, resources should not be limited to direct financial support but also include human capital, training, infrastructure, and technical assistance, which are essential for building institutional capacity. When considering equality bodies, it is clear that embedding these within institutional frameworks requires a paradigm shift – from viewing GE as an additional or temporary project to recognising it as a core component of institutional policy and practice. Stable and legitimised equality bodies can serve as anchors, providing continuity and sustaining momentum for GE efforts, even amidst changes in leadership or shifts in external funding priorities.

In addition to securing resources, governance frameworks are key for ensuring the sustainability of initiatives like GEPs. Institutions in countries with legal requirements for GE tend to perform better on various indicators, as national legislation amplifies their efforts and facilitates progress. However, even in these contexts, substantial results from formally adopted initiatives are not always guaranteed, as is the case of Spain (Bustelo, 2023; Tildesley, 2022). In this context, European policies continue to play a critical role both in countries with existing national obligations and in those without them, as they provide a unified standard and a broader framework that encourages consistency and accountability across institutions. European policies help address gaps left by national

legislation, ensuring that GE remains a priority at both national and institutional levels by offering funding, guidelines, opportunities for cross-border collaboration and supporting capacity-building initiatives.

Nevertheless, legal mandates alone are insufficient to ensure meaningful and sustained progress; without effective accountability systems, it is impossible to guarantee the scope and quality of practical initiatives. Our findings indicate a general lack of robust accountability mechanisms capable of monitoring and enforcing compliance. To bridge this gap, comprehensive monitoring and accountability systems must be established at both the national and European levels, ensuring that GEPs lead to substantive and lasting change rather than temporary compliance. Notably, while there have been increasing efforts to promote cooperation and synergies across GEP-implementing projects regarding GEP implementation, this collaboration has yet to extend fully to the monitoring and evaluation work conducted. These activities often occurred on an isolated project basis, with limited mutual learning and exchange between projects, despite different consortia facing similar challenges and concerns. Reality is that the long-term outcomes of European-funded GEPs are not systematically collected or evaluated, leading to a lack of comprehensive data on their effectiveness and limiting the ability to refine strategies for broader impact.

Notably, the institutionalisation of GE does not automatically guarantee deep and lasting change. Cultural shifts are equally important, as they involve altering the underlying norms, values, and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities throughout the academic system as a whole. Instrumentally, our findings suggest that achieving cultural change requires continuous efforts to raise awareness, build capacity, and foster a culture of inclusion. This process must also involve challenging traditional notions of meritocracy and excellence that often overlook systemic biases and inequalities. Participatory processes that actively involve diverse stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of GEPs are crucial for such a goal, as they help cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment among community members, making GE initiatives more resilient to resistance. When stakeholders feel they have a voice and a stake in the outcomes, they are more likely to support and sustain these initiatives over time. Furthermore, capacity building, including training programs that enhance gender competence across all levels of the institution, can challenge entrenched biases and gradually create a more inclusive environment.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that the transformation towards GE within academic institutions occurs through a delicate balance between continuity and change. Effective implementation and sustainability of GEPs rely on navigating this continuum, where maintaining certain institutional structures and practices is as important as driving progressive change. The findings underscore that structural, agency, processual, and transversal factors all play interconnected roles in this transformation, requiring both steadfast commitment and strategic adaptation. The chapter also highlights the necessity of embedding GE within the institutional culture, alongside robust governance frameworks and accountability systems, to ensure that changes are not only initiated but also sustained over time. It is by understanding and leveraging the dynamics between continuity and change that GEPs and initiatives alike can be implemented not just as objectives in themselves, but as efforts that generate meaningful changes, embedding GE as a lasting and integral part of the academic culture.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis sought to identify the factors contributing to the slow and uneven progress towards achieving greater GE in the European academic framework, despite significant policy advancements and investments in prompting the implementation of GEPs across academic organisations over the past decades. To achieve this, I adopted FI theory as the underlying theoretical framework and examined institutional change as a process unfolding in different phases: the planning and design of GEPs, the actual implementation of actions, and the long-term sustainability of the resulting changes.

Initially, I investigated whether there exists a shared understanding of institutional change across different stakeholders and contexts by examining how European policies were interpreted by change agents and translated into concrete actions at the institutional level. Following this, I assessed whether the conditions for effective GEP implementation (structural, agency, processual, and transversal factors) were present in the GEARING-Roles GEP cases, while also examining the resistance encountered at implementing organisations. Finally, I analysed how these factors collectively influence the long-term sustainability of the changes brought about through these initiatives.

By employing FI a theoretical foundation, this research critically interrogates the gendered nature of academic institutions. FI theory, which has garnered increasing attention for its analysis of the intersection between institutions (including academia), gender, and change, has offered a lens through which to examine how these gendered dynamics influence both institutional continuity and transformation. Although FI has traditionally been applied in conventional political contexts, extending its scope to sectors like academia aligns with feminist aims to broaden investigations beyond conventional political arenas. This broaden application enriches both the understanding of institutional change in academia and the theoretical development of FI more generally.

FI's emphasis on the interdependence of formal and informal institutional rules has offered a nuanced perspective on the mechanisms driving both change and continuity in the observed case studies. It has allowed for an analysis of institutional change processes by highlighting the dual role of agency – both as a catalyst for promoting GE and as a force of resistance to transformation. In this context, feminist agency in academia was characterised as bounded by institutional structures and by critical actors invested in upholding the *status quo*.

Referring back to the points outlined in the introductory chapter, the following conclusions are organised in alignment with the main research questions and their corresponding sub-questions.

1. DEFINING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

To address the first research question – How is institutional change defined in the context of GEP implementation within academic organisations? – the following supporting questions are explored:

- Is there a common definition of institutional change among partners involved in European-funded GEP-implementing projects?
- Is there alignment in the definition of institutional change between GEP-implementing project consortia and the European Commission?
- How do contextual differences across institutions and countries influence the development of a shared definition of institutional change?

Despite the significant strides in European policies and the considerable knowledge produced under the dedicated projects, institutional change endeavours continue to grapple with inherent complexity. While academic literature predominantly focuses on the complexities encountered in the actual implementation (operationalisation) of GEP actions (a topic that will be detailed in the next section), our findings unveiled that the process of framing institutional change – when planning and designing GEPs – is equally marked by complexity. In other words, the very concept of institutional change, and how it is defined, is itself multifaceted and difficult to pin down.

Overall, our findings from both the GEARING-Roles case and broader sister projects confirmed the absence of a common definition of institutional change across stakeholders, both among the change agents responsible for GEP implementation and between these agents and the European Commission. Although a shared methodology and operational foundation exist for putting GEPs in place, establishing an applicable definition of institutional change across diverse contexts remains a significant challenge.

The definition of the institutional change approach at the European level has evolved significantly since its inception in the FP7 framework. GEP-implementing projects have acted as “laboratories” for learning through practice. Early projects began by piloting specific actions, which gradually developed into the more structured and systemic GEPs seen in later initiatives. Initially limited in scope and focused on more simplistic views

such as gender representation, the approach to institutional change has gradually evolved into a more nuanced understanding, recognising its multifaceted nature and the need to address inequalities at various levels. Currently, there is a growing emphasis on integrating an intersectional lens into all strategies, with European policies calling for the implementation of *inclusive* GEPs.

An important observation from our findings is that while earlier projects (FP7 and early H2020) placed significant attention to defining and understanding the concept of institutional change prior to implementing interventions, more recent projects (mid-to-late H2020) did not devote the same level of attention to revising foundational concepts. This shift can be explained by the accumulation of knowledge generated by previous projects and the availability of resources such as the GEAR tool since 2016, which provided a robust framework for institutions to develop their GEPs. Although this reliance on pre-existing resources has streamlined the implementation process, allowing institutions to concentrate more on the operational aspects of GEPs, it may have also led to a diminished of critical reflection on how the concept of institutional change was actually being enacted in practice – sometimes treating GEPs as an end in themselves. As a result, this approach has potentially limited deeper engagement with evolving challenges and nuances in designing change strategies.

Looking at our case study, European guidelines offered both process- and content-related provisions for enacting change strategies. The GEPs represented a tangible practice of policy mobility, where EU policies were received, interpreted within specific contextual settings, and reshaped into concrete organisational actions. The pre-determined approach to GEPs, outlined in the GEAR tool and of mandatory use in EU-funded GEP-implementing projects, along with the H2020 requirement to cover the five minimum areas of intervention (dimensions) in the documents, contributed to the stability and coherence of activities across institutions. In practice, this meant that, regardless of their prior experience with gender-related initiatives, implementing organisations had to follow a shared direction and meet minimum standard in implementation. This pre-established framework implied that institutions were steered away from focusing solely on more superficial initiatives – or, as Sangiuliano et al. (2019) categorise, "preparatory actions" – and encouraged to engage with more structural changes, such as reforming institutional structures and policies.

Still, while all GEARING-Roles GEP-implementing institutions followed the same overarching methodology, a closer examination of the six GEP documents, alongside the

reports of "institutional change actions" submitted by the GEP teams to the European Commission, revealed that significant variations emerged in how institutional change was interpreted and operationalised by each of them. Although it was anticipated that each institution would adapt the European guidelines to fit its unique organisational structure, local context, and cultural realities, it became clear that these adaptations went beyond mere adjustments to the scope and focus of proposed actions; they reflected how each institution conceptualised institutional change. This was particularly evident in institutions with lower levels of gender awareness, where institutional change efforts primarily centred on awareness-raising activities and capacity-building initiatives, such as training and workshops – actions that were not typically viewed as institutional change by other GEPIs or by the European Commission.

In addition to the differences observed among the GEARING-Roles GEP-implementing institutions, variations also emerged in how GEP actions were assessed by REA throughout the reporting process. The evaluations revealed divergent interpretations of how similar actions were measured and validated in terms of whether they qualified as institutional change, exposing inconsistencies in the application of what should have been uniform parameters, designed to achieve an ultimate clear and common goal. These inconsistencies in evaluations created further uncertainty among the GEP teams regarding the specific expectations for GEP outcomes and what actions should be recognised as genuinely contributing to institutional change.

Such inconsistencies were also reported by change agents representing other GEP-implementing projects, who noted similar challenges in aligning institutional actions with the broadly defined goals set by European policies. These agents observed that variations in how institutional change was defined and operationalised across different contexts led to difficulties in ensuring consistent outcomes. As a result, the lack of standardised evaluation criteria not only complicated the monitoring process but also limited the potential for comparative analysis and the identification of best practices across projects.

In sum, there appears to be no clear, shared definition of institutional change, either among the change agents responsible for GEP implementation at the institutional level or between these agents and the European Commission, despite the existence of European guidelines outlining GEP methodology and dimensions for intervention. While diverse approaches and understandings are not inherently problematic – and are, in fact, expected given the varying contexts involved – in a framework where European policies aim to strengthen a unified ERA, the lack of a coherent and consistent approach hinders the

ability to effectively monitor and evaluate progress on a broader scale. This fragmentation ultimately undermines the overarching goal of fostering systemic change across institutions and beyond.

In order to establish a shared definition of institutional change – one that balances flexibility and adaptation with the need for clear pathways and actionable guidelines (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019) – it is crucial to consider the inherent complexity of institutional change processes. As discussed in Section 4, Chapter 5, an examination of the articulations of institutional change across various projects and stakeholders confirmed its inherently complex nature. Gender inequality, as a wicked problem, poses significant challenges at the institutional level, particularly in its identification and characterisation. These issues are deeply embedded within both formal and informal societal and institutional norms, making them difficult to detect and even more challenging to address effectively. Furthermore, the lack of a clear causal relationship complicates efforts to devise straightforward solutions or establish clear pathways toward lasting change.

Our findings identified eight key parameters that characterise this complexity in institutional change endeavours: (i) the necessity of adopting a holistic view of institutional change; (ii) the importance of a multidimensional approach to power; (iii) a view of institutional change as social change, with a focus on both structures and agency activation; (iv) the need to balance "institutional change actions" with "preparatory actions"; (v) the recognition of non-linearity and unpredictability in change processes; (vi) the consideration of the dual logic of academia (the organisational and the epistemic); (vii) context-sensitivity; and (viii) the integration of intersectionality as a transversal lens throughout change initiatives.

Building on these parameters and the theoretical debates that underpin this research, I aim to contribute to the discourse on institutional change through GEPs in academia by proposing both a theory-based definition and a more practice-oriented one:

Theoretical definition
From a theoretical point of view, grounded in FI theory, institutional change towards gender equality in academia can be conceptualised as an incremental process driven by the bounded agency of change agents and shaped by the dynamic interplay between agency (in its transformative and resistant forms) and institutional structures.

This process seeks to transform both formal and informal institutional rules underpinning the dual logic of academia – the organisational and the epistemic one –, by challenging established gendered power dynamics to gradually reshape the *status quo* over the long term.
Practice-oriented perspective
From a practice-oriented perspective, institutional change towards gender equality in academic settings can be understood as a strategic and ongoing process of transforming the very "fabric" of institutions, ultimately leading to substantial changes in their structures, rules, logics, and culture through an intersectional lens. These processes must be at the core of institutional priorities, engaging stakeholders at all institutional layers and addressing inequalities across multiple strategic areas, thereby fixing both organisational features *and* the knowledge production logics. Change-oriented interventions should concomitantly contribute to short-, medium-, and long-term goals, ensuring that they are context-sensitive to meet institutional needs while also remaining aligned with broader feminist strategic objectives. Finally, institutional change strategies must be designed to sustain transformative progress, ensuring that reforms are durable, integrated into the institution's long-term vision and practices, and capable of influencing the broader academic system.

2. FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

We now turn to research question 2 – What are the key facilitators and barriers to the effective implementation of GEPs within academic organisations?. This question is examined through the following sub-questions:

- What factors contribute to the effective implementation of GEPs?
- What are the primary institutional barriers that hinder the effective execution of change interventions?
- What strategies have been identified as effective in overcoming these barriers?

2.1 Facilitators for change

Our findings on the facilitators and barriers to effective GEP implementation emerge from the case study of the GEARING-Roles project. The research confirmed that

successful GEP implementation is contingent upon a variety of factors that work in synergy across structural, agency, processual, and transversal dimensions.

Looking at structural factors, our findings suggest that national and European governance frameworks provide a critical backbone for GEP implementation, creating external pressures that compel institutions to, at least formally, comply with GEE commitments. In countries where legal mandates for GEPs were absent, European policies and funding mechanisms were identified as the primary external instigators of action. These frameworks, particularly through European-funded projects, played a crucial role in encouraging institutions to adopt GEPs, offering both the necessary legitimacy and financial incentives to support the implementation of GE measures.

Furthermore, resource allocation – including financial support, human capital, time, and technical infrastructure – was repeatedly identified as a foundational condition for successful GEP implementation. In our case study, participation in the GEARING-Roles project not only provided institutions with financial support but also a structured methodology, access to technical expertise, and opportunities to share knowledge with other institutions facing similar challenges. These resources were crucial in enabling institutions to implement GEPs on a broader scale and with greater ambition than they might have been able to achieve independently. In particular, the provision of dedicated resources ensured that GEP implementation was more than a symbolic exercise, supporting comprehensive interventions that targeted both policy and practice.

Concerning agency-related factors, leadership support and bottom-up participation and buy-in emerged as critical facilitators. Top-level leadership support was highlighted as essential in legitimising GEP initiatives, enabling resource mobilisation, and setting the institutional tone for commitment to GE. Notably, even where leadership support was more symbolic or formal, it still played a role in validating GE efforts and providing GEP initiatives with the visibility and legitimacy needed to foster broader engagement.

However, leadership support alone is not sufficient. The necessity of securing broad buy-in from stakeholders at all levels of the institution is critical to fostering a sense of collective responsibility and ownership over GEP outcomes. When stakeholders across departments and positions actively engage in GE efforts, it helps embed these initiatives within the daily functions of the institution, making them more likely to be sustained over time. Without such engagement, GEP initiatives risk becoming isolated or viewed as the responsibility of a select few, undermining their potential for lasting impact. Importantly, achieving this broad engagement was identified as one of the most significant challenges

faced by many GEARING-Roles institutions. While some stakeholders were deeply committed to the goals of GE, others exhibited reluctance or disengagement, either due to competing priorities or a lack of awareness of the importance of these efforts – as will be discussed below. This disconnect hindered the development of a shared institutional commitment to GE, which is essential for overcoming institutional resistance and ensuring the sustainability of GEP initiatives.

In addition to leadership support and broad participation, our findings revealed a previously underexplored agency-related facilitator: the social capital of change agents. The ability of key individuals with institutional influence to navigate hierarchies and secure support was instrumental in advancing GEP objectives. Yet, this reliance on individual agency exposes underlying gendered power dynamics within academia, emphasising the need for broader institutional commitment. Over-reliance on a few key individuals risks overwhelming them, marginalising the "gender people", and reinforcing the perception that GE is the responsibility of a select group rather than an institutional priority.

When it comes to processual and transversal factors, these emerged as reinforcing structural and agency facilitators by ensuring effective coordination, collaboration, and accountability in GEP implementation. Informal negotiation spaces, as identified in our case study, provided critical platforms for flexible dialogue and strategy adjustment, particularly with institutional gatekeepers. Public commitments to GE also played a vital role in fostering visibility, accountability, and legitimacy for GEP efforts, making it more difficult for institutions to downplay or disregard their importance. Finally, monitoring and accountability systems were identified as critical in ensuring that GEP initiatives were not only formally implemented but also evaluated for their quality and sustained over time. However, securing these mechanisms proved to be one of the more challenging aspects of the process, as long-term accountability to external bodies, such as the European Commission, was often lacking. Without continuous external oversight, institutions may not feel the pressure to maintain rigorous evaluation practices or to uphold the quality and longevity of their efforts – as will be further discussed in the following section.

Importantly, our findings confirmed previous arguments by scholars such as Kalpazidou Schmidt et al. (2020) and Palmén et al. (2019), who advocate for interpreting institutional change through a "contribution approach" rather than an "attribution approach". This perspective recognises that institutional change is not the result of a

single, isolated intervention but rather a cumulative process shaped by multiple, interrelated factors that collectively contribute to transformation. These factors, including leadership support, resource allocation, and the social capital of change agents, are not static; they shift in response to changing institutional, societal, and policy contexts. For instance, leadership buy-in may be strong at the outset but diminish as other institutional priorities emerge – as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, resource availability may fluctuate due to external funding cycles.

Moreover, the contribution approach highlights the importance of recognising the interconnectedness of these factors. For example, resource allocation is often influenced by leadership priorities, which in turn are shaped by broader institutional norms and external pressures. The interdependency of these elements means that institutional change cannot be fully understood or measured by looking at individual components in isolation. Rather, it requires a holistic view that takes into account the dynamic interplay of multiple influences over time.

2.2 Resistance to change

The study also identified several barriers that hinder the effective execution of GEPs, with a particular emphasis on resistance to change, given the institutional focus of this thesis. A key finding was that resistance to GEP implementation is more often subtle and implicit, rather than overt opposition to GE. Passive non-compliance, lack of engagement, inadequate resource allocation, and the non-legitimisation of GE work were cited as the most common forms of resistance. These behaviours were often aligned with deeply entrenched organisational norms and hierarchies, which help to maintain the status quo and prevent meaningful progress. The implicit nature of this resistance makes it particularly challenging to address, as it operates under the guise of neutrality or passive acceptance, while in reality, it obstructs the deeper institutional reforms needed to advance GE.

Resistance was especially pronounced in initiatives aimed at more transformative changes, such as addressing power structures, revising traditional leadership models, and questioning long-held notions of academic excellence and meritocracy. Such initiatives challenge the core gendered power dynamics that underpin the academic system, making them more difficult to implement. The reluctance to engage with these deeper changes reflects a broader institutional tendency to maintain the *status quo* by formally committing to GE yet through less disruptive, surface-level actions. This inclination

toward more superficial change – such as solely focusing on awareness-raising campaigns or short-term projects – reinforces the perception that GE is a secondary issue, rather than a fundamental institutional priority. Furthermore, it allows institutions to present an image of progress without committing to the structural transformations necessary to achieve true GE.

In our case study, while leadership support was widely acknowledged as important, a significant barrier arose from the lack of engagement across a broader base of institutional actors. GEP activities often remained primarily the responsibility of the GEP teams, perpetuating the unequal distribution of equality-related work and placing a disproportionate burden on women, which further limited the inclusivity and effectiveness of these initiatives. This dynamic does not merely reflect disagreement among institutional actors on the need for change or a denial of inequality issues. Instead, it highlights a broader undervaluation of equality-related work, which is frequently unpaid, unrecognised, and viewed as secondary to other institutional priorities. This undervaluation not only restricts broader institutional participation but also undermines the overall effectiveness of GE efforts, as it reinforces the perception that such work is peripheral rather than a shared responsibility central to the institution's mission.

In this context, several strategies to overcome resistance were employed across the observed GEP-implementing institutions. One of the most effective strategies was leveraging external governance frameworks and funding mechanisms, such as participating in the GEARING-Roles projects, to provide the necessary resources and legitimacy for GEP initiatives. These external supports helped to circumvent internal resistance by creating accountability structures that compelled institutions to take action.

Moreover, collective strategies, such as seeking mutual support among project partners, also proved instrumental in overcoming resistance. Fostering collaborations between institutions allowed for the sharing of best practices, lessons learned, and collective problem-solving, which strengthened the overall implementation of GEPs. These collaborations helped to build a sense of solidarity among GEP teams, enabling them to address common challenges and resistances collectively, rather than in isolation. Institutionally, mutual support among partners also fostered an environment of shared responsibility, reinforcing the idea that GE efforts were not the burden of a single institution but a collective endeavour aligned with broader European goals.

In this regard, the use of participatory approaches and the development of innovative strategies to address emerging resistances, such as the creation of the Humorarium,

proved to be particularly effective. These approaches fostered greater inclusivity and engagement by involving a broader range of stakeholders in the decision-making process, while creative tools like the Humorarium helped to diffuse tensions and open up dialogue in a more accessible, non-confrontational way, thereby allowing institutions to navigate resistance more effectively.

Importantly, the degree of relevance of different facilitating factors, as well as the specific forms and development of resistances – and the strategies to counteract them – vary significantly depending on the context in which GEPs are implemented. Organisational culture, local policies, and the broader socio-political environment play pivotal roles in shaping which factors take precedence and how they interact within each institution. For example, in institutions with a strong tradition of hierarchical leadership, top-down support may be the most critical facilitator, whereas in more decentralised organisations, bottom-up participation and grassroots mobilisation may hold greater significance. Similarly, the nature of resistance can vary greatly: in some contexts, overt opposition to GE may arise, while in others, more subtle forms of passive non-compliance or indifference may prevail.

In essence, our study reinforces the interaction between structure and agency and challenges the idea of linear progress, taking us back to the notion of "nested newness" or bounded agency, as proposed by Mackay (2014). Understanding institutional change through the prism of bounded innovation prompts us to a closer examination of the way established norms constrain transformative endeavours and shape feminist insiders' agency during critical junctures or instances of apparent innovation (for example, the formal adoption of GEPs). Setbacks, resistance, and shifting priorities are inherent to change processes. In complex environments like academia, institutional change unfolds through a focus on long-term, systemic change rather than short-term, measurable outputs, where true transformation often occurs gradually and through the accumulation of smaller, interconnected shifts.

These gradual shifts may be difficult to detect at first but are crucial in fostering the conditions for sustained progress. This approach challenges the notion that success can be solely measured through immediate, short-term outputs or quantifiable metrics. Instead, it emphasises the need to focus on long-term, systemic change, allowing for the recognition of both visible milestones and more subtle, foundational changes that are necessary for GE to become embedded in the institutional fabric. When GEPs focus heavily on quantitative measures, there is a tendency to prioritise data that is easily

measurable, such as gender ratios in leadership positions or recruitment statistics. While these metrics are important for tracking progress, they can also inadvertently marginalise the qualitative aspects of GE, such as cultural change, inclusivity, and the lived experiences of individuals. This technocratic approach can create a superficial sense of progress, where institutions appear to be advancing towards GE based on numbers alone, without necessarily addressing the deeper, systemic issues that sustain gender inequities. This can result in initiatives that are more performative than transformative, with limited impact on the actual culture and practices within the institution.

Moreover, the gradual nature of transformative change also highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability. Institutions must be prepared to recalibrate their strategies in response to emerging challenges, resistance, or evolving priorities, while remaining steadfast in their long-term commitment. By adopting an approach that accommodates both the complexity and non-linearity of change, institutions can better navigate the inevitable obstacles that arise, maintaining momentum even in the face of resistance.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the view that institutional change in academia is a continuous and evolving process, where the interaction between structural reforms and the mobilisation of agency is key to overcoming resistance and fostering genuine, long-lasting transformation. Institutions that focus on building a culture of GE, supported by both structural and agentic factors, are more likely to achieve the kind of systemic change that reshapes not only policies and practices but also the deeper cultural norms that define academic environments.

3. SUSTAINING CHANGE

Finally, we address research question 3 – What factors influence the long-term sustainability of institutional changes achieved through GEPs? – and its related sub-questions:

- How is sustainability planning integrated into GEP processes?
- What factors determine or condition the long-term sustainability of these changes?

Our findings on sustaining changes, derived from both the GEARING-Roles case study and insights from representatives of other GEP-implementing projects, provided crucial insights into how the conditions identified for effective GEP implementation (discussed in the previous section) interact with the long-term sustainability of the changes achieved as a result of interventions. The data shows that while European

projects such as GEARING-Roles were fundamental in creating the necessary conditions to initiate change processes, there is a growing recognition that these external resources and frameworks are finite. A key concern that emerged from the findings is the risk that GEP activities cease or lose traction once European project funding concludes, leading to a potential stall in GE efforts.

Without the continued financial support, institutional backing, and structured oversight, many institutions struggle to maintain the progress made during the funded period. This challenge underscores the need for institutions to go beyond short-term project goals and focus on integrating GE into their core operational structures and long-term strategies. Institutions must be prepared to take ownership of the change processes initiated by GEPs, ensuring that GE remains a priority even in the absence of external funding and incentives.

Precisely, when examining the specific factors that influence the sustainability of changes, one of the most significant findings from our study is that resource allocation emerges as the primary driver for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the transformations brought about by GEPs. Consistently mentioned by all interviewees, the availability of financial, human, and time resources is critical to maintaining and advancing GE initiatives beyond the lifecycle of specific European-funded projects. As respondents noted, a major concern arises when European funding ceases, as many institutions revert to minimal efforts or discontinue initiatives altogether.

In this context, the importance of securing a stable internal budget dedicated to GE cannot be overstated. External funding from initiatives like European projects, while useful for initiating actions, should not be relied upon for sustaining long-term changes. Instead, institutions must integrate GE funding into their core budgets, ensuring that GE work becomes a permanent institutional commitment. Without this internal support, even well-established initiatives risk stagnation. Importantly, the emphasis here is not only on the necessity of financial resources but also on dedicating personnel and time to GE initiatives, reflecting a comprehensive resource commitment. Good practices, such as the Gender Budgeting reports in Italy, serve as models for institutionalising resource allocation. By requiring universities to produce annual reports on gender distribution and the financial commitments to GE, these initiatives ensure accountability and continuous investment in equality-related work. This practice allows for greater transparency in how resources are allocated and encourages institutions to track the impact of their investments, thus ensuring that GE remains a visible and prioritised goal.

