INSPIRE

Open Training Unit 3

Factors Facilitating Impact of inclusive Gender Equality Plans

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1 Introduction

Open Training Unit 3 (OTU3) of the INSPIRE project addresses the impact of Gender Equality Plans in universities, research centres and other research performing organisations. Despite Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) being one of the principal instruments at the EU policy level for a more inclusive European Research Area (ERA) and across many national contexts, little is known about their impact. This open training unit introduces the main facilitating factors of GEP impact, including the design of the equality interventions, the framing organisational factors (e.g. dedicated resources, governance framework among others) as well as the national policies and broader social and cultural support that convert policies into effective practice.

OTU3 is the result of extensive empirical work conducted during the INSPIRE project (Müller et al. 2025). A total of 35 case studies were carried out across varying European universities and research centres from 2024 to 2025, spanning 8 countries and interviewing more than 200 people including rectors and deans, academic staff, equality officers and practitioners, students and administrative staff across the hierarchy. Analysing the collective evidence, 6 factors were identified to capture the crucial facilitating factors of GEP impact within organisations. These factors are:

1) Strategic organisational commitment
2) Comprehensive data for decision-making
3) Advanced gender knowledge
4) Inclusive community of change agents
5) Enforceable legislation
6) Supportive social and cultural context

In a sub-sequent step, these factors where refined and discussed in two co-creation workshops with equality practitioners and gender experts.

Taken together, these factors present a model to explain change towards greater inclusive gender equality within organisations in higher education and research. The six factors indicate that change is complex, i.e. driven by several interacting factors that cannot be reduced to any simple recipe. Successful change needs to combine people, with knowledge, leadership, evidence while being embedded and combined with wider contextual elements such as legislation, social movements and progressive, egalitarian cultural norms regarding gender. These factors capture essential dimensions that help to convert GEPs from 'policy-on-paper' into applied practice that affects the power and status hierarchy within organisations.

The **purpose of OTU3** therefore is two-fold. First, it introduces the INSPIRE Change model how to advance structural change within organisations towards greater inclusive gender equality. The six factors that comprise our model are not isolated elements but form part of a coherent, interlocking theory of change that, by working together increase the chances of real transformation. Second, each factor comes with a set of indicators that identify how advanced an organisation fares on each factor, indicating

thus the likelihood of change. As a result, the model also provides important benchmarks for each factor, pinpoint to areas of improvement. The learning objectives of this Open Training Unit are therefore twofold:

- Develop a solid understanding of the key elements that drive organisational change towards greater inclusive gender equality

- Learn about the key indicators to identify elements of successful change within an organisation

The **intended target audience** of OTU3 are equality practitioners such as Equality Officers and Diversity staff working in universities and other research performing organisations. Equality practitioners are usually tasked with the design, implementation and monitoring of equality interventions such as GEPs. They are the most likely stakeholder group to coordinate these efforts and hence oversee the multiple other interest groups and processes involved. However, the Open Training Unit should also be of interest to gender scholars, feminist activists and anybody interested in equality work in higher education to gain a deeper understanding of the key elements of structural transformation.

The **content** of OTU3 is structured according to 6 main chapters, one chapter per facilitating factor. Each chapter provides a short explanation why and how a given facilitating factor contributes to change. Next, each chapter then describes a set of corresponding indicators to identify promising elements of change. The chapters each conclude with further references and resources for more in-depth reading. Before diving into the six individual factors, the next section provides a short introduction to the key concepts and the cross-cutting issues the convert our six factors into a coherent whole rather than a collection of isolated elements for change.

2 The big picture: practice, power, status

Any theory on how to achieve change towards greater gender equality should define from the outset how 'success' looks like. What are we aiming for when designing and implementing inclusive Gender Equality Plans?

On a fundamental level, policies for greater gender equality aim at transforming structural inequalities. Gender hierarchies thereby involve two fundamental dimensions, being simultaneously rooted in the **economic structure** and the **status order** of society. Status-based gender inequalities address the institutionalised patterns of cultural value that privilege masculinity and devalue everything associated with femininity or minoritised groups. Resource-based inequalities are largely class-based, rooted in economic inequalities associated with wealth and power.

Although status hierarchies, once developed tend to co-occur with differences in power/wealth, this should not distract from the fact that the mechanisms to establish and sustain these types of hierarchies are different. Power and wealth are rooted in the control of material resources whose possession enable the enforcement of compliance

without consent. A common example of resource-based inequality concerns wage gaps between women and men, or the lesser funding received by women working in feminised disciplines or when applying for research grants. Status on the other hand is rooted in cultural beliefs and as such is granted by others, not owned; status-based hierarchies are cultural beliefs and norms regarding the higher competence of men and the more communal orientation of women that are shared both by dominant and subordinate groups. A common example of status-based inequalities in science is the under-representation of women among prestigious prizes but also the lower visibility and recognition received for excellence in teaching and care work within academia.

This fundamental difference between power and status has implications for assessing 'successful' transformation, as it needs to change both the power hierarchy within organisations as well as the gendered status hierarchy. Positive change for greater gender equality implies that each factor contributes to shifting the power and status hierarchy within its specific domain.

Existing models of change have mainly focused on changing organisational procedures and practices that are likely to affect gender equality in universities. As Joan Acker has shown, organisational practices are not gender neutral but build upon and continuously reproduce masculine ideals, for example in terms of work-life unbalance. Much of contemporary equality policy aims at dismantling these organisational practices that disadvantage women and minoritised groups. Definitions of success along this vein consist of the institutionalisation of organisational practices that are less gendered.

However, as many organisations across Europe have implemented their second and third editions of GEPs, institutionalisation of equality infrastructures in itself is not a sign of success anymore. Given the lack of real transformation, some argue that these institutionalised practices are 'box-ticking', 'window-dressing', 'gender-washing' exercises that fail to change the associated power and status hierarchies. As we argue, substantive change therefore needs to combine three elements: it needs to change practice within organisations, but it also needs to affect simultaneously the gendered power hierarchy as well as the status hierarchies attached to gender. As shown in Figure 2, the INSPIRE Change model integrates these three elements throughout each of the six facilitating factors: strategic organisational commitment, comprehensive data, advanced gender knowledge, inclusive community of change, enforceable legislation and supportive cultural and social context.
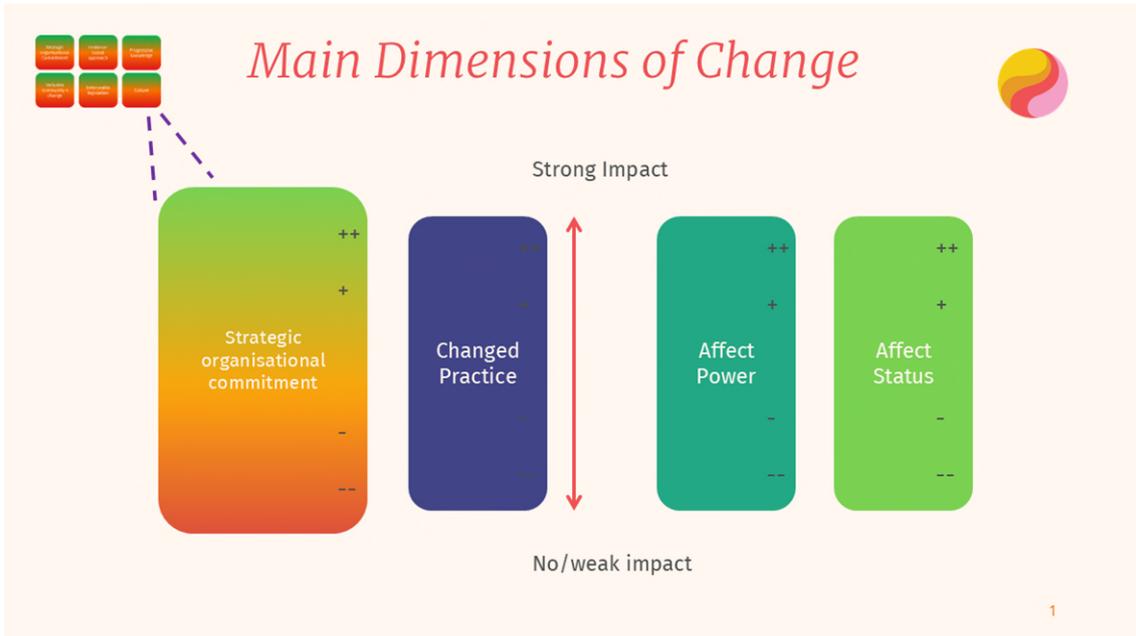
Figure 1 Integrating practice, power and status perspectives for achieving change

