



Traces of intersectionality:

*Key findings on intersectional equality
policy-making in Higher Education
& Research organizations*

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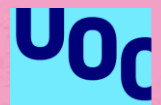
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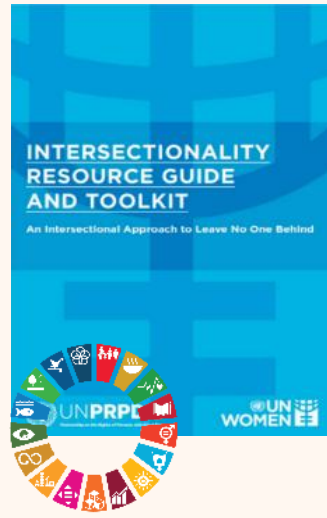
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Are “intersectional” equality policies de facto doomed to remain an ideal?



NO, however, we need an approach that does not treat intersectionality as an all-or-nothing policy.



Traces of intersectionality as “potentialities” or “doings” to build policies and practices from.



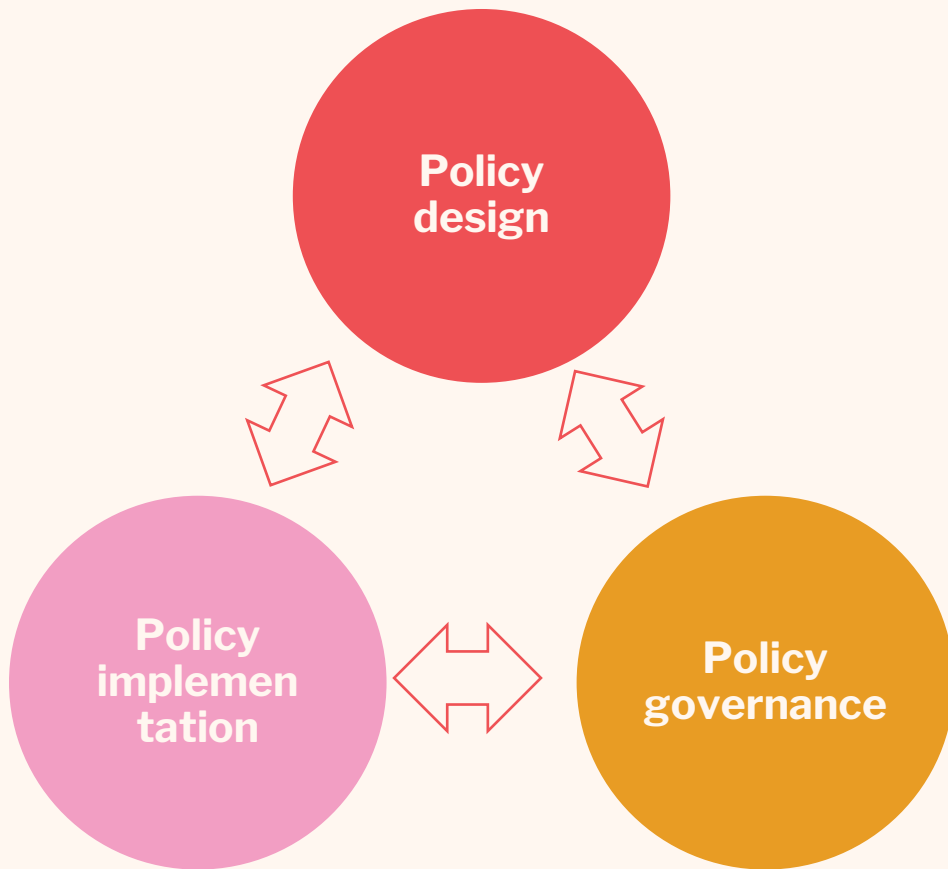
3. STRENGTHENING GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVENESS IN THE ERA, NOTABLY WITH AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Objectives

- Deepen policy dialogue and the coordination of policies and actions among Member States, and, where appropriate, associated countries and stakeholders, on gender equality and inclusiveness, notably with an intersectional approach, in R&I, including institutional/structural changes through inclusive gender equality plans (GEP), integrating the gender dimension in R&I content, ending gender-based violence, and developing gender budgeting;



Looking for traces of intersectionality:



- 1. How are single-axis, siloed policy approaches and power inequalities addressed** in the current process of designing, governing and implementing equality policies?
- 2. What organizational and extra-organizational factors facilitate or hinder** these traces of intersectionality to be developed towards **intersectional equality policy-making?**