Beyond resource allocation, supportive governance frameworks at both the European and national levels emerged as another critical factor influencing the sustainability of GE initiatives. Notably, European policies were emphasised as being even more impactful than national regulations in their capacity to instigate institutional action, especially considering that many countries still lack national obligations in place. Policies such as the GEP eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe have been particularly effective in exerting external pressure on institutions, compelling them to uphold their commitments to GE.

However, participants voiced growing concerns regarding the continuation of GEPs in the next cycle of European Framework Programmes, fearing that any rollback could risk undoing years of incremental progress. They pointed to the backlash that occurred between FP6 and FP7 when GAPs were discontinued. Their concern stem from the understanding that, without a clear and consistent mandate from European policies, many institutions – especially those with weaker internal motivation – may deprioritise or scale back their GE efforts. This dependency on external pressure underscores the fragility of GE progress in certain settings, where the absence of strong internal drivers leaves progress vulnerable. In this context, the pressing need for GEPs to remain a central component of future European programmes comes to light as a means to safeguard the advances made and to prevent institutions from reverting their commitments.

Moreover, while external policies and legal mandates provide the framework for change, their effectiveness is contingent upon the presence of robust accountability systems. The absence of consistent monitoring and accountability mechanisms was a recurring concern among respondents, who argued that many institutions might adopt GEPs in name only, failing to implement substantial changes once project funding ends. Ensuring that GEPs do not become mere box-ticking exercises requires ongoing internal and external accountability, where progress is continuously monitored, evaluated, and adjusted in response to emerging challenges.

Notably, our findings suggest that change agents expect that, given GEPs are now a requirement for accessing Horizon Europe funds, a robust monitoring and accountability system would significantly enhance the sustainability of these efforts. Respondents highlighted that such a system could ensure that especially institutions which previously received European funds for developing GEPs remain accountable for their GE commitments, even after external funding has ended. However, this mechanism is still not fully in place. There is currently no comprehensive structure for assessing the long-

term impact of GEPs or holding institutions accountable for their sustained progress. This gap represents a missed opportunity to embed GE as a permanent institutional priority, and addressing it is crucial for ensuring that GEPs lead to lasting, transformative change rather than temporary, project-based interventions.

Incorporating a stronger, more consistent monitoring framework at the European level would not only reinforce institutional accountability but also support a broader culture of continuous improvement in GE practices across academia. This would help mitigate the risk of backsliding once external pressures are reduced, thereby contributing to the durability of GE initiatives across diverse contexts. In this regard, several respondents advocated for the establishment of a European-level certification system for GE, which could provide a formal, long-term benchmark for evaluating institutional progress on a larger scale.

Additionally, respondents noted that while a substantial body of knowledge has been generated by European-funded projects, it remains fragmented due to the absence of a systematised platform for accessing and sharing this information, thus hindering the ability of institutions to fully benefit from the wealth of insights and practices developed across different projects. Respondents emphasised the potential benefits of creating a centralised platform where institutions could share GEP strategies and progress updates in a contextualised manner. Such a platform would enable continuous benchmarking and cross-institutional comparison, facilitating mutual learning and collaboration. By promoting transparency and knowledge exchange, this system would not only enhance accountability but also support institutions in adapting successful strategies to their own contexts. Furthermore, it would contribute to the establishment of more robust networks, reinforcing the durability and long-term impact of GE efforts throughout the European academic landscape.

Critical factors in sustaining changes also relate to agency-related factors. Initially, while leadership support is essential in legitimising GE efforts and mobilising resources, it is also a vulnerable factor, as shifts in leadership can undermine sustained progress. Respondents highlighted that while top-leadership support is crucial for maintaining GE on the agenda, it is also a highly vulnerable factor, particularly when the institutional commitment to GE has not yet been deeply embedded into the broader organisational culture.

To mitigate the potential negative effects of leadership changes, it is vital to cultivate bottom-up participation and buy-in from the wider institutional community. Broad

participation fosters a sense of collective ownership over GE initiatives, ensuring that they are not solely dependent on the vision of a few individuals at the top. Respondents stressed that when different bodies within the institution take ownership of specific actions and responsibilities, the likelihood of sustaining those actions increases. This broad engagement also exerts pressure on leadership to prioritise GE, creating a continuous demand for accountability and resources.

Beyond leadership support and bottom-up participation, it is also crucial to recognise the feminist agency of change agents driving transformative GE initiatives. These individuals play a key role in navigating the institutional system and advancing GE, often operating in difficult conditions that require substantial effort and resilience. However, their work is frequently undervalued, both in terms of recognition and compensation, and marginalised in their feminist activism. The personal costs borne by change agents – including the additional workload, resistance from institutional actors, and emotional strain – are often overlooked in discussions on sustaining GE efforts. Duly recognising equality-related work and legitimising feminist agency is not just an ethical necessity but a strategic one. When change agents are supported and their work is legitimised, they are better equipped to sustain momentum and foster deeper, long-lasting change.

The creation and stability of institutional equality bodies also emerged as a pivotal factor for sustaining changes. Equality units serve as repositories of gender expertise, providing guidance, support, and strategic direction for GE efforts. However, these bodies must be well-positioned within the institutional hierarchy, with direct access to decision-making processes and the authority to influence organisational change. Moreover, ensuring the stability of these bodies is essential for preserving institutional memory, expertise, and trust between change agents and other stakeholders.

In sum, sustaining the changes achieved through GEPs requires a multifaceted, context-sensitive approach. While resource allocation and supportive governance frameworks provide the necessary foundation, long-term success depends on broader institutional engagement, ongoing capacity building, and robust accountability mechanisms. The durability of GEP initiatives ultimately hinges on how deeply GE becomes integrated into the institution’s core mission, structures, and culture, as well as how strongly it is embraced and demanded by the entire institutional community.

In practice, sustaining these changes requires a commitment at multiple levels: institutional, national, and European. At the institutional level, it is crucial for universities and research institutions to integrate GE into their strategic priorities and core operational

frameworks. This involves securing dedicated internal budgets for GE initiatives, embedding accountability mechanisms, and ensuring the presence of stable equality bodies with the authority and resources to drive ongoing change. Institutions should also foster a culture of inclusivity and ownership across all levels of staff, ultimately creating a bottom-up demand for GE that transcends individual leadership and project-based initiatives.

At the national level, governments must establish clear and enforceable GE mandates, including national policies that require institutions to adopt and report on GEPs. National oversight bodies should ensure that these plans are not merely symbolic but lead to measurable and sustained improvements. Collaboration between institutions and national bodies can strengthen the commitment to GE through shared learning, benchmarking, and continuous feedback loops that allow for the adaptation of policies to specific institutional contexts.

At the European level, sustained support through policies like the GEP eligibility criteria in Horizon Europe is essential to maintaining momentum. Continued European funding and policy frameworks can provide the external pressure and incentives necessary for institutions to prioritise GE. However, this also needs to be complemented by stronger monitoring and accountability systems at the European level, ensuring that institutions uphold their GE commitments beyond the project lifecycle. The creation of a centralised platform for sharing best practices, knowledge, and strategies across institutions and countries would further enhance the practical application of GEPs, ensuring that successful models are replicated and adapted across diverse academic contexts.

Moreover, these efforts must continue to incorporate an intersectional perspective that recognises how gender inequality intersects with other forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, disability, and other social markers. To be effective, this intersectional approach must be implemented in a strategically planned and coordinated manner, with institutions, national bodies, and European frameworks working together to ensure that practical initiatives maintain their integrity, are effectively translated into action, and do not remain an unrealistic theoretical expectation.

4. FINAL REMARKS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Taking all the above into consideration, it can be concluded that the uneven and slow progress towards GE in academia cannot be attributed solely to issues in with GEP

implementation. A key challenge also lies in the lack of clarity surrounding the very conceptualisation of institutional change, which has significant implications for how GEPs are designed and executed. This lack of conceptual clarity often results in GEPs that are fragmented and devoid of a long-term vision, focusing primarily on short-term, superficial actions rather than fostering deep, systemic transformation. Without a cohesive and strategic understanding of institutional change, many GEPs fall short of addressing the entrenched structures and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality, ultimately limiting their impact.

Compounding this issue is the difficulty of implementing GEP actions in environments where resources are scarce and genuine institutional commitment is either weak or absent. In these contexts, institutions tend to approach GEPs more as a compliance exercise, fulfilling external obligations, rather than as part of a broader, meaningful commitment to change. This reveals a crucial dependency on external pressure, particularly from European policies and funding mechanisms, which continues to be a driving force behind progress in many cases.

While this thesis provides valuable insights into institutional change processes through GEPs in academia, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, which open avenues for further research:

The first limitation regards the fact that the GEP implementation cases observed in this thesis took place within the context of European-funded projects. These projects benefited from dedicated financial and human resources, expert guidance, and structured networks, creating an environment conducive to effective intervention. As such, they provide a valuable framework for understanding how institutional change can be conceptualised, operationalised, and implemented when supported by the necessary infrastructure. While this setting provides a fertile ground for analysing institutional change processes, it does not account for the challenges faced by institutions implementing GEPs outside such advantageous frameworks.

As most academic organisations have never received external funding for implementing GEPs, these institutions often lack the necessary resources, expertise, and strategic guidance to successfully implement and sustain GEPs. Yet, they are now required to implement GEPs to comply with national or European mandates (such as the eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe). This raises critical questions about the capacity of institutions without prior experience or external funding to meet the ambitious goals set by European policies. Future research could usefully explore how these institutions

are adapting to the new requirements and the strategies they are adopting to design, implement, and sustain GEPs in the absence of external financial and technical support.

The second limitation concerns the fact that, while this research provides insights into change agents' views and strategies for sustaining changes, it does not represent a longitudinal analysis of the development and impact of GEPs in the long-term. Longitudinal studies examining the sustainability and depth of GEPs after the termination of European funding are still needed, as it remains unclear how deeply embedded these changes become once the external funding and support structures dissolve. Tracking the long-term impacts and institutionalisation of GE initiatives post-project is essential for understanding whether these efforts lead to enduring, transformative changes or if they are dependent on continuous external intervention. Are institutions maintaining and expanding their GE actions autonomously, or to what extent do these initiatives diminish once project funding ceases? Such longitudinal research could reveal the factors that contribute to or detract from the sustainability of GEPs beyond the funded period, providing valuable insights into the long-term viability of externally initiated institutional change.

The third limitation lies in the fact that the interviews conducted under this thesis exclusively targeted change agents. Although this focus provides a unique perspective, engaging with other institutional actors – such as decision-makers, administrative staff, and other stakeholders – could have provided a more holistic understanding of the dynamics surrounding GEP implementation not only from the perspective of those directly involved in the change process but also from the organisational communities as a whole. Future research could address this gap by conducting in-depth case studies of singular organisations, encompassing the perspectives of a diverse rang of stakeholders to capture the multi-faceted nature of change processes within a specific context.

More than ever, it is crucial to ensure that GEPs are not reduced to mere box-ticking exercises, which risks undermining the transformative potential of GE initiatives and diluting GE objectives into technocratic and easily measurable metrics, which may provide a semblance of progress but fail to capture the complex and multifaceted nature of institutional change. Reducing GEPs to a checklist of tasks diminishes their broader purpose, transforming them into bureaucratic exercises that fail to challenge the *status quo* or address the underlying power dynamics that perpetuate inequality. This leads to the critical issue of establishing a robust monitoring and accountability system at the

European level that tracks progress, consistently evaluates outcomes, and holds institutions accountable for their commitments. Additional research should focus on identifying potential frameworks for this system and exploring how it could be implemented on a broader scale across Europe.

Finally, another critical area for future exploration is the incorporation of intersectionality into institutional change strategies. While intersectionality is increasingly acknowledged as an essential component for understanding the complexity of institutional change, its integration into concrete GEP frameworks remains inconsistent, often due to a lack of knowledge and practical guidance on how to operationalise it effectively. This gap points to a broader challenge: despite European policies emphasising the need to address multiple, intersecting forms of inequality – such as those based on race, class, disability, and sexual orientation – intersectional approaches are frequently side-lined or treated as secondary to gender-specific interventions. Future research must explore how to better integrate intersectionality into GEPs, ensuring that institutional change frameworks are equipped to address diverse forms of inequality in a holistic manner. This would involve developing more robust methodologies, tools, and policies that provide institutions with the necessary resources and understanding to implement intersectional strategies effectively.