Practice, power and status are intertwined in organisational change processes. Practice ideally leads to dismantling gendered power- and status hierarchies. If they fail, they appear as "box-ticking" or "gender-washing" exercises. To the degree that gendered status hierarchies are dismantled, modified procedures and administrative processes indicating that cultural norms and values associated with gender have shifted within the organisation. Usually, change in the status hierarchy goes hand in hand with changes to power structures, understood as access to resources and decision making. Changes in the power structure in turn make it more likely to make room for alternative organisational practice that value a diverse, safe and welcoming working environment.
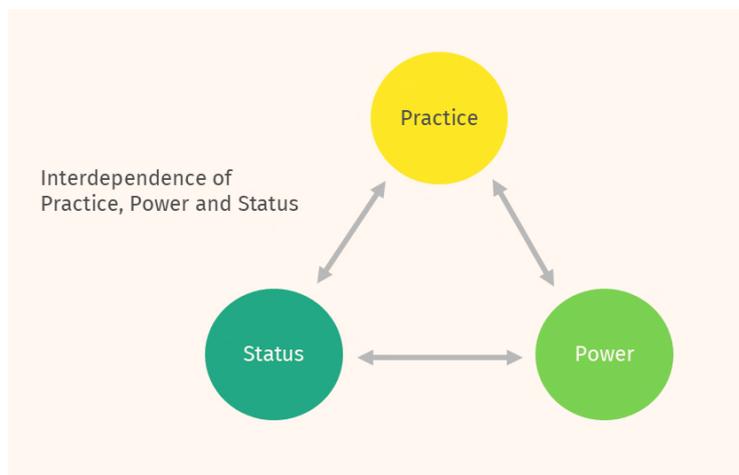
Figure 2 Interlocking of practice, power and status for change.

How are these three dimensions of the INSPIRE Change model operationalised across our six factors and applied in real-world organisations? To give an example, we use the first factor "Strategic Organisational Commitment". It captures the level at which an organisation commits strategically to gender equality, which is crucial for achieving structural, sustainable change in large and complex organisations such as universities. Strategic Organisational Commitment usually involves top management support, but now with important qualifications: decision-making power needs to be shared more equally while the value of gender equality / feminist goals needs to be recognised more explicitly.

- **Power / resources:** Gender Equality officers have voice and vote at the strategic decision-making level. Ideally, a dedicated Vice-rector for Equality or Diversity forms part of the highest decision-making organ. In addition, resources are made available to equality work.

- **Status:** gender equality and associated feminist values such as care are clearly recognised, for example by incorporating them at the highest level into strategic documents of the organisation.

- **Practice:** Top management is held accountable on agreed strategic goals and dedicated resources through dedicated Equality Steering Committees or (internal/external) oversight committees.

To the degree that these elements regarding strategic organisational commitment are present within an organisation, change is more likely. Usually, these three elements need to be combined in order to drive real change.

In what follows, we provide in-detail descriptions for each of the six main factors, including their practice, power and status dimensions. A list of indicators for each factor will allow practitioners to identify the relevant issues within their organisation.

The descriptions of each factor in this Open Training Unit 3 is a short, summary version of a detailed description to be published in a forthcoming book to be published by Routledge in 2026.

2.1 Further reading

Fraser, Nancy, and Axel Honneth. 2003. *Redistribution or Recognition? : A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. London; New York, N.Y.: Verso.

DiTomaso, Nancy, Corinne Post, and Rochelle Parks-Yancy. 2007. "Workforce Diversity and Inequality: Power, Status, and Numbers." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33(1):473–501. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131805.

Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon. 2010. "When Do Governments Promote Women's Rights? A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Sex Equality Policy." *Perspectives on Politics* 8(1):207–16. doi:10.1017/S1537592709992787.

Engeli, Isabelle, and Amy Mazur. 2018. "Taking Implementation Seriously in Assessing Success: The Politics of Gender Equality Policy." European Journal of Politics and Gender 1(1–2):111–29. doi:10.1332/251510818X15282097548558.

3 Strategic organisational commitment

Strategic organisational commitment to inclusive gender equality is an important facilitating factor, mirroring early findings on the importance of top-leadership commitment and support for achieving gender equality in research performing organisations. While top-leadership commitment is an important element, the INSPIRE Change Model introduces important precisions, concerning the practice, power and status dimensions of change.

3.1 How does strategic organisational commitment contribute to dismantling gendered power and status hierarchies?

Universities and research centres are evolving into more centrally managed organizations, driven by external pressures like reduced funding and increased accountability. This shift has elevated the role of top management in strategic decision-making and organizational change, including initiatives for gender equality.

The role of top-management for gender equality change has been highlighted across many European structural change projects. One recurring issue concerns lip-service from top-management that superficially embrace gender equality without converting it into a strategic commitment of the organisation. In some cases, top management uses GEPs as window-dressing exercise, to signal compliance "on paper" but without supporting substantive transformation. Even when gender equality structures are established, these often remain a patchwork that does not affect existing gendered hierarchies.

Strategic organisational commitment in general involves four dimensions: strategic vision, resources, effective communication, and expertise.

Strategic vision: Strategic vision is essential for driving change because it aligns initiatives with broader organizational goals and ensures long-term commitment. In the context of gender equality, a clear and compelling vision from top management legitimizes the change, fosters stakeholder buy-in, and helps overcome resistance from those who may lose privilege.

Resources: Strategic commitment implies dedicated financial, human, physical resources to support and sustain change. Without dedicated resources, even well-articulated strategies risk remaining symbolic, making resource allocation a clear indicator of genuine institutional commitment.

Effective communication is essential for driving change, especially from top management, whose credibility depends on aligning words with actions. In gender equality efforts, leaders must consistently embody the values they promote, as gender equality is a contested topic where mixed signals and superficial endorsements can erode trust and hinder progress.