10 in-depth case studies across Europe

Country cluster	Countries	Type of institution
Eastern Europe	Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	1. Public university 2. Public research institute
Northern Europe	Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Sweden	3. Public university 4. Private university
Southern Europe	Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain	5. Public university 6. Public university
West Europe	Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxemburg, Netherlands	7. Public university 8. Public University 9. Public research institute 10. Public research institute

Data collection (October 2023-May 2025):

- ✓ **210 semi-structured interviews** (i.e. (PhD-)student representatives, practitioners, EDI officers, HR managers, management, Vice-Rectors, Deans, etc.)
- ✓ **130 equality policy documents** (institutional & national level)
- ✓ **9 observations** (workshops, events and lectures)

1. DESIGN: Intersectionality as explicit and implicit strategic goal

Policy
design

- Explicit intersectional strategies
 - **Leveraging external requirements** (e.g. GEPs, anti-racism plans, LGBTQ+ inclusion, accessibility policies).
 - **Leveraging internal expertise** to increase legitimacy (e.g. research, HR surveys, (gender) equality reports)
- Doing intersectionality without labeling it as such
 - **Building capacity from “known” concepts or transversal issues** to identify how it affects different groups within (e.g. equity, human rights, anti-harassment, social safety).

***YET: still predominantly gender+ and using limited intersections
(e.g. religious discrimination, class and transphobia often lacking)***

2. GOVERNANCE: *Fostering participation and dialogue across diverse actors*

- Broadening representation in centralized structures:
 - **Participation of intersectionally minoritized voices in centralized committee** + involvement of leadership, students and staff representatives, **chaired by senior role.**
- Knowledge production & exchange between single-axis policies:
 - **Capacity-building** across internal, single-axis committees (e.g. building expertise on inequality axes AND (in)formal exchange of knowledge produced)
 - **Coalition-building** with external societal actors (e.g. other HE&R organizations, ministries, NGO's, student associations, unions)

***YET: power imbalances remain across actors
(e.g. between students and staff, between single-axis committees)***

3. IMPLEMENTATION: Raising awareness & building capacity



- Implementation preliminary, partial and informal
 - Formal implementation **widening previous practices to raise awareness** (e.g. events, lectures, trainings, campaigns on intersectional issues).
 - Focus on **informal implementation first to build capacity** across different actors & counter resistances (e.g. conversations, bottom-up initiatives, physical safe(r) spaces, open door policies).

YET: lack of resources, equality data, monitoring + little change in unequal academic culture + (c)overt resistances against equality work

4. (EXTRA-)ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS: *strategically mobilize facilitators*



	Organizational	Extra-organizational
Facilitating factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise and familiarity with intersectionality Support of the top for intersectional equality policy-making Organizational structures supporting intersectional equality policy-making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horizontal Vertical Gender policies as a springboard. Increased internal diversity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Equality-related eligibility criteria for research project funding (Supra-)national legislation mandating attention to different axes of inequality National policies fostering equality policy-making. Demographic shifts in the organization's context. Pressures from societal stakeholders to adopt equality policy Equality certifications. External networks supporting equality policy-making
Hindering factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of resources for intersectional equality policy-making Lack of ownership of and accountability for the implementation of intersectional policy-making Persisting dominance of gender in (intersectional) equality policy-making. Lack of intersectional data Vertical or horizontal segregation of (intersectionally) minoritized groups 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Limited or constraining national law Unsupportive or hostile socio-political context Sector-wide academic culture and structure