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Appendix A – GEP-implementing projects under FP7 and H2020

Project	FP	Timeline	Partners by country (n. of partners)	GEP-implementing countries (type of institution)	Call and topic
The Gender in Science and Technology LAB (GENIS LAB)	FP7	Jan 2011 – Dec 2014	Italy (4), Sweden (1), Serbia (1), Slovenia (1), Germany (1), Spain (1)	Spain, Germany, Serbia, Slovenia, Italy, and Sweden (RPOs)	SiS-2010-2.1.1.1 - Implementing structural change in research organisations/universities
INstitutional Transformation for Effecting Gender Equality in Research (INTEGER)	FP7	Mar 2011 – Jun 2015	France (1), Ireland (1), Lithuania (1), UK (1), Germany (1)	Ireland, Lithuania, France (RPOs)	SiS-2010-2.1.1.1 - Implementing structural change in research organisations/universities
Structural Transformation to Achieve Gender Equality in Science (STAGES)	FP7	Jan 2012 – Dec 2015	Italy (3), Germany (1), Denmark (1), Romania (1), Netherlands (1)	Italy, Germany, Denmark, Romania, and Netherlands (RPOs)	SiS.2011.2.1.1-1 - Implementing structural change in research organisations/ universities
Female Empowerment in Science and Technology Academia (FESTA)	FP7	Feb 2012 – Jan 2017	Sweden (1), Denmark (1), Germany (1), Ireland (1), Italy (1), Türkiye (1), Bulgaria (1)	Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Türkiye, and Bulgaria (RPOs)	SiS.2011.2.1.1-1 - Implementing structural change in research organisations/ universities
Transfering Implementing Monitoring Equality (GENDERTIME)	FP7	Jan 2013 – Dec 2016	France (2), Spain (1), Austria (2), Italy (1), Serbia (1), Germany (1), UK (1), Sweden (1)	Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Serbia, Spain and UK (RPOs)	SiS.2012.2.1.1-1 - Ensuring equal opportunities for women and men by encouraging a more gender-aware management in research and scientific decision-making bodies

Transforming organisational culture for gender equality in research and innovation (GENOVATE)	FP7	Jan 2013 – Jun 2017	UK (1), Ireland (1), Türkiye (1), Italy (1), Slovakia (1), Spain (1)	UK, Ireland, Türkiye, Italy, Slovakia, and Spain (RPOs)	SiS.2012.2.1.1-1 - Ensuring equal opportunities for women and men by encouraging a more gender-aware management in research and scientific decision-making bodies
Effective Gender Equality in Research and the Academia (EGERA)	FP7	Jan 2014 – Dec 2017	France (1), Spain (1), Netherlands (1), Türkiye (1), Belgium (1), Germany (1), Czechia (1), Portugal (1)	France, Netherlands, Türkiye, Belgium, Germany, Czechia, Spain (RPOs)	SiS.2013.2.1.1-1 - Supporting changes in the organisation of research institutions to promote Gender Equality
TRansforming Institutions by Gendering contents and Gaining Equality in Research (TRIGGER)	FP7	Jan 2014 – Dec 2017	Italy (4), Czechia (2), UK (1), France (1), Spain (1)	France, Czechia, UK, Italy, Spain (RPOs)	SiS.2013.2.1.1-1 - Supporting changes in the organisation of research institutions to promote Gender Equality
Gendering the Academy and Research: combating Career Instability and Asymmetries (GARCIA)	FP7	Feb 2014 – Jan 2017	Italy (1), Belgium (1), Netherlands (1), Iceland (1), Switzerland (1), Austria (1), Slovenia (1)	Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Iceland, Switzerland, Slovenia (RPOs)	SiS.2013.2.1.1-1 - Supporting changes in the organisation of research institutions to promote Gender Equality
Gender Equality Network in the European Research Area (GENERA)	Horizon 2020	Sep 2015 – Aug 2018	Germany (3), Italy (2), Netherlands (1), UK (1), Austria (1), Switzerland (1), Romania (1), Poland (1), France (1), Spain (1)		GERI-4-2014 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans

Leading Innovative measures to reach gender Balance in Research Activities (LIBRA)	Horizon 2020	Oct 2015 – Mar 2019	Italy (2), Spain (1), Austria (1), UK (1), France (1), Denmark (1), Switzerland (1), Germany (1), Czechia (1), Netherlands (1)	Italy, France, the UK, Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, Czechia, Netherlands, and Austria (RPOs).	GERI-4-2014 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Promoting gender balance and inclusion in research, innovation and training (PLOTINA)	Horizon 2020	Feb 2016-Jan 2020	Italy (2), Spain (3), UK (1), Slovenia (1), Portugal (1), Türkiye (1), Austria (1), Belgium (1)	Italy, the UK, Slovenia, Portugal, Spain, and Türkiye (RPOs).	GERI-4-2014 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Systemic Action for Gender Equality (SAGE)	Horizon 2020	Sep 2015 – Aug 2018	Ireland (1), Italy (1), Türkiye (1), Portugal (1), France (1), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1), UK (1)	Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Türkiye, France, Italy, UK, Ireland (RPOs)	GERI-4-2015 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Gender Equality Plans for Information Sciences and Technology Research Institutions (EQUAL-IST)	Horizon 2020	Jun 2016 – May 2019	Italy (2), Greece (1), Germany (1), Liechtenstein (1), Finland (1), Lithuania (1), Portugal (1), Ukraine (1)	Italy, Germany, Liechtenstein, Portugal, Ukraine, Finland, Lithuania (RPOs)	GERI-4-2015 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Baltic Consortium on Promoting Gender Equality in Marine Research Organisations (BALTIC GENDER)	Horizon 2020	Sep 2016 – Aug 2020	Germany (4), Estonia (1), Lithuania (1), Sweden (1), Finland (1)	Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Finland (RPOs) - Marine Science and Technology field	GERI-4-2015 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans

Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment (GEECCO)	Horizon 2020	May 2017 – Apr 2021	Austria (3), Italy (1), Poland (1), Spain (1), Czechia (1), Belgium (1), Germany (1)	Austria, Spain, Poland, Italy (RPOs), Czechia, Austria, Austria (RFOs) – STEM field	SwafS-03-2016-2017 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
TAking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation (TARGET)	Horizon 2020	May 2017 – Apr 2021	Italy (2), Austria (1), Romania (1), Cyprus (1), Greece (1), Morocco (1), Serbia (1), France (1), Spain (1)	Greece, Morocco, Serbia (RPOs), Romania, Cyprus, Italy (RFOs), and France (network of universities)	SwafS-03-2016-2017 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
CHAlleNging Gender (In)Equality in science and research (CHANGE)	Horizon 2020	May 2018 – Apr 2022	Germany (2), Austria (1), Portugal (1), Slovakia (1), Slovenia (1), Israel (1)	Portugal, Slovakia (RFOs), Israel, Germany, Slovenia (RPOs)	SwafS-03-2016-2017 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Pilot experiences for improving gender equality in research organisations (R&I PEERS)	Horizon 2020	May 2018 – Aug 2022	Italy (3), Cyprus (1), Tunisia (1), Spain (1), Belgium (1), Greece (1), Israel (1), Slovenia (1)	Italy, Cyprus, Spain, Israel, Slovenia (RPOs), Tunisia (RFO), and Greece (governmental body)	SwafS-03-2016-2017 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Supporting the Promotion of Equality in Research and Academia (SUPERA)	Horizon 2020	Jun 2018 – May 2022	Spain (2), Italy (2), Belgium (1), France (1), Hungary (1), Portugal (1)	Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Spain (RPOs), Spain (RFO), and Italy (governmental body)	SwafS-03-2016-2017 - Support to research organisations to implement gender equality plans

Supporting and Implementing Plans for Gender Equality in Academia and Research (SPEAR)	Horizon 2020	Jan 2019 – Dec 2022	Lithuania (2), Bulgaria (2), Denmark (1), Sweden (1), Germany (1), Hungary (1), Austria (1), Portugal (1), Croatia (1)	Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Portugal, and Croatia (RPOs)	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Gender Equality Actions in Research Institutions to traNsform Gender ROLES (GEARING-Roles)	Horizon 2020	Jan 2019 – Dec 2022	Spain (2), UK (2), Portugal (1), Slovenia (1), Türkiye (1), Estonia (1), Belgium (1), Netherlands (1)	Spain, Portugal, Türkiye, Slovenia, UK (RPOs), and Estonia (RFO).	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Gender SMART Science Management of Agriculture and life sciences, including Research and Teaching (GENDER-SMART)	Horizon 2020	Jan 2019 – Dec 2022	France (2), Spain (1), Italy (1), Ireland (1), Netherlands (1), Cyprus (1), Belgium (1), Czechia (1)	France, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Cyprus (RPOs), and France (RFO)	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Gender Equality Standards for AHMSSBL institutions throughout Europe (EQUAL4EUROPE)	Horizon 2020	Jan 2020 – Dec 2023	Netherlands (2), Spain (1), Slovakia (1), Slovenia (1), Germany (1), France (1), Belgium (1)	Spain, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Germany, France (RPOs)	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Leading Towards Sustainable Gender Equality Plans in research performing organisations (LeTSGEPs)	Horizon 2020	Jan 2020 – Dec 2023	Italy (2), Germany (2), Serbia (1), Albania (1), Spain (1), France (1)	Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Albania, Serbia (RPOs)	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans

Linking research and innovation for gender equality (CALIPER)	Horizon 2020	Jan 2020 – Dec 2023	Greece (2), Italy (2), Croatia (1), Georgia (1), Slovakia (1), Germany (1), Belgium (1), Spain (1), Romania (1), Türkiye (1)	Croatia, Slovakia, Belgium, Greece, Spain, Türkiye, Italy (RPOs), Romania, and Georgia (RFOs) – STEM field	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Transparent And Resilient Gender Equality Through Integrated Monitoring Planning and Implementation (TARGETED-MPI)	Horizon 2020	Sep 2020 – Aug 2024	UK (2), Greece (1), Sweden (1), Belgium (1), Lebanon (1)	UK, Greece, Sweden, Belgium, Lebanon (RPOs) – Business & Management Schools	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together (RESET)	Horizon 2020	Jan 2021 – Dec 2024	France (2), Greece (1), Poland (1), Portugal (1), Germany (1), Finland (1)	France, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Germany, and Finland (RPOs)	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Implementing gender equality plans to unlock research potential of RPOs and RFOs in Europe (ATHENA)	Horizon 2020	Feb 2021 – Jan 2025	Spain (3), Slovenia (1), Poland (1), Romania (1), Italy (1), Slovakia (1), Bulgaria (1), Portugal (1)	Spain, Slovenia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria (RPOs), Italy, and Portugal (RFOs)	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans
Modifying Institution by Developing Gender Equality Plans (MINDtheGEPS)	Horizon 2020	Feb 2021 – Jan 2025	Italy (3), Poland (2), Ireland (1), Serbia (1), Spain (1), Sweden (1), Netherlands (1)	Italy, Ireland, Poland, Spain, and Serbia (RPOs)	SwafS-09-2018-2019-2020 - Supporting research organisations to implement gender equality plans

Note: European Commission. CORDIS: EU research results, available at: https://cordis.europa.eu/projects/en.

Appendix B – Interview guides

Interview Guide 1

Target group: **GEP Implementers - GEARING-Roles project**

Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. I am a doctoral researcher in human rights at the University of Deusto in Spain and a member of the core group for the implementation of the GEP at the institution within the scope of the GEARING-Roles project. My research focuses on structural/institutional change projects funded under the FP7 and H2020 for implementing GEPs in academic organisations. I am contacting you for this interview given to your position as a key actor in the GEP implementation at [name of institution].

Confidentiality

Before starting, I would like to reinforce that all the information collected in this interview will be confidential and your identity will not be publicly disclosed for any purpose. This means that your responses will be shared with the interviewer and the thesis directors. You may also decline to answer any question or interrupt the interview at any time.

To ensure the information will be accurately reported in the final analysis, I ask your permission to record this interview. The recording file will be kept in an off-line database which will be accessed exclusively by me and will be destroyed after the defence of this thesis.

Would you like to ask me anything about the research or data collection and management before we start?

May I turn on the online recorder?

1st block: Definition of institutional change [38]

[38] Please note that this guide only represents the theme blocks and respective core questions of each. As a guide for a semi-structured interview, it may not include questions that emerged throughout the interviews and/or comments from respondents that covered topics beyond those proposed herein. It does not include the examples given for each question and personal notes for the interviewer either.

Considering the main objective of GEARING-Roles to be the promotion of institutional change towards GE in the GEP-implementing institutions:

1. Without disregarding the need to consider the specific context of each GEPI institution, has the GEARING-Roles consortium defined a shared definition of what it understands as institutional change? If so, what was the basis for such definition?

1.1 At what stage of the project has it been defined?

2. And at the institutional level, has [name of institution] defined a strategy for action (a Theory of Change) for the planning and design of its GEP?

2.1 If so, at what stage of the project did it happen?

3. How have the project partners been reporting the institutional changes achieved to the European Commission?

3.1 Is there a shared understanding among the consortium about what should be reported as institutional change? If so, how has it been established?

2nd block: Institutional change in different contextual frameworks

Considering that the socio-political and institutional contexts have a direct impact on the success or failure of GE measures:

1. Which contextual characteristics of your institution would you identify as facilitating or hindering the effective implementation of the GEP?

3rd block: Intersectionality

1. At the project level, has GEARING-Roles adopted an intersectional approach to the initiatives promoted under the scope of the project? How?

2. And at the institutional level, has your institution adopted an intersectional approach to the initiatives promoted under the scope of the project? How?

4th block: Impact factors

1. In the process of change at your institution, how do you think the presence or absence of the following factors prior to GEARING-Roles helped or hindered the implementation of the GEP? (i.e., a- GE officers, GE units, departments; b- Previous GEPs; c- National legal obligation on GEPs/equal representation in leadership/equal pay; d- Institutional normative, protocols, guidelines, and mechanisms that consider the gender dimension in recruitment and promotion, in decision-making, etc; e- Work-life balance measures that go beyond the national legal framework; f- Gender expertise in the work team; g- GE budget / other

resources (staff, hours); h- Incentive/reward system or sanctions to discourage gender bias and discrimination; i- Gender networks between the institution and external stakeholders)

2. Considering the GE actions taken in your institution before the participation in GEARING, how do you think these initiatives differ from the ones taken under the umbrella of the project? (coverage scope, resistance faced, resources available, staff commitment, leadership commitment)

3. Has the work under GEARING contributed to the creation of new GE structures in your institution? (e.g. courses, mentoring programmes, units, GE staff, allocated budget, mainstreaming guidelines, external affiliations, gender expertise, etc.)

3.1 Do you think they will remain in place after the termination of the project? If so, what factors may contribute to that?

4. Has the participation in the project contributed to the inclusion of GE in strategic documents (*including recruitment, retention and promotion policies, decision-making systems*) of the institution?

4.1 Do you think these changes will remain in place after the termination of the project? If yes, what factors may contribute to that?