Expertise: strategic commitment to gender equality change depends not only on leadership skills but also on subject-specific expertise, such as gender competence. Without solid

knowledge of gender equality, leaders may struggle to set adequate strategic goals, integrate relevant criteria into decision-making or drive structural change that addresses the underlying power- and status hierarchies.

3.2 How to recognise strategic organisational commitment?

Equality officers have **voice and vote at highest decision-making** organ of the university, e.g. executive management team. In some cases, this might involve Equality Officers having a permanent seat at the management table together with Faculty Deans, administrative heads and Vice-rectors. Ideally, this includes the creation of a dedicate Vice-Rector position for gender equality (or EDI or similar). Having a voice-and-vote in highest level decision-making provides direct access to power and assures not only that equality interests remain on the organisational agenda but also that these issues are mainstreamed into all other decision-making areas of the organisation. Participation of gender equality experts as dedicated VR or on decision-making boards is also crucial to **provide gender competence at this strategic level**. The specific knowledge, experience, values and preferences of management influence the assessment of the necessity and urgency for change and impinges upon the strategic choices they make.

Concerning power in terms of (economic) resources, strategic organisational commitment requires **dedicated resources**. We stipulate that dedicated resources include at least 2 FTE allocated to the planning, coordination and implementation of gender equality work at mid-sized university. This should be dedicated staff, preferably via a dedicated EDI position or across several staff positions. Apart from salaries, additional resources might involve internal EDI project funds and awards, or funding for infrastructures regarding IT (data monitoring), or for architectural modifications among others.

Concerning gendered status hierarchies, strategic organisational commitment involves clearly integrating gender equality into the main strategic documents that steer the management of the organisation over an extended period. **Gender equality is listed as one among other top-level strategic objectives and values** of the organisation. This provides more sustainable and long-term support to the degree that gender equality is located at the same level as other top strategic priorities. Integrating gender equality as strategic goal signals consensus among decision-makers and stakeholders to work towards a long-term goal, independent of personal agendas and motivation.

Top management must **lead by example**, as their legitimacy influences how gender concerns are perceived. Their **active and visible support**—through consistent messaging, public engagement, and stakeholder alignment—plays a vital role in **legitimizing change** for greater gender equality, especially since others involved may lack the authority to overcome resistance. Effective communication that matches symbolic support with concrete actions signals a changed status hierarchy, as gender equality concerns receive the legitimacy at from the highest level in the organisational hierarchy.

Concerning practice, strategic organisational commitment implies the **creation of a steering and governance structure** that holds top-management **accountable** for their progress towards stated equality goals. Usually, dedicated committees with representatives from all stakeholder groups including feminist and gender experts overseeing strategic goals, holding

management accountable and address progress but more importantly setbacks and resistances. This might involve tackling of resistances as part of the broader strategic commitment to change.

Strategic anchorage

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
GE/EDI not mentioned in strategic documents	GE/EDI alluded to general or vague terms in strategic documents without being linked to strategic objectives	GE/EDI mentioned as part of strategic documents and linked to objectives, but not priority as other high-level objectives	GE/EDI is placed at the same level as other priority level objectives in strategic documents, being linked to specific organisational objectives

Resources

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
No internal dedicated resources; main GE/EDI staff operate on voluntary basis.	Dedicated resources are insufficient or rely strongly on external, temporal funding (e.g. EU projects)	Sufficient internal (at least 50% or more) resource allocation with regards to the size of the organisation, 1 to 3 FTE. Resources match needs to reach strategic objectives	Sufficient internal resource allocated with regards to the size of the organisation, likely +3 FTE, and monetary funds. Resources match needs to reach strategic objectives.

Decision-making

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
GE/EDI initiatives limited to bottom-up initiatives with little or no link to top-management	GE/EDI officers with sporadic access to top decision making. No working relation; one-way reporting	GE/EDI office or delegate with frequent access to top management. No effective participation in critical decision-making "voice but not vote".	Highest level decision-making unit exclusively dedicated to GE/EDI, e.g. dedicated VR. Or: equality staff has permanent voice and vote in highest

| | | | GE/EDI as one item amongst others in VR portfolio | decision-making level.

Strong gender expertise present for top decision-making. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

Effective communication

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Top management ignores GE/EDI or actively resist or undermine GE/EDI efforts	Top-management support is largely symbolic and not consistent with actions.

Support at the top may not be uniform due to open resistance. | Top-management support is highly dependent upon personal agenda/support at the top but not visibly enacted by majority of executive team.

No open resistance, but lack of uniform voice and actions | Top-management symbolic and practical support is consistent and long-term.

Top-managements speaks and acts with one-voice.

No resistance. |

Governance & accountability

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
No steering and accountability unit, mirroring absence of strategic anchorage, decision making, lack of resources.	No independent steering and accountability unit; accountability mainly in the hands of Equality Officers, i.e. same as implementation team	Independent GE/EDI steering commission composed of different stakeholder groups, but little influence on decision making	Steering and accountability commission composed of all stakeholder groups, independent of GE/EDI implementation staff, with decision-making or veto power at top-decision making level

3.3 Further reading and resources

Müller, Jörg & Karolina Sikora. 2026. "Strategic Organisational Commitment." In: *[Title of our book]*, edited by Jörg Müller & Rachel Palmén. London: Routledge.

Benschop, Yvonne, and Marieke Van Den Brink. 2018. "The Holy Grail of Organizational Change. Toward Gender Equality at Work." Pp. 193–209 in *Gender Reckonings: New Social Theory and Research*, edited by J. W. Messerschmidt, P. Y. Martin, M. A. Messner, and R. Connell. New York: NYU Press.

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Prosci. 2025. "Change Management Plan for Change Success." https://www.prosci.com/blog/change-management-plans.

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4 Comprehensive data for decision-making

A second main facilitating factor for GEP impact captures the importance of a data driven approach. This again, mirrors earlier insights in the literature arguing for the importance of data collection, availability of gender disaggregated data, or tracking, monitoring and evaluating GEP implementation and progress.

4.1 How does a comprehensive data contribute to dismantling gendered power and status hierarchies?

Data helps to **identify the nature and scope of existing inequalities**, enables the prioritisation of interventions, and are essential for monitoring and evaluating progress. Without data, evidence on the (in-)effectiveness of interventions is not available.

An initial gender equality audit during the design phase of a GEP is crucial to understand context-specific needs, design relevant actions and monitor progress. Without **systematic monitoring of progress**, it is difficult to understand if interventions are well implemented (or need to be modified) whilst the lack of data needed for a robust evaluation means that outcomes and impacts are impossible to demonstrate.

Given the centrality of initial needs assessment during the design phase of a GEP (and subsequent monitoring of its progress), data not only provides evidence on gender inequalities but also an **entry point for change agents to engage**. This is especially true in terms of mainstreaming gender equality efforts throughout universities and reaching faculties and departments. In the context of natural science departments within universities, where quantitative evidence is highly valued, quantitative data serves as a first entry point to engage with gender equality as it provides evidence of existing inequalities.