5. Has the participation in GEARING has promoted changes in more people-related areas? *(e.g.: increased stakeholder engagement with GE issues; awareness about GE; increased commitment to GE from a wider range of actors)*

5.1 Do you think these changes will last after the termination of the project? If yes, what factors may contribute to that? If not, why?

6. Since H2020, gender is considered a crosscutting issue in all EU-funded projects. Now in Horizon Europe, there is a new eligibility criterion stating that the applicant entities shall have a GEP in order to get access to funds, in all areas of specialisation.

6.1 How do the European Commission requirements impact the position that your institution adopts towards GE?

6.2 Do you think the participation in a European-funded project contributes to the sustainability of the changes achieved during this period? If so, how? *(are there agreements with the European Commission for ensuring the sustainability of the initiatives; structural change community strategies and alliances beyond the life of projects, etc.)*

7. Besides GEARING, are there / do you foresee your institution's participation in other executive sponsorship arrangements for GE projects that impact the promotion of institutional change in your institution?

8. Considering the context of your institution, who are the actors you identify as key for the success in the implementation of the GEP? *(could be internal or external to the task force)*

8.1 What are their institutional positions? What is their relationship with leadership bodies?

8.2 How does their participation contribute to the sustainability of the changes?

9. Considering institutional culture as styles of thought, interpretive traditions and ways of working, are there specific aspects of your institution's culture that you consider to have a considerable impact on the implementation of the GEP?

9.1 How do you consider that your institution's position in relation to the following aspects impacts the success of the measures implemented? (a. Leadership style; b. Idea of meritocracy; c. Attribution of roles/tasks (teaching, research, students support); d. Unconscious bias in any area/people's positions towards GE)

9.2. Were these factors considered at the moment of designing the GEP? How?

9.3 To what extent have GEARING and/or GEP activities contributed to promote changes in the institutional culture of your organisation?

5th block: Resistance

1. What areas of intervention of your GEP are perceived to be "less problematic", that is, are more well-received by the institution?

1.1 What factors contribute to that? *(e.g. no budgetary investments needed, higher awareness of the topic, less contradictory measures, the role of the actors in charge of their implementation, external influence)*

2. Is there any area or topic in which you are experiencing particular resistance? Why do you think this happens?

3. What measures has the working group taken to tackle such resistances?

6th block: Sustaining change

1. Has GEARING-Roles (at the project level) established a strategy to ensure the sustainability of the changes achieved after its conclusion?

1.1 If so, at which stage of the project was this strategy established?

2. And at the institutional level, has [name of institution] established a strategy to ensure the sustainability of the changes achieved during the project after its conclusion?

2.1 If so, at which stage of the project was this strategy established?

3. What areas of intervention and specific initiatives do you think are less likely to be sustained after the project is completed at [name of institution]? Why?

3.1 What steps could be taken to avoid it in future initiatives? *(by the part of the institution, the consortium, the structural change community, and the European Commission)*.

Interview Guide 2

Target group: **Representatives of broader GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020**

Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. I am a doctoral researcher in human rights at the University of Deusto in Spain and a member of the core group for the implementation of the GEPat the institution within the scope of the GEARING-Roles project. My research focuses on structural/institutional change projects funded under the FP7 and H2020 for implementing GEPs in academic organisations. I am contacting you for this interview given to your position as a key actor in the [project(s) name(s)].

Confidentiality

Before starting, I would like to reinforce that all the information collected in this interview will be confidential and your identity will not be publicly disclosed for any purpose. This means that your responses will be shared with the interviewer and the thesis directors. You may also decline to answer any question or interrupt the interview at any time.

To ensure the information will be accurately reported in the final analysis, I ask your permission to record this interview. The recording file will be kept in an off-line database which will be accessed exclusively by me and will be destroyed after the defence of this thesis.

Would you like to ask me anything about the research or data collection and management before we start?

May I turn on the online recorder?

Introductory question: In which GEP-implementing projects funded under FP7 and H2020 have you participated and in what role?

1st block. Definition of institutional change

1. From your academic expertise and experience in the field of GEP-implementing projects, what do you understand as structural/institutional change?

2. How have the projects you participate/participated in established their approach to institutional change? Did partners come together to define a Theory of Change that could be applied to all institutions implementing the GEPs?

3. Some projects were run even before the GEAR tool and other tools were available. What tools (developed by the European Commission and beyond) supported projects in planning their change strategies? Did the European Commission provide any guidance regarding what it would understand and expect as IC?

4. Do you think it is realistic to have "minimum bases" for an understanding of structural/institutional change, considering the quite diverse contexts of GEP-implementing organisations?

5. When comparing previous projects to current ones, how do you think more recent projects have evolved?

6. How do you see the application of the intersectionality approach in structural change projects? How do you think it can be more effectively included in concrete strategies?

2nd block. Reporting structural/institutional change to the European Commission

1. How do participant institutions report changes achieved during the implementation of projects to the European Commission? (in what format, how often). In other words, what is expected by the Commission to be reported and positively assessed as institutional change? Are there common minimum bases?

3rd block. Sustainability strategies

When it comes to the long-term sustainability of the changes achieved over the lifespan of a structural change project:

1. Did the projects you have participated in have a sustainability strategy? If so, was it developed at the consortium level or individually by GEPI partners? (formally documented through deliverables or not)

2. At what stage of the project were these strategies designed? Since the beginning of the projects or they came about throughout the process?

3. Do you think that setting a sustainability strategy since the beginning of a GEP implementing project would be feasible and helpful for the endurance of the changes achieves after the end of the grant agreements? (considering that change processes are not linear, there can be many backlashes, and so on).

4. From your experience in previous project(s), what are the key factors that increase the likelihood that changes are sustainable over time? Could you give me some examples from your experience with institutions implementing GEPs?
5. And what factors do you see as usual threats for it?

4th block. Monitoring sustainability

1. Does the European Commission require the consortium to report on its sustainability planning and strategies? Is sustainability a matter that is assessed in mid-term and final review of projects?
2. What measures, if any, does the European Commission take to monitor the long-term sustainability of changes achieved through its funded projects?
3. From your experience in the field, do you think it would be feasible and helpful if there was a more direct monitoring by the European Commission on the long-term impact of projects?

5th block. Personal costs of gender-related work

It is known that the role of change agents (in the case of structural change projects, of the working teams responsible for their implementation) in processes of institutional change is crucial. In fact, the success of GE initiatives strongly depends on the ability of change agents to act strategically on a continuous basis, to "play the rules of the game" and act from institutional margins to negotiate and keep the progress of changes.

1. Is the weight of the personal effects generated to the actors in charge of implementing the GEPs considered when planning project initiatives?
2. How do you think these effects can impact on the achievement of institutional change?
3. And on the sustainability of the changes achieved?

Appendix C - Certificate of ethical approval

Deusto
Research Ethics Committee

UNIVERSITY OF DEUSTO RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE REPORT
Ref.: ETK-11/23-24

Subject: Assessment of the project entitled *Gendered Institutional Change: Seeking Substantial and Sustainable Outcomes*, submitted by María Silvestre Cabreral, in her capacity as co-supervisor of the PhD project, carried out Fernanda Campanini Vilhena.

As documented in the record of the proceedings of the meeting held on 26 October 2023, the University of Deusto Research Ethics Committee qualifies the project as: Favourable report. To all intents and purposes, the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Deusto will be responsible for the ethical supervision of the project, including periods of stay and mobility in other international research centres.

After reading the provided documentation, the research ethics committee of the University of Deusto states that the project is appropriate from an ethical point of view.

Issued, placed on record and signed in Bilbao on 26 October 2023

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Cristina de la Cruz Ayuso
Coordinator, Research Ethics Committee

Appendix D - GEARING-Roles informed consent for research

This consent form provides information about the GEARING-Roles project, a four-year (January 2019 – December 2022) Coordination and Support Action project that brings together a pan-European group of academics and industry professionals to collaborate and exchange knowledge, good practices, and lessons learned on designing, implementing, and evaluating 6 Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). The project therefore has a firm objective of challenging and transforming gender roles and identities linked to professional careers.

The consortium consists of 10 organisations: [organisation's names]

As a project funded by Horizon 2020 - the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme - which intends to foster the European Research Area, Gearing-Roles foresees the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data at the 6 GEP implementing institutions. You have been identified as a potential participant in this process. To take part in this data collection, please, read carefully the form below:

Aim of the project:

The main purpose of the Gearing-Roles project is bringing about structural change for GE at the institutional level. To this end, in addition to the ordinary activities carried out by the Task Forces of the project, Gearing-Roles is also supporting the development of further academic research under the scope of the project which cover broader areas regarding the achievement of GE in education and research institutions, and hence expand the impact of the project and its outcomes. For the development of further academic studies under the scope of the Gearing-Roles, therefore, researchers shall use available data from the project and collect information from the participating entities. Gearing-Roles has established three levels for analysis:

- The macro analysis refers to the national level, mainly in what regards to legal aspects, but comprehends the collection of data related to the situation of men and women in universities and research centres. For this, a sound analysis of the socio-political and normative contexts at the regional and national levels using EU and country-specific reports (with anonymous data) will be carried out.

- The meso analysis focuses on the situation of men and women inside the institutions. At this level, policies for talent attraction, promotion and retention are important as well as research and education policies: study plans, contents, competence, the presence of women in undergraduate courses, gender perspective in research and feminist studies. For this, work will be carried out in the collection and analysis of quantitative data through human resources services of partner institutions and through on-line questionnaires addressed to students and teaching and research staff of the universities.

- The micro level intends to analyse the values, attitudes, prejudices, behaviours and values that students, teachers, researchers and management hold in relation to gender roles. Semi-structured interviews and discussion groups will be conducted to enable a participatory process in the elaboration and assessment of the diagnosis and in the design of the GEPs.

1. What you will be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one of the focus groups and workshops and / or in-depth interviews, qualitative analysis:

- Identifying and discussing gender inequalities in work-life balance (workloads) at the institution related to career progression, access to resources and support in the institution,

everyday interactions among academic/research staff or between academic/research staff and administrators; and/or students and academic staff in the institution;

- Identifying and discussing sexism and sexual harassment in everyday interactions life of academic/research staff or between academic/research staff and administrators and/or students and academic staff in the institution;
- Identifying and discussing gender-based violence academic/research staff or between academic/research staff and administrators; and/or students and academic staff in the institution;
- Discussion on inclusion of gender dimensions in the syllabus of courses, pedagogical practice, etc., examples of good practice and common guidelines for curricula, other identified, relevant issues related to GE.

Notice that no information on sensitive data will be collected. Sensitive personal data relates to specific categories of data which are defined as data relating to a person's racial origin; political opinions or religious or other beliefs; physical or mental health; sexual life; criminal convictions or the alleged commission of an offence; trade union membership.

2. How will researchers protect the privacy of the participants?

The study has been approved by the research ethics committees of all partners. Personal data will be protected with a particular emphasis: the supporting partners will not have access to individual data of respondents, (names and addresses) and the implementation of the survey will meet all international and national standards with regard to data security or data protection. Among others, the information gathered will not be traceable to specific individuals (it will be anonymous) and data will only be presented in aggregate form. The databases available at each GEP implementing institution will be used, safeguarding the anonymity of the participants. At all times, the interpretation of the data will be executed according to demographic, academic, socio-economic profiles, etc., for which purpose dynamic Excel tables will be used. Regarding the online questionnaire, the anonymity of those who answer will be ensured by only identifying a sociodemographic profile. The contact with these people will always be made from public emails and after signing the online submitted informed consent forms. Statements and opinions will not be collected based on personal data but on professional profiles or on anonymous labels when the professional profiles are easily identifiable. In the discussion groups, the representation of all the groups will be guaranteed, based on intersectional criteria. Likewise, the groups will be designed avoiding asymmetries of power that may condition the free participation of all members. In this respect, there will always be a responsible person in charge of ensuring the free participation of all the members.

3. How will the researchers share the results of the project?

The data collected will support the development of strategies for GE and help understanding imbalances in terms of participation of staff and students as well as identify wage gaps, time lapses in career advancement, educational segregation, work-life balance, decision-making and assumption of leadership roles, among others. You will receive preliminary and final information with the results of the research performed on the basis of your participation. Observation notes and information from feedback forms will be shared with only those members of the consortium who require access for their work. This information will be retained for the lifetime of the project. After the research ends, it will be either permanently and irrevocably deleted after a maximum of 24 months.

4. Is there a risk or benefit?

There are no foreseeable risks related to participation in this project.

5. Do I have to participate?

If you agree to participate, please understand that your participation is voluntary (you do not have to do it). Your decision will in no way affect your current or future relationship with the University of Deusto/other. You have the right to ask questions and receive understandable answers before making any decision. You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop your participation at any time without penalty. You may leave the exercise at any time. Notes about the exercise will be taken during, but they will not include your name or any information that could identify you to others. As part of pseudonomysing the interview you will be given a unique ID number. You will be given a unique ID number as a security measure to foster anonymity as far as possible. This allows us to collect and process data in ways that can no longer be attributed to you without the use of additional information. The record that links your ID number to you is stored separately and subject to the provisions laid out in the GEARING ROLES Data Management Plan, which follows the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All data, including audio files, will be stored on password protected computers, in a secure location at the University of Deusto or on secure servers within EU. Every effort will be taken to protect your identity. You will not be identified in any report or publication of this study or its results. You can review any recording/notes that concern you should you choose to do so. You have the right to access, update, correct and erase all personal data. As to the qualitative information that you provide us with, you have a right to withdraw the same up to the point of publishing the information in the relevant deliverable. Your researcher will inform you as to the planned publication date. You have a right to lodge a complaint, to do so please contact the researcher or project coordinator (details below); they will in turn pass your complaint onto an independent panel.

6. Will there be any compensation?

There will be no compensation for participating.

7. Who has reviewed the study?

Gearing Roles Project is funded by the European Union's H2020 research and innovation programme under the grant agreement No. 824536. The project and the fulfilment of all the ethical guarantees required for its implementation have also been reviewed by the Ethics Committees of the participating institutions and also by an external ethical advisor. The study will be carried out by researchers from the University of Deusto who have signed a prior confidentiality contract.

8. Who can I contact if I have questions about the project?

Before, during or after your participation, you can contact some of the following people: Maria Silvestre Cabrera: maria.silvestre@deusto.es; María López Belloso: mlbelloso@deusto.es; Cristina de la Cruz: delacruz@deusto.es

Informed Consent Form

Name * _____

Institution * _____

I volunteer to participate in research conducted under the scope of the Gearing-Roles project. The Gearing-Roles project is funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 20202 funding programme, grant agreement number 824536.
By signing this form, I agree to take part in the Gearing-Roles research. The nature of the research, my involvement in it and my rights regarding the participation in the Action are explained in the Information Sheet accompanying this form.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood both this form and the accompanying Information Sheet.

2. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without giving reason and that my participation in this project is voluntary.

3. My personal data can be gathered to be used, stored and shared in the ways according to the privacy police of the University of Deusto (available in the next page of this form).

4. Data from my participation can be used to inform Gearing-Roles outputs.

5. Data from my participation may be used to an academic use such as articles for peer-reviewed journals and relevant industry magazines, and presentations at conferences and workshops.

6. Data from my participation may be used in the promotion of Gearing-Roles in general.

7. Gearing-Roles may take research notes or recordings of my activities as I participate in the research.

8. I understand that I have the right to ask questions and receive understandable answers before making any decision.

9. I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any question or to terminate my involvement.

10. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation.

11. I consent that my personal data will be transferred to and stored in the EU/EEA (Applicable for research subjects outside of the EU/EEA).

12. I understand my right to request access to any, and all, personal information that I have voluntarily provided as part of my participation, and that I may ask for that information to be rectified and/or amended if it is inaccurate, or request that all personal information that I have provided be deleted.

13. I understand that the Gearing-Roles consortium intend on retaining versions of research transcripts and questionnaires for a period up to 24 months following the completion of the project.

Data Protection Information

With the submission of your request you are accepting the use of your personal data authorizing their treatment for the activities indicated below.

Responsible Institution: University of Deusto

Aim:

The personal data collected are intended to analyse and manage:

1. The activities and research projects carried out by the teaching and research staff.

2. The generation and management of your curriculum.

3. The elaboration of the research memory of the University.

4. The dissemination of publications.

5. The elaboration of profiles of interest or preference and of activities developed.

6. The sending by physical and electronic means of informative information of the research activities developed and results.

Lawful basis:

- Execution of the contract.

- Legitimate interest.

Sharing your data: No data will be transferred to third parties, except compliance with legal obligations, development of educational agreements and / or consent.

Rights: You have the right to access, rectify and delete data, as well as other rights, as explained in the additional information linked below.

Additional Information: You can access additional information about the processing of your personal data in the following link:
https://www.deusto.es/cs/Satellite/deusto/en/university-deusto/information-about-deusto/the-university/privacy/privacy-policy/politica-informativa-en-proteccion-de-datos-relativa-a-investigacion-0/generico?cambioidioma=si

Appendix E – Informed consent for research – thesis specific

Research information sheet: Doctoral thesis
Fernanda Campanini Vilhena

This consent form provides information about the doctoral research carried out by Fernanda Campanini Vilhena, under the PhD Programme in "Human Rights: Ethical, Social and Political Challenges" at the University of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain). The research is registered within the Deusto Social Values research team, is funded by the Research Training Grants Programme at the University of Deusto, and is carried out within the scope of the Horizon 2020 GEARING-Roles project. The thesis focuses on structural change projects developed under the 7th and 8th Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation of the European Commission and has two main objectives: i) to understand how the European Commission and the different projects define the term "institutional change" and verify if there is a common understanding among the community; and ii) understand how projects plan for the long-term sustainability of changes achieved during the implementation of grant agreements.

1. What will you be asked to do? If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one in-depth interview, in which you will be asked questions related to (when applicable):

- Your experience as a member in a GEP implementing team, an evaluator partner, and/or a technical partner in a structural change project consortium;
- Your experience as an EC representative for the structural change projects community;

To discuss (when applicable):

- The process of goal setting, strategic planning, and negotiation in structural change projects, especially regarding the definition of institutional change and long-term impact.
- The formal and informal institutional rules that impact the implementation of GEPs in academic institutions, including everyday interactions between working teams and institutional actors;
- How the projects report institutional change to the European Commission, and how the European Commission monitors and evaluate it;
- How the projects report sustainability strategies to the European Commission, and how the European Commission monitors and evaluate it.

Notice that this research is sensitive to the professional, personal and political costs entailed in GE work within traditional environments such as academic institutions. Therefore, it is mindful of the non-linearity of processes of institutional change and pays adequate attention to contextual factors impacting the outcomes of structural change projects (e.g. Covid-19, political and economic crises).

2. How will the researcher protect the privacy of the participants?

The study will be revised by the research ethics committee of the University of Deusto. Personal data will be protected with a particular emphasis: individual data of respondents will not be disclosed at any point, the information gathered will not be traceable to specific individuals (it will be anonymous), and data will only be presented in aggregate form. The databases available will only be accessible to the researcher and, if needed, the thesis supervisors, safeguarding the anonymity of the participants. At all times, the interpretation of the data will be executed according to demographic, academic, socio-economic profiles, etc. The selected samples ensure representation of different groups among the structural change community, based on

intersectional criteria. Observation notes and interview records will be retained for the lifetime of the research. After the research ends, it will be permanently and irrevocably deleted after a maximum of 12 months.

4. Is there a risk or benefit?

There are no foreseeable risks related to participation in this project.

5. Do I have to participate?

If you agree to participate, please understand that your participation is voluntary (you do not have to do it). You have the right to ask questions and receive understandable answers before making any decision. You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop your participation at any time. You may leave the exercise at any time. Notes about the exercise will be taken during, but they will not include your name or any information that could identify you to others. You will be given a unique fictitious name as a security measure to foster anonymity. This allows the collection and process of data in ways that can no longer be attributed to you without the use of additional information. The record that links your fictitious name to you is stored offline and separately, following the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All data, including audio and video files, will be stored on a password protected computer, in a secure location at the University of Deusto. Every effort will be taken to protect your identity. You will not be identified in any publication of this study or its results. You can review any recording/notes that concern you should you choose to do so. You have the right to access, update, correct and erase all personal data. As to the qualitative information that you provide us with, you have a right to withdraw the same up to the point of publishing the information. You have a right to lodge a complaint, to do so please contact the researcher or project supervisors (details below).

6. Will there be any compensation?

There will be no compensation for participating.

7. Who can I contact if I have questions about the research?

Before, during or after your participation, you can contact the researcher and/or the thesis supervisors through the following email contacts: Fernanda Campanini Vilhena: fernanda.campanini@deusto.es; Maria Silvestre Cabrera: maria.silvestre@deusto.es; María López Belloso: mlbelloso@deusto.es

You can access additional information about the processing of your personal data in the following link: https://www.deusto.es/cs/Satellite/deusto/en/university-deusto/information-about-deusto/the-university/privacy/privacy-policy/politica-informativa-en-proteccion-de-datos-relativa-a-investigacion-0/generico?cambioidioma=si

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Informed consent form

I volunteer to participate in the research. The nature of the research, my involvement in it and my rights regarding the participation are explained in the Information sheet accompanying this form.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood both this form and the accompanying Information Sheet.

2. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without giving reason and that my participation in this project is voluntary.

3. My personal data can be gathered to be used, stored and shared in the ways according to the privacy policy of the University of Deusto.

4. Data from my participation may be used for academic use such as the doctoral thesis concerned, articles for peer-reviewed journals, books, relevant industry magazines, and presentations at conferences and workshops.

5. I understand that I have the right to ask questions and receive understandable answers before making any decision.

6. I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any question or to terminate my involvement.

7. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation.

8. I consent that my personal data will be transferred to and stored in the EU/EEA (Applicable for research subjects outside of the EU/EEA).

9. I understand my right to request access to any, and all, personal information that I have voluntarily provided as part of my participation, and that I may ask for that information to be rectified and/or amended if it is inaccurate, or request that all personal information that I have provided be deleted.

I, (name) _____, confirm that I have read the information about the research information sheet and about the data collection purposes.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix F – GEARING-Roles GEP actions by category

Table 37. GEARING-Roles GEPs per measures and typology of actions: Institution 1

Area of intervention	Action	Category
Selection, recruitment and promotion	Identify and define the different profiles and roles of the administrative staff	Preparatory action
	Analyse the relationship of roles and profiles to pay scale categories	Preparatory action
	Assign the jobs to the profiles/roles established for the Administrative Staff	Preparatory action
	Analyse the career development procedures of the teaching personnel	Preparatory action
	Analyse the career development procedures of the research personnel	Preparatory action
	Evaluate the use of people management tools in other organisations	Preparatory action
	Acquire or develop a talent management tool	Structural change action
	Implement a mentoring program for female researchers	Structural change action
	Participate in the workshops on Personal Career Development Plan organised in the context of the GEARING-Roles project	Preparatory action
	Participate in the workshops on Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment organised in the context of the GEARING-Roles project	Preparatory action
Wage gap	Map the salary structure of the institution and analyse cases of salary gaps of more than 25% in equivalent positions	Preparatory action
	Make an action plan for its elimination	Structural change action
	Implement measures to prevent its reproduction	Structural change action

Work-life balance	Maternity/paternity leave or leave to care for family members should not be counted as time spent in the calculation of the MGPDI's three-year research period	Structural change action
	Negotiate with the National Commission for the Evaluation of Research Activity (CNEAI) the computation of the six-year periods of research as has already been done for civil servants	Structural change action
	Realise a follow up on the implemented conciliation measures in the previous Equality Plan	Preparatory action
	Design conciliation measures for groups that were unable to access the measures established in the previous Equality Plan	Structural change action
	Analyse the possible improvement of existing legal conciliation measures	Structural change action
	Include a chapter about the psychosocial risk of "double presence" in the Plan of Prevention of Labour Risks	Structural change action
Research and curricula	Design a system of indicators to evaluate the inclusion of the gender perspective in learning programmes and guides	Structural change action
	Design a training course for teachers	Preparatory action
	Apply the system of indicators to evaluate the inclusion of the gender perspective in programmes and learning guides	Structural change action
	Create a pilot group of volunteer teachers with representation from all faculties for the application of the gender perspective in teaching	Structural change action
	Elaborate a Guide for the introduction of the gender perspective in teaching, adapting the already existing material	Structural change action
	Publish the good practices in the introduction of the gender perspective of the Teaching Innovation Day	Preparatory action
	Realise a mapping of the key competences from a gender perspective in different subjects	Preparatory action

	Call for an undergraduate thesis award and a master thesis award with a gender perspective	Structural change action
	Approve gender mainstreaming in programmes/guidelines as a criterion for recognition of points in the MGPDI	Structural change action
	Offer workshops and training actions on how to apply the gender perspective in teaching and research adapted to different levels	Preparatory action
	Organise a Summer School	Preparatory action
	Awareness campaign on November 25	Preparatory action
	Awareness campaign on March 8	Preparatory action
	Design indicators to establish a system to identify the gender perspective in research projects	Structural change action
	Design indicators to incorporate the gender perspective as a criterion for assessing the social impact of research	Structural change action
	Offer training workshops and actions on how to apply the gender perspective in research adapted to different levels	Preparatory action
	Develop a manual for gender mainstreaming in research	Structural change action
	Promote a mentoring programme with doctoral students for the inclusion of the gender perspective in research	Structural change action
	Include of the gender perspective as an assessment criterion in the institutional research calls	Structural change action
	Call for a doctoral thesis award with a gender perspective	Structural change action
Leadership and decision-making	Include specific scores in the evaluation of candidates, based on the representativeness of the gender to which they belong in the body to which they aspire	Structural change action
	Design specific training actions within the institutional training offer, which are compulsory for those people who access / are in management positions	Preparatory action

	Implement a questionnaire to all workers with specific questions about the leadership observed	Preparatory action
	Conduct a training and awareness session with the Board of Directors	Preparatory action
	Participate in the Training Program for Women Leaders developed in the framework of the GEARING-Roles project	Preparatory action
	Design specific webinars on leadership and encourage the participation of senior managers of the institution	Preparatory action
	Carry out group reflection sessions about the leadership model of the institution in the different groups of the institution	Preparatory action
	Apply a questionnaire to all staff with specific questions about the leadership observed	Preparatory action
Sexism and sexual harassment	Manifest public commitment to pursue and eradicate any situation of discrimination, violence or sexual- or gender-based harassment	Structural change action
	Carry out training actions aimed at specific audiences (students, administrative staff, Research personnel, Teaching and Research personnel)	Preparatory action
	Establish external partnerships to channel and address identified cases of gender-based violence	Preparatory action
	Develop information and awareness campaigns on the Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women	Preparatory action
	Disseminate the protocols online and offline	Preparatory action
	Conduct information campaigns on existing resources on violence against women	Preparatory action
Gender-sensitive language	Identify good practices in organising inclusive and parity public events and disseminate them for widespread use	Preparatory action
	Avoid all-male panels by ensuring the participation of female experts whenever possible	Structural change action
	Analyse the events organised by the institution and the role played by women	Preparatory action