Establishing a solid data collection infrastructure and providing a centralised service to sub-units, i.e. faculties and departments is a substantive facilitating factor as it enables problem-ownership across organisational sub-units. This becomes key when departments have the autonomy for recruitment and promotion processes. A centralized infrastructure with **data experts builds trust among employees**, guarantees high quality data, and frees up time for equality change agents to work the design/implementation of transformative interventions.

Crucially, although data provides evidence, it only becomes effective for change if it is part of a **reflexive decision-making approach**. Data collection and analysis contribute to organisational change to the degree it is not an end in itself – as more data does not reduce inequalities by itself. It needs to be guided by the purpose to **transform gendered power and status hierarchies**. This implies to address real needs and formulate a theory of change how these can be best tackled. A Theory of Change spells out how and through which interventions inequalities can be reduced and provides depth and interpretative purpose to the data collected. Data collection and analysis contribute to change when used reflexively to monitor and steer equality efforts, across all levels of decision making.

4.2 How to recognise comprehensive data for decision-making?

Data collection and analysis follow current **good-practice guidelines for equality data monitoring**. Data collection should serve a purpose, addressing real needs with the aim to transform gendered power and status hierarchies; data collection needs to be organised as **participatory process** (e.g. self-assessment teams) with concerned minoritised groups to identify early risks, prevent further stigmatisation, and allow for adequate self-identification (e.g. non-binary gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity). Data collection and analysis should further be intersectional to capture multiple social identities and their associated privilege and disadvantages.

The purposefulness and participatory nature of the data collection imply to use both quantitative and qualitative data. **Different data sources are combined**, ranging from administrative / HR data for documenting many resource-based inequalities (e.g. wage gap, gender balance in decision-making or career progression), to surveys (e.g. capturing experiences of discrimination among staff), to incidents reports (e.g. on gender-based violence including sexual harassment) or focus groups and interviews (e.g. to detect risks of stigmatisation). The use of experience-based interviews for example on gender-based violence, incidence reports, and qualitative interviews indicate that experiences of discrimination are taken seriously and valued.

The **frequency and ease with which data is collected**. Ideally, data collection and analysis take place on an ongoing basis, at least at the outset and towards the end of a GEP lifecycle with a tight feedback loop. The ease and frequency with which data can be collected thereby indicates the status and value granted to equality data within an organisation.

Considering the practice of data collecting and analysis, this involves **professional handling of privacy issues** to protect confidentiality and anonymity of participants. It involves access and easy deployment of validated instruments such as questionnaires. Meaningful analysis of (intersectional) data often also involves advanced statistical techniques. These issues are best addressed by **dedicated staff or data experts** that increases trust in data and hence its usefulness for decision-making. A dedicated data expert for equality monitoring within an organisation requires economic resources.

Equality data collection contributes to change and the dismantling of power and gendered status hierarchies, once data collection and analysis run rather smoothly in the background freeing up energy and resources to **reflect about its use and implications for equality.** It provides the basis for designing relevant interventions/ actions and measures. Targets are set, monitored and their achievement assessed, for example through (bi-)annual reports, progress tracking, or making explicit the relation between data/evidence and (**strategic**) decisions taken. There are also accountability mechanisms in place if targets are not reached. Data provides a benchmark against which progress can be assessed and hence it can legitimise actions taken.

Frequency, infrastructure and ease of data collection

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Data collection is non-existent. Efforts to collect equality data are blocked.	Isolated data collection, e.g. once during an initial GEP audit, to establish a (partial) picture of gender inequalities. Data is fragmented and difficult to access. Access is very time consuming and hence unsustainable. Sporadic attempts at data collection in specific units are undertaken by non-professional staff in response to identified needs.	Data is collected at least twice, i.e. at the start and end of a GEP lifecycle. Simple GEP implementation indicators (e.g. participants of training activities) are available. Some standardized data collection instruments (e.g. survey) processes are available. Occasional buy-in of professional external data advice (e.g. statistician)	Data collection and analysis is implemented on a continuous basis. Equality data needs have been standardised and mainstreamed into organisational processes & infrastructures, enabling smooth monitoring. Comprehensive professional, centralised equality data collection infrastructure including dedicated personnel and resources.

Data sources & quality of data

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Data reflects anecdotal "evidence"; No primary data available, and if available remains fragmented and low quality.	Largely using existing administrative / HR data (e.g. type of contract, positions). Data collected follows administrative needs rather than equality objectives.	A variety of data sources is used, including HR data, surveys (e.g. wellbeing), interviews. Data sources and measurement instruments are of medium quality being designed ad-hoc, unaware of guidelines for equality data collection.	A variety of qualitative and quantitative data sources are used: administrative data (e.g. wage gap), surveys (wellbeing, gender-based violence), incident reports, focus groups, interviews, clinics. Indicators and measurement scales are of high quality, adhering to guidelines

			for equality data collection.

Purpose and use of data collection: monitoring and evaluation linked to TOC

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Data, to the degree available, reinforces existing stigmatisation. Unreflective benchmarking undermines equality goals.	Data mainly geared to capture women's under-representation. Collected data feeds into the design of interventions stipulated in the GEP. No robust evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of actions. Data is not part of decision-making processes.	Data captures representation and experiences, outputs. Data feeds into GEP audit, design, including monitoring system for implementation activities. Monitoring system provides feedback to make decisions about implementation activities. Data used to document inequalities but not for tracking progress in terms of impact or evidence-based decision-making / accountability.	Data captures representation, experiences, outputs, outcomes and impact. Comprehensive targets & monitoring indicators. Evaluation of outcomes and impact of interventions. Data is trusted, essential for tracking progress and accountability. Data inserted into reflective practice and hence evidence-based decision making across organisational units and hierarchy.

4.3 Further reading and resources

Rachel Palmén. 2026. "Evidence-based, reflexive approach to data." In: *[Title of our book]*, edited by Jörg Müller & Rachel Palmén. London: Routledge.

Leslie, David, Michael Katell, Mhairi Aitken, Jatinder Singh, Morgan Briggs, Rosamund Powell, Cami Rincón, Thompson Chengeta, Abeba Birhane, Antonella Perini, Smera Jayadeva, and Anjali Mazumder. 2022. *Advancing Data Justice Research and Practice: An Integrated Literature Review*. doi:10.5281/zenodo.6408304.

Müller, Jörg, and Anne Laure Humbert. 2025. "Data Collection and Analysis for Inclusive GEPs: Intersectional Challenges and Solutions for R&I Institutions." Pp. 39–76 in *She figures 2024: policy report*, edited by European Commission. Publications Office of the European Union.

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5 Advanced gender knowledge

Structural change for inclusive gender equality involves substantive gender competence / knowledge as well as practical experiential knowledge and competences for organisational change. Without a sound understanding of gender, gender inequalities and how they are reproduced especially at the organisational level, it is unlikely that they can be successfully dismantled. This also involves building upon insights from research, practitioners and discriminated and underrepresented groups regarding their experiences and the common hindering and facilitating factors for change.

5.1 How does advanced gender knowledge contribute to dismantling gendered power and status hierarchies?

Institutional change processes have evolved from early approaches that aimed to "fix" women to fit male-dominated norms toward recognising and addressing the structural inequalities embedded in organisational practices. More recent developments go further by exposing gender bias in scientific methods and knowledge production itself—seeking to "fix" the knowledge rather than the individuals. By understanding gender (inequality) and its sustaining processes, we can better interrupt its reproduction.