	Design and implement a plan for socialisation and monitoring of the non-sexist language guide for all groups	Structural change action
	Promote the incorporation and progressive assumption of the recommendations in the use of non-sexist language	Structural change action
	Establish priority groups and make a training plan in the use of the non-sexist language guide	Preparatory action
	Create and disseminate a directory of women experts in different fields and areas of knowledge	Preparatory action
	Develop and disseminate multimedia content to make women's knowledge in the different areas of knowledge visible (pills, interviews, inspirational phrases, etc.)	Preparatory action
	Adhesion to the campaign "Where are they?": to make the presence of women experts visible in public spaces, especially as speakers in debates, events and conferences on European issues	Preparatory action
Eva-Lua-tion	Analyse the impact achieved by the Plan (degree of increase in socialisation, perception, awareness, implementation, etc.)	Preparatory action

Table 38. GEARING-Roles GEPs per measures and typology of actions: Institution 2

Area of intervention	Measures	Typology
Mission and institutional culture	Include the commitment for GE promotion within the institutional mission	Structural change action
	Produce the institutional Welcome Guide, with up-to-date legal information in terms of GE	Structural change action
	Publicise the GEP at the institution’s website and other communication channels	Preparatory action
	Ensure the GEP implementation, monitoring, evaluation and sustainability through the elaboration of an annual report	Structural change action

	Include GE principles in strategic documents (e.g. reports, plans, regulations) as a corporate value	Structural change action
	Create a Commission for Equality for the promotion of all forms of equality and against the discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and other intersectional factors	Structural change action
	Systematically collect and publicise information disaggregated by sex.	Preparatory action
	Training/awareness raising for decision-making bodies regarding gender issues	Preparatory action
	Include training for the promotion of GE, gender stereotypes, inclusive language, work-personal life balance, and sexual and moral harassment into the regular training options for staff	Preparatory action
	Promote the use of inclusive language in official/institutional communication and reports in 25%/year	Structural change action
	Include principles of GE and institutional commitment to GE promotion into the students' manual	Structural change action
	Promote task force follow up meetings	Preparatory action
Leadership and decision-making	Comply with existing national legislation introducing a minimum of 40% female representation at government bodies and higher education institutions	Structural change action
Student recruitment and trajectories	Ensure gender balanced representation of students in student's events (e.g. students' fairs, Ambassadors Programme, Students Association etc.)	Structural change action
	Give visibility to female role models (key female geographers, national or foreign)	Preparatory action
	Monitor students' achievement rates and dropouts, by sex, and propose corrective measures	Structural change action
	Develop mentoring programmes to encourage women-led applications	Structural change action
	Publicise information regarding gender of applicants (for job vacancies)	Preparatory action

Recruitment and promotion	Ensure gender parity at the composition of academic jury's and recruitment panels (40%)	Structural change action
Research and curricula	Promote training on research funding skills and balanced composition of research teams	Preparatory action
	Promote training programmes on how to include gender perspective within research project and on its economic, social and innovation value	Preparatory action
	Increase the number of theses and publications including gender perspective	Structural change action
	Creation of a biannual prize for research with a gender perspective	Structural change action
	Establish clear guidelines to ensure gender parity at conference panels and other academic events (and achieve 40% of female representation in all events)	Structural change action
	Make evident that, whenever pertinent, research applications hosted by the institution (including doctoral and postdoctoral grants and projects) need to detail in which ways a gender perspective will be used in the project	Structural change action
	Ratify the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers	Structural change action
	Promote training and awareness raising programmes for GE and the development of soft skills	Preparatory action
	Inclusion of gender perspective within courses' programmes (when pertinent)	Structural change action
Work-life balance	Adjust, whenever possible, work meetings and commitments to take place at working hours (bearing in mind exceptional cases) and encourage online meetings	Structural change action
	Give positive visibility to men taking parenthood leave	Preparatory action
	Implement, whenever possible, a compensatory time system (Law 59/2008, Public Labour Regime)	Structural change action

	Take actions for the work-personal life balance of the members of the academic community (disseminate videos, prioritise placement at Summer School and other social activities for family members)	Structural change action
	Publicise existing social action programmes at the University level	Preparatory action
Sexism and sexual harass-ment	Create specific mechanisms for filing complaints in case of discrimination, moral harassment, sexual harassment and other types of violence in the work/study environment	Structural change action
	Publicise available mechanisms for filing complaints	Preparatory action

Table 39. GEARING-Roles GEPs per measures and typology of actions: Institution 3

Area of intervention	Measures	Typology
Establishing sex-disaggregated database and mechanisms	Analyse the new data collection system and prepare a set of indicators to monitor GE in career progression, pay gaps, work-life balance, and student choices and progression	Structural change action
	Deliberate on indicators for monitoring GE in priority areas in collaboration with the Quality Assurance commission	Structural change action
	Establish a strategy for period monitoring of GE as part of the Quality Assurance process and implement the clusters of indicators	Structural change action
	Mentoring programme activities	Structural change action
Research and curricula	Prepare a questionnaire to understand the state of play of GEE in teaching and learning at the level of departments	Preparatory action
	Present and discuss the results of the questionnaire	Preparatory action

	Raise awareness on the importance of GE in teaching, learning and research through co-creative and participative work with institutional stakeholder groups	Preparatory action
	Prepare institutional guidelines on GE in teaching, learning and research	Structural change action
	Organise events to promote GE in the academic activities at the level of departments (workshops, talks, exhibitions)	Preparatory action
	Training for faculty members on how to design and develop gender-related content and competences, and include a gender perspective across the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral curricula of all academic disciplines	Preparatory action
Gender sensitive language	Workshops on gender and language in academia for sensitising for gender inclusive language	Preparatory action
	Review institutional documents and include gender sensitive expressions (e.g., gender-sensitive academic titles, diplomas, contracts, etc)	Structural change action
Sex stereotypes, sexual harassment and discrimination	Awareness raising activities targeting students	Preparatory action
	Workshops on gender discrimination, stereotypes and harassment	Preparatory action
	Share information on current and future institutional activities regarding prevention of sexual harassment	Preparatory action
	Develop guidelines on sexual harassment in collaboration with institutional and external experts in the subject and review existing documents and good practices	Structural change action
	Publish guidelines, booklets, posters	Preparatory action
	Establish counselling services for gender-based offenses and harassment	Structural change action
	Review good practices and prepare guidelines for gender balance in leadership and decision-making	Preparatory action

Mission statement	Formulate the mission statement and meet with leadership and members of departments to decide how to and where to implement the mission statement	Structural change action
	Establish a GE webspace on the institutional website	Structural change action

Table 40. GEARING-Roles GEPs per Measures and typology of actions: Institution 4

Area of intervention	Measures	Typology
Data monitoring and evaluation	Create a data working group responsible for the systematic data collection and analysis to monitor gender and intersectional equality across all dimensions of the institution	Structural change action
	Align data collection and analysis strategy with national datasets	Structural change action
	Review existing Athena Swan surveys using gender plus approach	Structural change action
	Monitor impact assessment metrics by gender and intersecting inequalities	Structural change action
Governance	Impact assessment of action plans from previous GEPs	Preparatory action
	Monitor composition of existing committees	Structural change action
	Recognition of governance activities e.g. committees, in workload planning	Structural change action
	Recognition of governance activities e.g. committees, as part of the Personal Development Review	Structural change action
	Increase the profile of GEP initiatives and successes	Structural change action
Leadership and	Analyse impact/outcomes of mentoring programmes (survey and follow-up interviews)	Structural change action
	Evaluate impact of Women's Leadership Programme (survey and follow-up interviews)	Structural change action

decision-making	Analysis of leadership career pipelines	Preparatory action
	Assess barriers and enablers to promotion (focus groups)	Preparatory action
	Monitor and evaluate middle management responsibilities e.g. quantity and diversity of direct reports	Structural change action
	Systematise middle management process for GE change	Structural change action
Recruitment and promotion	Analysis of career opportunity pipeline	Preparatory action
	Monitor career opportunities and progression of early career staff	Structural change action
	Analyse career issues for Associate Lecturers to include understanding of portfolio vs precarious careers	Structural change action
	Increase understanding of perceived barriers and enablers to promotion	Preparatory action
	Explore opportunities for scholarships or bridging grants for temporary ECRs	Structural change action
	Promote existing mentoring programmes	Structural change action
	Reduce use of fixed-term contracts and consider replacement with open-ended contracts for contract researchers where appropriate	Structural change action
	Raise awareness among PhD and ECR community of transition opportunities	Preparatory action
	Recognise practitioner pathways to senior academic roles	Structural change action
	Assess motivation and awareness of opportunities to move into academic roles amongst professional services staff	Preparatory action
	Ensure diversity on all interview panels	Structural change action
	Mandatory Equality & Diversity training for all interview panel members	Preparatory action

	Training workshop on gender sensitive recruitment process	Preparatory action
	Perform a decomposition analysis of pay by sex and improve specific actions to reduce gender pay gap and analysis of ethnicity pay gap	Structural change action
	Monitor Achievement, Contribution and Excellence awards by sex	Structural change action
	Analyse the relationship to working time and improve micro-interventions towards more sustainable work practices	Structural change action
Research and curricula	Raise awareness and increase knowledge around inclusive research	Preparatory action
	Raise awareness and increase knowledge around developing an inclusive curriculum	Preparatory action
	Creation of a gender research network	Structural change action
	Analysis of gender and intersectional awareness within existing teaching materials	Preparatory action
	Analysis of gender and intersectional awareness within existing research projects	Preparatory action
	Identify courses where there is a significant gender imbalance in the student population, and discuss solutions	Preparatory action
	Monitor commercialisation of research i.e. consultancy, licenses, spinouts by sex	Structural change action
	Extend existing award schemes to include and celebrate gender-sensitive research, teaching, etc.	Structural change action
Work-life balance	Campaign to raise awareness of existing policies e.g. through social media, newsletters etc.	Preparatory action
	Assess ease of access and suitability of existing provisions, policies and practices	Preparatory action
	Explore emerging practices of “slow scholarship” and shorter working time	Structural change action

Sexism and sexual harassment	Participation in UniSAFE project	Preparatory action
	Intersectional analysis of gender-based violence (survey)	Preparatory action
	Raise awareness of existing Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedure and revise Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedure, and develop related report, support and communications resources	Structural change action
	Extend existing "it's not ok" campaign to staff and improve anonymous and named reporting of harassment and bullying for incidents related to staff	Structural change action
	Challenging attitudes campaign that explicitly addresses stereotypes	Preparatory action
	Consent education programme for students	Structural change action

Table 41. GEARING-Roles GEPs per Measures and typology of actions: Institution 5

Area of intervention	Measures	Typology
Institutionalisation and capacity building for gender equality	Appoint a Gender Equality Officer	Structural change action
	Create a GEP Committee	Structural change action
	Create a Gender Equality Task Force (to be active during GEARING-Roles's duration)	Structural change action
	Include GEPs principles in strategic documents (e.g. reports, plans, regulations) as a corporate value	Structural change action
	Institutionalise a systematic gender segregated data collection regarding recruitment	Preparatory action

Recruitment	Set own targets for all faculties, centres, and academic programs for raising the percentage of women faculty. Shortlist at least one applicant of underrepresented gender for all positions, before a vacant post can be filled	Structural change action
	Aim for gender balance in all recruitment committees, ensuring that there is at least 40% of underrepresented genders	Structural change action
	For all units which have more than 50% men or women employees, set own targets for employing on a more inclusive basis. Shortlist at least one applicant of underrepresented gender for all positions, before a vacant post can be filled	Structural change action
	Develop diverse strategies to enhance the visibility of women faculty and their research within the university and as a part of publicity events to serve as role models for junior faculty, current and prospective students	Structural change action
	Observe GE of 50% in initiatives such as the Distinguished Research Fellow Program and the Commencement Speech	Structural change action
	Put a non-discrimination clause in all job advertisements. For programs and units where there is a major gender imbalance, include a welcoming clause for applications coming from the underrepresented gender	Structural change action
	Establish a mentoring program for junior women faculty and researchers	Structural change action
	Publish a Handbook for Hiring and Search Committees (both academic and administrative) to provide guidance on search and hiring processes, covering such issues as implicit bias, gendered language, and gender-based discrimination	Structural change action
	Make the selection processes and the criteria for promotion more transparent	Structural change action
	Require a “gender-equality report” outlining their statistics and policies for ensuring GE from subcontracting companies and set annual GE targets together with the companies	Structural change action
	Require GE training for subcontracting companies' personnel	Preparatory action

	Organise regular trainings for all faculty and staff involved in recruitment processes as well as other related trainings, such as gender-sensitive budgeting for procurement and finance department	Preparatory action
Career progression	Institutionalise a systematic gender segregated data collection regarding career progression	Preparatory action
	Set own targets for all faculties, centres, and academic programs for raising the percentage of women faculty. Shortlist at least one applicant of underrepresented gender for all positions, before a vacant post can be filled	Structural change action
	Aim for gender balance in all promotion committees, ensuring that there is at least 30% of underrepresented genders	Structural change action
	Shortlist at least one applicant of underrepresented gender for all positions, before a vacant post can be filled	Structural change action
	Publish a Handbook for Promotion and Performance Evaluation committees (both academic and administrative) to provide guidance on promotion and performance evaluation processes, covering such issues as implicit bias, gendered language, and gender-based discrimination	Structural change action
	Make the promotion processes and the criteria more transparent	Structural change action
	Analyse gender wage gap at all academic and administrative levels	Preparatory action
	Establish returner schemes for faculty and staff to support a smooth transition after parental leave or other care-related career breaks	Structural change action
	Create and actively disseminate job shadowing and other related schemes for inter-departmental transfer or career advancement of administrative staff, especially for managerial positions	Preparatory action
	Organise regular trainings for all faculty and staff involved in promotion and performance evaluation processes	Preparatory action
Work-life balance	Implement a systematic gender disaggregated data collection and evaluation mechanism for work-life balance	Preparatory action