While our understanding of gender has expanded, making it bear on organisational change involves three aspects:

- State-of-the-art knowledge on gender inequalities including a theory of change

- Practitioners' knowledge regarding how to best drive organisational change in research performing organisations

- How knowledge is valued: the epistemic authority and justice with regards to gender knowledge but also practitioners' expertise regarding complex organisational change processes.

Advanced gender knowledge plays a crucial role in driving structural change within research-performing organisations. This involves a clear understanding of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of GEPs, and the main areas of intervention to tackle inequalities in a systematic and holistic manner (e.g. across the five recommended thematic areas, including: work-life balance, leadership & decision-making, recruitment and career progression, integration of gender dimension, and measures against gender-based violence). Moreover, it concerns an understanding of the gender regimes operating within the institution, which re-inscribe social inequalities and epistemic exclusions.

Successful change starts from a recognition of underlying gendered power- and status hierarchies that need to be addressed. However, this abstract knowledge needs to be made actionable through practical, experiential and institutional knowledges. Their combination allows formulating a **Theory of Change** that clarifies pathways to change, links actions to impact, addresses implicit assumptions, and enables monitoring and evaluation. A Theory of Change operationalizes knowledge for transformation by turning abstract goals (gender

equality) into actionable, evidence-informed pathways. It ensures that organizational change is intentional, measurable, and adaptive – enabling learning about change along the way.

In this sense, **experiential knowledge on how organisations work** and can be changed is fundamental. This refers to change management, leadership and the wider knowledgebase regarding organisational change within the specific context of each organisation. This competence is often held and used by practitioners such as Equality Officers to effectively negotiate power structures and deal with resistances. It is also a key element that is often 'undervalued' in discussions of knowledge on gender inequality in science and organisations, a frequently cited as a source of epistemic injustice.

Knowledge hierarchies within research organisations can undermine the effectiveness of gender expertise by privileging scientific 'objectivity' over experiential knowledge of organisational change. For gender knowledge to drive transformation, it must be recognised as authoritative and integrated into decision-making processes. Empowering Equality Officers and gender scholars with **epistemic legitimacy** is essential to challenge entrenched power structures and foster meaningful, structural change.

Training and capacity building: the available knowledge needs to 'travel' within the organisation. It is a necessary step during the implementation of intervention(s) to raise general awareness of gender equality issues while also enabling staff to change organisational processes and procedures, for example during recruitment, work allocation, or interventions to prevent gender-based violence. Organisational learning deals with the difficulties to preserve experiential knowledge of Equality Officers on how to best preserve insights on how to best promote change.

5.2 How to recognise advanced gender knowledge?

To the degree that gender knowledge is valued and has authority, the logic of scientific decision making purely based upon un unreflective use of excellence and merit is weakened. Similar, to the degree that gender knowledge is valued, it can also supplant or complement the rule of neoliberal, business-oriented decision-making, which follows the logic of efficiency.

Social justice-based criteria or (gender) equality criteria infuse previously based on purely "scientific" criteria-based decision-making, such as for example using purely meritocratic or excellence-based funding, recruitment, or promotion criteria. Similar, social justice-based criteria make inroads into bureaucratic and administrative decision-making procedures, by reorienting administrative decisions away from purely efficiency / economic criteria and towards criteria of gender-sensitive or care-logics. The weight of measures based on a structural change approach is greater than those based on an awareness-raising approach. These are indicators for a changing knowledge hierarchy within organisations.

The systematic **integration of gender dimension** into research and teaching indicates a shifting status hierarchy of knowledge, as scholars recognise that disciplinary knowledge and methods can be (gender) biased. Alongside, promoting gender studies strengthens in-house gender knowledge which contributes to state-of-the-art knowledge on gender inequalities.

The role of **gender training** often only reaches the already converted and is limited to raising awareness regarding existing inequalities. The participation or lead on gender competence training by senior academics, including men, signals that gender knowledge is taken seriously and relevant for organisational life. As mentioned, gender competence that is available at the top-management level is another sign of being valued and deemed important.

Endowing **epistemic authority** to gender experts and to those that have traditionally been epistemically excluded contributes to the shift in power hierarchies. This entails considering the contextualised experiences of those individuals and groups discriminated and/or marginalised by the gendered and racialised academic culture as part of the necessary corpus of knowledge for truly inclusive and sustainable transformation. Importantly, the critical shift in power and status hierarchies occurs when feminist scholars and epistemically excluded groups feel safe and supported, rather than excluded, undermined or attacked. Therefore, the theory of change neds to address these types of resistances.

Advance gender knowledge informs decision-making

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
No evidence that GE or social justice are considered in decisions; traditional notions of "merit" or "excellence" unchallenged.	Gender equality and social justice are rarely considered in scientific or administrative decisions. They are not part of evaluation or excellence criteria, and there is no evidence that these considerations have influenced outcomes.	Gender equality mentioned or documented in decisions, but it rarely affects final outcomes or alters traditional merit-based criteria. Intersectionality is not considered.	Evidence that inclusive gender equality criteria are embedded in decision-making (e.g. recruitment, promotion, funding, or resource allocation). IGE is included in evaluation frameworks and used as a criterion of excellence.

Advance gender knowledge feeds GEP

Extent to which the GEP's frames integrate advanced, context-specific gender knowledge and structural change approach grounded in intersectional and social justice principles.

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
GEP exist as a "tick the box" matter and/or adhere to conservative ideas perpetuating inequalities	GEP does not reflect state-of-the-art knowledge nor addresses the 5 HE key areas. Awareness raising focus with no structural measures or social justice frames.	The GEP covers the five HE key areas but includes few structural measures. It combines social justice and business case rationales, with only partial contextual tailoring (e.g. limited gender diagnosis, little or no intersectional data).	The GEP covers the Horizon Europe (HE) key areas, with at least 50% of its measures tackling structural inequalities. It applies intersectional and social justice lenses and is tailored to the institutional context (e.g. through a participatory process).

Supported in-house expertise

Level of institutional support for feminist and gender research, capacity building, and systematic integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching.

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
No training, or counter-productive to progressive gender equality.	Some gender training might be set up, but in-house gender knowledge is not substantially supported by other means. Gender dimension not integrated into	An inclusive gender research centre or unit exists but lacks sufficient funding. Training on gender topics is offered but remains peripheral — not embedded in core programmes or aimed at key decision-	Existence of in-house inclusive gender research centres or units with secured funding; regular, tailored training for key stakeholders; and high visibility of gender dimensions in research and curricula, supported by formal evaluation or

	research and teaching. Intersectionality not considered relevant.	makers. Few research projects, publications, or courses address gender dimensions.	recognition mechanisms.

Epistemic authority

Degree to which diverse gender and feminist knowledges — including those from marginalised groups — are recognised as authoritative and taken onboard shaping institutional knowledge and culture.