	Set up rules for distance-working and publish them	Structural change action
	Create support mechanisms for care-related needs during the COVID-19 pandemic	Structural change action
	Do benchmarking of different kinds of care leave	Preparatory action
	Institutionalise mechanisms for different kinds of care leave by including different types of care leaves in the directive taking into consideration performance indicators (i.e. parental leave, elderly care, partner sickness care)	Structural change action
	Organise workshops on fatherhood and promote the effective use of paternal leaves	Preparatory action
	Establish a course reduction mechanism for academic staff, and other reduced workload mechanisms for administrative staff in the six-month period following maternity leave. The mechanism shall be included in the related directive	Structural change action
	Extend the evaluation period following maternity and care leaves (Faculties). Take into consideration the leave period in performance evaluations and adjust the annual pay rise of the employee that used care leave based on the minimum pay rise of the average-performing staff	Structural change action
	Provide clear information to faculty and staff regarding all types of care leave	Preparatory action
	Provide training and re-orientation opportunities and externally recruited counselling support for women after maternity leave	Structural change action
	Provide all staff optional flexible work hour options and implement ICT-based systems to enhance flexibility	Structural change action
	Conduct exit surveys including questions on work-life balance	Preparatory action
	Conduct focus group discussions/ to identify and address needs and issues related to work-life balance and satisfaction	Preparatory action

	Organise experience sharing workshops about work life balance	Preparatory action
	Institutionalise support for childcare and make available the option to choose between the following options: affordable on-campus childcare, institutional partnership with at least two affordable off campus childcare centres and subsidies for childcare	Structural change action
	Increase the number of lactation rooms on campus to make them accessible in different locations. For the buildings where room allocation is not possible, provide small refrigerators as inventory stock and allocate to lactating personnel for the period of lactation	Structural change action
	Set a directive on working and communication hours, restraining administrative e-mailing and meetings to be set after work hours, on weekends or on short notice	Structural change action
	Set up gender-neutral toilets around the campus	Structural change action
	Legally recognise gender transition processes of staff and include coverage for gender transition in insurance policies	Structural change action
	Develop and make visible policies for same-sex partners (such as health insurance) and include an awareness of gender- and sexuality- based phobia, discrimination and implicit bias in all trainings	Structural change action
Leadership and decision-making	Develop a policy and support mechanisms for acknowledging the benefits of gender diversity and increasing the number of women at all levels of management and decision-making bodies	Structural change action
	Ensure that all decision-making bodies and committees have gender parity (with at least 40% representation of underrepresented genders)	Structural change action
	Identify the reasons for women not partaking in leadership positions. For example, interview women who refuse leadership positions; conduct blind, anonymous surveys with women regarding their “care” responsibilities and need for support mechanisms, etc.	Preparatory action
	Ensure that there is at least one woman candidate in all shortlists for leadership positions	Structural change action

	If there is more than one management position at the same level, aim for gender parity of at least 30%.	Structural change action
	Develop gender-equality and gender sensitivity guidelines for decision-making processes	Structural change action
	Include “promoting GE” as a SMART objective in the Strategic Plan and its subprocesses	Structural change action
	Include “promoting GE” as a SMART objective in performance evaluation of all managers	Structural change action
	Engage in awareness-raising activities regarding implicit biases and the use of gendered language in leadership definitions and communications	Preparatory action
	Offer leadership training programs and other support mechanisms such as coaching for women in management positions, and periodically offer leadership training for all women faculty and staff interested in assuming leadership positions	Preparatory action
	Provide annual gender bias and gender-equality training for all levels of management (including committees)	Preparatory action
Research	Form a committee with one representative from each of the following units (RGP, RPD, faculties, research centres) to serve for three years. The committee will prepare guidelines on the inclusion of gender perspective in research and scientific production including suggestions for incentive schemes	Structural change action
	Provide financial and organisational support for establishing platforms for discussion on the issue of creating incentives for research projects that incorporate specific measures for ensuring and addressing GE (RGP, RPD, faculties, centres). Suggestions: (a) Allocate budget (RGP) for academics/researchers who would like to organise meetings, discussions to generate policies regarding this issue; (b) Produce a discussion paper regarding the creation of incentives for research projects that incorporate gender perspective and organise a meeting where all academics are invited to discuss suggestions outlined in the paper	Structural change action
	Require all applicants to write a section on the applicability of integrating a gender perspective to their research in internal research fund application proposals, based on the example of EU Research Area applications and norms	Structural change action

	Develop gender specialisation within RGP and appoint a specialist to: to review relevant external funding opportunities for gender research and match funds with relevant researchers and research groups; plan, organise and/or provide organisational and logistical support to activities such as trainings, seminars, conferences, mentoring sessions for women researchers, addressing issues such as applying to external research funding, research managements, mentoring possibilities, etc.; plan, organise and/or provide organisational and logistical support to activities such as trainings, seminars, conferences, mentoring sessions addressing the gender dimension of research	Structural change action
	Establish an institutional and a national award program for women scientists	Structural change action
	Disseminate and enhance the visibility of research projects that incorporate a gender perspective, e.g. by creating a pool of good practices	Preparatory action
	Establish systematic data collection, analysis and benchmarking systems regarding gender in research (including projects, publications, patents and innovations) in all its aspects of research i.e. funding allocations, gender diversity in research teams, gender dimension in research and prepare annual reports for monitoring and evaluation	Structural change action
	Set targets and monitor gender diversity in research groups and labs	Structural change action
Curriculum and Teaching	Develop, communicate and implement standards for the incorporation of sex and gender analysis into basic and applied sciences: Apply the “gender in teaching checklist” developed by Institution 4 in the scope of the GEARING-Roles project to review FDP as well as undergraduate and graduate curricula with a gender perspective and send selected questions from the checklist to all faculty members who wish to review their course curricula and syllabi based on the checklist; organise workshops on integration gender into course content	Structural change action
	Organise seminars on gender sensitive teaching and prepare a Guideline for Gender Sensitive Teaching Methods	Structural change action
	Design and include GE topics and other mainstreaming actions as part of the Foundation Development Program	Structural change action
	Organise an inclusive classroom workshop with TAs and include gender components in TA orientation/training	Preparatory action

	Incorporate a gender perspective into counselling and peer mentoring mechanisms	Structural change action
	Increase the number of inter-faculty classes that have a gender focus	Structural change action
	Create incentive mechanisms for the integration of a gender perspective in teaching, e.g. in teaching awards, including this as a target in the performance evaluation of faculty, and making visible good examples of gender mainstreaming in teaching	Structural change action
	Make available and encourage the application of the Harvard University's Implicit Association Test to all faculty and students	Preparatory action
	Integrate GE and sexual harassment trainings in Civic Involvement Projects programs	Preparatory action
	Monitor and evaluate mainstreaming activities, e.g. include assessment questions in FDP graduate exit surveys	Structural change action
	Inform students on gender bias in teaching evaluations	Preparatory action
	Establish a mechanism to make a gender disaggregated qualitative and quantitative analysis of students' program choices, including changes between the anticipated and declared majors, and prepare regular reports	Structural change action
	Establish incentive mechanisms such as the "Tenzile Erdoğan scholarship" given to a woman engineering student, with the aim of recruiting women students to programs where they are underrepresented	Structural change action
	As part of the Graduate Ambassadors Programs, promote the establishment of a scholarship program for women students who are the first women in their families to receive university education	Structural change action
	Conduct activities that address gender bias in major and career choice, e.g. in career programs targeting existing students, the Major Fest, summer school for high school students, and promotion activities in high schools	Preparatory action
	Encourage the integration of a GE perspective to the activities and make-up of student clubs and the student union and provide incentives for GE related activities	Structural change action

Sexual Harassment Mechanisms and Gender-Neutral Communication	Prepare an internal review report on the experiences of the Sexual Harassment Committee since its establishment and gather recommendations for improvement of relevant processes and structures	Preparatory action
	Provide information on the university website on alternative complaint and support mechanisms and their relations to one another (ethics committee, sexual harassment prevention and support committee, discipline committee)	Preparatory action
	Make the sexual harassment and domestic violence support mechanisms and documents available and visible on all university platforms (online and physical) and include these documents in all orientation packages. Both staff and students shall sign a document indicating they have read the documents and been notified about the consequences of violations of sexual harassment and domestic violence prevention principles	Structural change action
	Employ an expert on sexual harassment (with experience as psychologist, social worker or gender-based counselling in NGOs with specialisation in trauma counselling) to receive the complaints and coordinate the work of the sexual harassment committee	Structural change action
	Integrate gender perspective in Ethics Committee policy and add anti-mobbing and antiharassment clauses in the regulation. Include detailed information on the principles of ethical code of conduct on the university website	Structural change action
	Require gender training for legal counsellors of the university	Structural change action
	Work with all service-providers to either enable the creation and effective implementation of their internal sexual harassment mechanisms or include service-provider employees in the existing mechanisms of the institution	Structural change action
	Integrate sexual harassment in all orientation programs (undergraduate students, graduate students, assistants, instructors, faculty, and staff)	Structural change action
	Include the link to the sexual harassment statement and policy in all course syllabi	Preparatory action
	Work on developing other pedagogical interventions, such as a pass-fail course on GE and sexual harassment for first year students	Structural change action

	Prepare an online mandatory training program on sexual harassment for all faculty (as part of the academic orientation program), staff and workers in service providing companies	Structural change action
	Prepare a university guideline for gender-neutral and inclusive communication	Structural change action
	Assess and revise all university documents and procedures, including the ones regarding sexual harassment and communication LGBTI+ inclusive	Structural change action

Table 42. GEARING-Roles GEPs per Measures and typology of actions: Institution 6

Area of intervention	Measures	Typology
Awareness raising	Improve our competences regarding GE, including by participating in training courses	Preparatory action
	Integrate the aspects of gender into the training courses we organise, if applicable	Structural change action
	Assemble existing and compile new need-based information materials on GE, including materials on the importance of considering unconscious bias and on integrating the gender dimension in research	Preparatory action
	Share our experiences, good practices, and developments regarding GE within our organisation, including in in-house seminars, workshops, etc.	Preparatory action
Adhering to the principles of equal treatment	Examine our rules and regulations to make sure that they ensure equal opportunities for everyone	Structural change action
	Take into consideration a justified leave of absence from research, such as a parental leave or military service, in the preparatory materials relating to making decisions	Structural change action
	Adhere to the principles of equal treatment and proceed only from established criteria when making decisions	Structural change action

	Collect feedback on the adherence to the principles of equal treatment in the decision-making processes	Preparatory action
Gender balance in decision-making	Consciously pay more attention to gender when searching for the experts	Structural change action
	Prefer a candidate of underrepresented gender if the candidates are of equal standing	Structural change action
	Ask other organisations responsible for nominating the candidates to be part of our decision-making bodies to also nominate candidates of underrepresented gender in order to convene decision-making bodies with a greater gender balance	Structural change action
	Ask the experts suggesting the reviewers to also recommend reviewers of underrepresented gender and, if necessary, draw their attention to the great gender imbalance among the reviewers	Structural change action
	Compile statistical overviews and guidelines highlighting the aspects of gender in the process of searching for the members of the panels as well as the reviewers in order to acknowledge the issue more widely	Preparatory action
Gender balance among applicants	Present the information regarding research funding calls and contests in an inclusive and gender-neutral manner	Structural change action
	Monitor the gender distribution among the applicants and recipients of research grants, awards, and funding	Structural change action
	Present gender-disaggregated data of the applicants and recipients of research grants, awards, and funding on the website of the institution	Structural change action
	Monitor the success rates of men and women applicants	Structural change action
	Draw the attention of the decision-makers to possible unconscious bias and to the importance of considering the aspects of gender	Preparatory action

	Emphasise the issue of gender imbalance among the applicants and recipients of research grants, awards, and funding during information days and other meetings with the target groups and their representatives in order to raise the awareness of gender imbalance among potential applicants and their institutions	Preparatory action
Gender-sensitive communication	Monitor our use of language and refrain from reproducing gender stereotypes	Structural change action
	Monitor the representation of men and women in illustrative materials	Structural change action
	Proceed from the principles of gender diversity when writing press releases, news, profile articles, etc.	Structural change action
	Try to ensure gender balance among the speakers at public events, if at all possible. As is the case with decision-making bodies, we consider the representation of the underrepresented gender of at least 40% to be a good gender balance	Structural change action
	Emphasise the need to underline the aspects of gender in various materials and statistics: the data, wherever possible, will be disaggregated by gender	Structural change action
	Regularly publish the core indicators of GE in research on our website	Structural change action
Equal opportunities and a supportive work environment for the employee	Monitor the gender distribution among the employees, incl. across different positions (1. specialists and managers, 2. middle managers, 3. executive managers). Prefer a candidate of underrepresented gender if the candidates are of equal standing in the recruitment process. Everyone, regardless of gender and other characteristics, are welcome to apply for a position	Structural change action
	Proceed from the principle that each employee will receive a fair remuneration that is both internally and externally equitable. The remuneration and possible pay gap across different positions is analysed annually	Structural change action
	Consider the needs of the employees to maintain a good work-life balance: offer flexible working arrangements and, if necessary, allow working from home. In case of regular remote work, individual risk assessments are compiled in order to ensure the working conditions that foster the health and wellbeing of the employees	Structural change action

	We care about the psychological and physical safety of the employees. We have zero tolerance for acts of workplace bullying and harassment, incl. gender-based violence. In order to tackle possible incidents of workplace bullying and harassment, we are developing and implementing a protocol, also ensuring the discretion of the victim and access to professional help	Structural change action
	Support the personal development and career progression of all employees, regardless of gender and other characteristics. It is possible for the employees to participate in specialised training courses and equal opportunities for career advancement are guaranteed for all employees	Structural change action