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Presence of strong epistemic exclusion regimes that keep power- and status-based hierarchies untouched	Contextualised experiences of discriminated and/or marginalised groups are not considered part of the necessary corpus of knowledge. No consultation or participatory mechanisms in place.	Gender scholars receive some institutional recognition (e.g. cited in reports), but their expertise is not consistently valued or sought in key decisions. Leadership shows limited acceptance of knowledge from marginalised groups.	Gender and diversity scholars have visible credibility and epistemic authority (e.g. advisory roles). Epistemic justice addressed in policies. Mechanisms in place to bring in different types of knowledges (e.g. participatory fora, consultations, etc.)

Resistances to gender knowledge

Extent to which the institutional culture allows recognising and addressing resistances to gender knowledge/scholars and provides a safe space for the dissemination of feminist knowledge.

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Production of feminist knowledge is strongly resisted. Resistances cannot be safely expressed.	No evidence of resistances to gender being acknowledged, hence no institutional strategies are set up (or rather appeasement arguments are held). Feminist scholars report burn-out.	Some signs suggest that resistances can be discussed without major risk, but there are no formal strategies or institutional responses to address them, and no visible learning or adaptation has occurred.	Resistances are addressed in institutional documents and through structured strategies (e.g. safe spaces, reflexive workshops). Evidence shows that managing resistance fosters learning and a safe climate for feminist scholars.

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6 Inclusive community of change agents

Structural change cannot be limited to isolated equality officers or gender experts, but needs to be an inclusive, distributed process that requires a closely knit community of change agents. It is evident that people drive and resist change. The question is what elements convert stakeholders into an effective community that transforms gendered power and status hierarchies? We distinguish four dimensions: the scope of the community, its effective coordination, its sustainability and its inclusiveness.

6.1 How does an inclusive community of change agents contribute to dismantling power and status hierarchy?

While equality officers and feminist and gender scholars are frequently identified as change agents for equality, the broader impact and success depend on the mobilisation of other players across the organisation. Without the involvement of a critical mass of other staff and students, structural change remains the responsibility of a few experts and does not transform actual processes and practices in the wider organisation.

The **reach (or scope) of the community** is key to driving change, with different roles across the hierarchy. **Equality officers** are important but ineffective when being the sole agent of change. Staff and student-led **bottom-up initiatives** bring strong problem-ownership, making inequalities visible and pushing for action. **Top management** ensures strategic alignment, resource allocation, and visible support to legitimize change (see factor 1). Crucially, **middle managers**—such as Heads of Departments and Deans—bridge top leadership and staff, translating policy into practice while navigating competing logics like scientific excellence and bureaucratic efficiency. Their ability to manage these tensions is vital for successful implementation, but their resistance to implementing changes can be a huge barrier. **Senior academics**, even without gender expertise, are crucial gatekeepers and must engage for equality to transform the scientific enterprise. **Administrative staff** are essential for adapting bureaucratic procedures, and problem-ownership across all these groups is vital for meaningful progress.

As communities of change grow, **coordination becomes increasingly essential**—not merely to improve efficiency or reduce redundancies, but to sustain transformation by aligning organisational culture, practices, and values around equality and inclusion. Fragmented or isolated initiatives risk being diluted within bureaucratic routines, while coordinated action can connect different actors, levels, and perspectives to reinforce learning, continuity, and accountability. Coordination among equality officers and units is thus not a technical or administrative necessity but a strategic means to ensure that knowledge, commitment, and action converge toward systemic transformation.

Equality officers and feminist scholars play a crucial role in this process: by linking different levels of the organisation, facilitating dialogue between leadership and departments, and maintaining institutional memory, they help navigate resistance and support across local practices. Effective coordination involves a **complementary distribution of roles and responsibilities**—balancing centralised structures for support and data (such as monitoring and policy design) with decentralised, context-sensitive implementation within faculties and

departments. In many institutions, this balance is achieved through networks of faculty equality officers, equality committees, and other participatory bodies.

Beyond ensuring coherence, coordination enables **bottom-up initiatives** to be recognised and connected to institutional processes, contributing to genuine cultural and structural change, where shared values are translated into daily interactions. Finally, sustained coordination mechanisms help keep equality issues visible in organisational agendas and strengthen accountability over time.

To ensure the **sustainability of equality work**, it must be organized across staff categories in ways that are manageable, valued and formally recognised. This includes rotating committee roles, formally recognizing contributions through pay, workload adjustments, or promotion criteria. Equal participation by senior men is also essential, helping to distribute responsibility and signal institutional commitment. Without such measures, equality efforts risk overburdening those with less power and visibility.

The **inclusiveness of a community of change** can be understood not merely by who participates, but by how intersectional differences are recognised and negotiated within it. Inclusion is not an endpoint or a moral ideal but a relational and political process through which power circulates among change agents. From an intersectional perspective, the presence of minoritised and marginalised groups in decision-making spaces is meaningful only when their experiences and knowledges shape collective priorities and challenge dominant perspectives.

The degree of inclusion thus depends on the community's capacity to **redistribute epistemic and organisational authority**—so that privileged actors do not simply "admit" or "tolerate" others but actively question the structures that sustain their privilege. In this sense, inclusion becomes a measure of transformative power: an inclusive community is one that can confront organisational resistance, contest institutional hierarchies, and reconfigure norms and values from within. The more the community integrates intersectional standpoints into its collective reasoning, the stronger its ability to act as an agent of cultural and structural change.

6.2 How to recognise an inclusive community of change agents?

Whereas the previous literature has identified different levels or types of change agents separately – such as for example Equality Officers, internal and external stakeholders, bottom-up participation, allies – the INSPIRE Change model integrates these into a single factor while shifting the attention to the overall scope as well as power and status hierarchies involved. We argue that it is the reach of the community that counts, especially in terms of having mobilised middle-management decision-makers and senior academics, while keeping marginalised voices at the centre, allowing for values of solidarity and care as guiding principles.

Gender-equality work usually is considered low-status work. It is predominantly considered to be carried out by "low-status" members of the community, that is, early-career women or members of minoritised groups. When **senior academics**, such as full professors, actively engage in equality work, they shift the power and status hierarchies through which these

issues are perceived, negotiated, and valued. Their involvement can reframe equality from a marginal or administrative concern into a matter of academic legitimacy and institutional culture, making transformative change more likely.

Compensation schemes for equality work, including teaching reductions or promotion criteria signal **formal recognition** that can prevent burn-out and make equality work sustainable. They also avoid overburdening those who should benefit from equality most: women and minoritised groups. Recognising the value of equality work elevates its status within departmental life, while fostering collective problem-ownership and long-term sustainability.

The active engagement of academic **middle managers** with equality goals represents a key leverage point for transformation, where policy meets practice and equality meets science. It signals access to middle-management decision-making power and resources, which are essential for influencing the day-to-day realities of academic departments.

The degree to which women and minoritised groups form part of critical decision-making and steering committees is an important **indicator of inclusiveness**. The governance and oversight of the equality agenda through committees that represents all stakeholders is one approach. Participatory methods, co-creation and co-ownership during the design, implementation and monitoring of GEPs further indicate that real needs are being addressed and that the envisioned change is meaningful and grounded.

Depending on the size of the organisation, equality work **requires coordination** that carefully balances **centralised** support and services with **distributed** ownership at the departmental or faculty level. For example, centralised data collection by experts ensures high-quality information while freeing resources for translating evidence into meaningful action.

The main role of **Equality Officers is supportive** rather than being the main implementing agent. They set agendas, coordinate efforts, provide gender expertise, guide and support others across departments and faculties. If Equality Officers are made solely responsible for implementation, change will not become transversal, as problem-ownership is not shared. Equality work cannot be 'outsourced' to equality officers, it must be collectively owned and embedded across the organisation.

Scope of Community

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
GE/EDI work is confined to a few, often isolated individuals (e.g. committed women scholars). No critical mass or	A small network or committee exists but participation is uneven. Senior academics and middle managers remain detached.	Broader participation across hierarchies: equality officers, middle managers, senior academics, admin staff, and students begin to	The community spans all organisational levels. Senior academics and leadership are visibly engaged. GE/EDI work is

cross-level engagement.		collaborate. Problem-ownership starts to expand.	recognised as a shared responsibility across research, teaching, and administration.

Effective coordination

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
No coordination across units such as departments. Activities are ad hoc or project-based. Efforts remain siloed.	Some coordination led by equality officers, mainly administrative or compliance-oriented. Limited communication between central and local organisational units.	Regular coordination mechanisms link departments and central offices. Equality officers act as facilitators and knowledge brokers. Bottom-up initiatives begin to inform institutional processes.	Coordination is strategic and reflexive, aligning equality values with organisational culture. Roles and responsibilities are complementary; learning, accountability, and dialogue connect all levels.

Sustainability

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
GE/EDI work relies on voluntary labour, no resources, recognition, or workload adjustments. Risk of burnout is high.	Some short-term funding or project support exists, but equality work remains peripheral to career structures.	Formal recognition through workload models, compensation, or promotion criteria. Senior men and other privileged groups begin to share responsibility.	Equality work is institutionally valued and resourced. GE/EDI responsibilities rotate; participation is embedded in governance and career systems, ensuring continuity beyond individuals or projects.

Inclusive process

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Participation is homogeneous (mostly women or equality experts). Marginalised voices are absent or tokenised.	Diversity is mentioned but intersectional perspectives rarely shape priorities or decisions.	Efforts to include minoritised and marginalised groups in decision-making spaces. Some attention to intersectionality and relational dynamics.	Inclusion is intersectional, relational, and power-aware. Diverse standpoints shape agendas and norms. The community can confront organisational resistance and reconfigure hierarchies from within.

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7 Enforceable legislation

Although many countries have anti-discrimination laws, legislation and/or public policies addressing gender inequality in research and higher education (for example to make GEPs mandatory), these are not necessarily effective. Governmental policy and/or legislative approaches to gender equality vary significantly between countries in scope and implementation ranging from inactive to proactive policy profiles. What converts legislation and/or public policy into effective instruments for change are compliance checks tied to clear quality standards (e.g. with regards to process- and thematic requirements of GEPs) and credible sanctions.

7.1 How does enforceable legislation contribute to the dismantling of power and status hierarchies?

Examining through our case studies which national legislation drives strongly the design and implementation of GEPs at the organisational level shows that enforceable legislation usually involves three aspects:

- Resources to guarantee the application / implementation of policies or legal requirements

- Quality standards regarding the process and thematic requirements of these policies and their corresponding assessment framework and compliance checks

- Credible sanctions that can enforce compliance

Although many European countries have national policy and/or legislation for gender equality and against discrimination in place, these remain ineffective without the provision of sufficient resources for their implementation. In some countries, resources are made available at the national level, for example through funds for hiring dedicated equality staff. In other cases, legislation stipulates that organisations must reserve specific amounts of their internal funds for equality work, contributing to their strategic organisational commitment (see factor 1).

Legislation and policy to be effective also need to set **quality standards** and **guarantee compliance**. For example, national legislation that requires public and private organisations to have a GEP but does not set quality standards facilitates a box-ticking approach especially when faced with resistance or lacking resources. Certification schemes provide quality assurance while signalling commitment, driving competition among organisations and promoting shared standards and visibility of GE/EDI efforts.

Finally, legislation and policy need to be enforced. Without **real sanctions**, policies can be played, circumvented and not followed through. Sanctions require compliance checks to have a decision criterion when to be applied. Powerful sanctions, such as access to funding – are an effective way to enforce policy and legislation.

Overall, these three elements – resources, quality standards/checks and credible sanctions – need to work together in order to convert policy and legal provisions into a real leverage for change.

7.2 How to recognise enforceable legislation?

What makes a given legal or policy framework enforceable? Two elements:

First, enforceable legislation requires a type of compliance check in order to be effective. This can be carried out by an external agency in a systematic fashion or sporadically. Athena SWAN would be an example of the former while compliance checks by the European Commission regarding the GEP Eligibility Criterion would be an example of the latter. Litigation would be a third option, in case organisations do not follow the recommendations or regulations foreseen by the law.

On a practical level, national and European or Global **certification schemes** for gender equality and diversity facilitate the dissemination of shared quality standards as well as their compliance check. In the UK and Irish context, for example, Athena SWAN provides an external assessment framework which establishes a prescriptive framework for universities to engagement with gender- and race equality. As such, it specifies process requirements (e.g. to establish a self-assessment team to carry out an initial needs assessment) and thematic requirements (e.g. to tackle work-life balance, wage gap analysis, etc.) whose compliance, together with evidence on impact, leads to an overall quality assessment (Gold, Silver, Bronze awards). However, certification and audit schemes vary strongly across Europe in scope, requirements, quality and finally effectiveness for transforming gendered hierarchies.

Second, a compliance check might remain ineffective if no real sanctions are attached. **Penalties for non-compliance** can involve access to economic resources (e.g. funding) or status-based rankings. Sanctions that involve access to economic resources such as research funding address clearly the power-dimension of gender inequality. It is a strong indicator of the value of gender, if non-compliance is attached to withholding monetary resources. In relation to gendered status hierarchy, the possession of Equality and Diversity certificates on the national or European scale can also indicate the relative loss or gain of organisational status when competing on the international market for students and talent.

Policy & legislation

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Unsupportive or counter-productive policy and legal framework in place. No provision of GE/EDI at the organisational level.	Isolated and fragmented policies in place; weak legal provision at the organisational level. Few to no resources available; implementation mostly based on voluntary efforts.	Comprehensive polices in place; solid legal framework regarding GE/EDI at the organisational level available. Resources cover rudimentary implementation, i.e. add-on	Comprehensive, progressive national / regional / EU policies regarding GE/EDI at the organisational level. Sufficient resources for effective implementation, monitoring and

		responsibilities on existing job profiles.	compliance checks available (e.g. Ministerial or organisational level) by dedicated, specialised staff

Compliance

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
No compliance checks available.	Compliance checks mostly carried from within the organisation, limited to monitoring some output indicators / implementation. Criteria for non-compliance not clear.	Compliance checks are available by independent organisations but largely voluntary and targeting implementation but not outcomes/impact.	High quality compliance frameworks by independent organisations on GE/EDI process, themes, and outcomes/impact available. Compliance checks quasi-obligatory

Sanctions

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Backlash and sanctions when engaging with GE/EDI	Sanctions are purely symbolic that remain without consequences at the administrative or scientific level of the organisations.	Sanctions affect loss of status and prestige in a credible way, e.g. through highly visible rankings, widely recognised GE/EDI certificates, gender rankings, etc. Sanctions affect mainly administrative level of organisation but not scientific operations.	Credible sanctions are in place to penalise non-compliance by withdrawing monetary funds and affecting status and prestige of organisation. Sanctions affect science/research activities directly.

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8 Supportive social and cultural context

Organisational change within higher education is shaped by a range of contextual factors such as the wider political climate, existence and collaborations with social movements, and wider beliefs in traditional or more egalitarian gender roles. These contextual factors, many of which operate at a national level, set the stage of what is deemed acceptable, legitimate and desirable within a given context. The wider social and cultural context is therefore a key enabling or hindering factor of change initiatives that happen at the organisational level.

8.1 How does social and cultural context contribute to dismantling gender and status hierarchies?

Contextual factors encompass cultural, social, and political elements that establish a climate conducive to sustainable change and shaping institutional and cultural norms regarding what is considered acceptable or appropriate behaviour.

European countries vary in their **culture, including gender roles and norms**. While some countries adhere to more traditional division of gender roles with men being the primary responsible for earning an income and women being in charge of domestic and reproductive activities, other countries embrace more progressive ideas where labour market participation and care responsibilities are more gender balanced. Gender beliefs on how paid-work and care-work should be distributed between women and men set the stage how gender gaps, hierarchies and inequalities within and beyond organisations are taken for granted and naturalised, or recognised and addressed through various social policies, including parental leave policies or early-childhood education and support.

Cultural beliefs in gender roles then shape important areas of **social policy** which affect labour market participation of women for example through the provision of parental leave policies or early-childhood education and care. Work-life balance policies including maternal, paternal and parental leave policies vary greatly across Europe in terms of duration of leave, associated leave benefits, or farther incentives. These policy elements provide important contextual conditions not only for the overall participation of women in the labour market but also for the overall participation of fathers in care duties, potentially transforming beliefs in distinct gender roles and hierarchies. Similar, early childhood education and care provision is an important contextual factor that shapes women's participation in the labour market. Other important areas of social policy include equality legislation and anti-discrimination laws (see also factor 7), gender quotas in political leadership positions, and legislation against gender-based violence.

Gender roles are part of a more encompassing **political struggle** within societies. The context of social alliances, social movements and counter-movements and backlash provide a further important element that shapes organisational change as it enables or hinders political pressure. Feminist networks and social movements play a vital role in driving institutional reform by shaping public discourse, influencing policy, and pressuring organizations to comply with equality standards. Internal change agents within the organisation can collaborate with external agents and thus amplify marginalized voices through intersectional advocacy. Younger generations and especially students can push for

more profound and substantive changes as they are less willing to tolerate behaviours that perpetuate inequality and discrimination.

Finally, an additional important contextual factor concerns the ongoing **transformation of the higher education sector** in Europe, its ongoing struggle with scarce economic resources, increased competition, marketisation and accountability. Narrow focus on efficiency and competition on the neoliberal market for talent, funds and students imposes an important constraining factor for organisational change towards greater gender equality.

To the degree that gender equality is recognised as a significant societal and political value it promotes institutional reform and legitimises action. More egalitarian beliefs shape expectations for just decision-making, equal access to resources, and balanced sharing of work-life including care responsibilities.

8.2 How to recognise supportive social and cultural context

Broader cultural beliefs in traditional versus more progressive gender roles and norms have been the subject of research on gender ideologies across Europe. Gender ideologies refer to individuals' beliefs about how gender roles—particularly the division of paid work and domestic / reproductive (care) work—should be organized, often broadly conceptualised from **traditional** (separate spheres) to **egalitarian** arrangements. An egalitarian context is characterized by strong support for gender equality in both public and private spheres, where social norms strongly favour shared domestic responsibilities and equal participation in the labour market, and egalitarian gender beliefs and attitudes are reinforced by education, media representation, and institutional frameworks that normalize gender equality as a societal value.

Progressive work-life balance policies recognise the equal right of women and men to time for care. Care is equally valued as work, for example through comparable compensation while being the responsibility of family and public actors. Importantly, in gender egalitarian contexts, fathers' incentives to uptake care are emphasised, tackling the transformation of gendered resources and status hierarchies between paid work and unpaid care. Progressive parental leave policies are ideally combined with progressive early childhood education and care where the end of parental leave coincides with state-provided services.

A supportive cultural and social context can also be recognised by a **high visibility of systematic collaborations** between the university sector with wider societal groups, movements, and networks that are supportive of GE/EDI. This includes active student movements or protests, alliances with NGOs working for the prevention of gender-based violence, anti-discrimination or anti-racism activist groups among others.

Cultural beliefs and gender norms

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Traditional gender norms, emphasising women's primary role of care responsibilities. Strong traditional, hierarchical stereotypes; naturalising male privilege. Backlash to GE/EDI due to conservatism, traditionalism, and/or heteronormativity.	Beliefs in equal participation of women in labour market, but women still seen as primary / best carer for children and dependent adults Naturalisation of gender stereotypes as "value in difference" of distinct gender roles	Beliefs in equal participation of women in labour market, but individualistic and choice-oriented, with care duties covered by the state or market. Thus, no agenda for dismantling gender stereotypes and hierarchies.	Progressive gender beliefs, targeting equal participation of men in care and equal participation of women in remunerated work. Gender stereotypes perceived as contingent, combined with belief in their abolishment. Active dismantling of hierarchies tied to gender roles.

Political climate and social policy

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
GE/EDI principles are seen as a threat or openly negated within the political sphere, with appearing diverse forms of resistance against GE/EDI. Policies normalise gender inequalities.	GE/EDI principles are competing with other political values, being undermined or openly questioned. This is reflected in policies ambiguous towards GE.	GE/EDI is considered as a political value but not a priority, and as such is expressed through singular fragmented actions policy initiatives/regulations.	Political climate values GE/EDI as a high priority issue, that is expressed through a robust policy framework.

Alliances & coalitions

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Activity of groups, movements, networks (inside and/or outside the institutions) that are	Lack of groups, movements, networks that support GE/EDI cause.	Incidental collaborations (e.g. project-based, one-time) with groups, movements, networks	Systematic collaborations with groups, movements, networks outside the institutions, which

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
against GE/EDI (e.g. anti-genderism).		outside the institutions supportive of GE/EDI.	are supportive of GE/EDI.

Transformation of higher education & organisation

Weak contribution			Strong contribution
Rejecting GE/EDI as threatening or undermining meritocracy, excellence and efficiency that should rule in the academic/research setting.	Fatigue over GE/EDI effort or inactivity, complex gendered inequalities are ignored. Systemic inertia or implicit resistance within a wider academic or inner institutional setting towards GE/EDI change.	Core values of the academic, institutional setting (e.g. meritocracy, internationalisation, autonomy) are negotiated with GE/EDI change, while resources (human and funding) are shared.	Academic and institutional setting is conducive to GE/EDI change, both considering core values (meritocracy, internationalisation, autonomy) and resources (human and funding).

8.3 Further reading and resources

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