Concluding reflections



Intersectionality as political practice in design

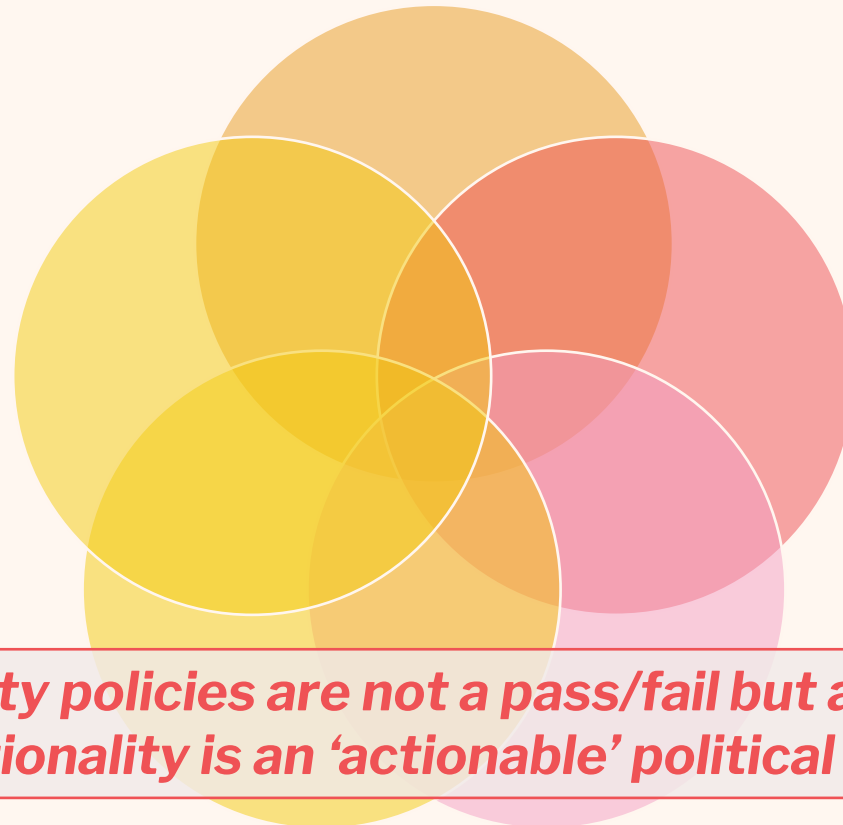
Leverage external requirements & internal expertise YET address unequal policy prioritization in intersectional equality policy-making.

Importance of collaborative governance

Ensure representation across hierarchical levels & intersectionally minoritized voices AND redistribute power in intersectional equality policy-making .

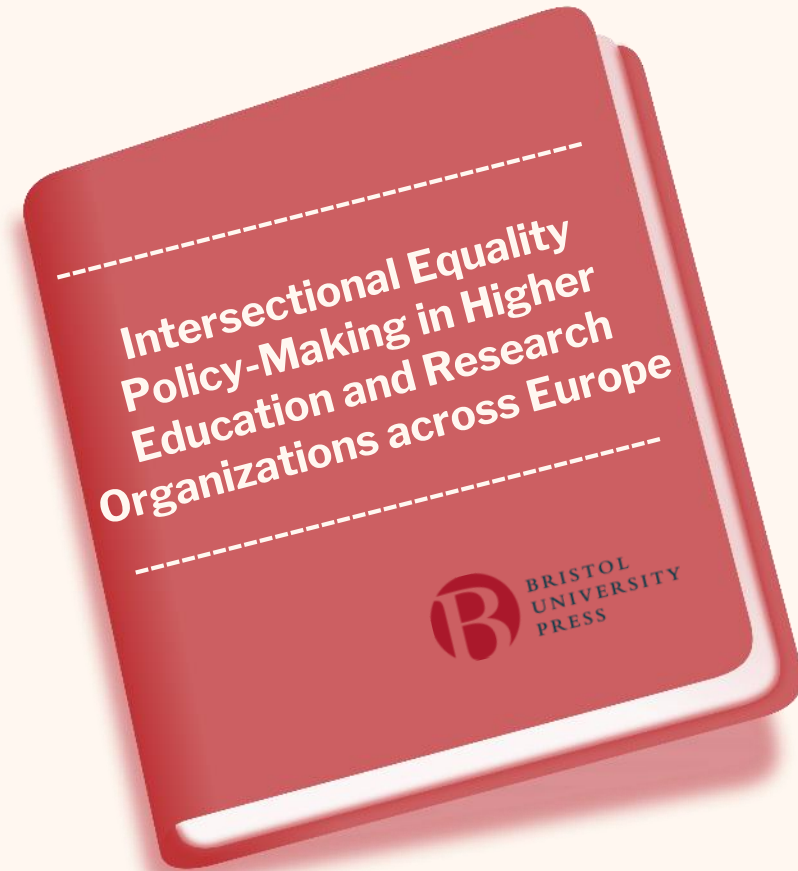
Implementation still preliminary

Install institutional accountability by building AND providing effective support for intersectional equality policy-making.



Intersectional equality policies are not a pass/fail but a matter of degree → Intersectionality is an 'actionable' political strategy

Looking back and moving forward



- ✓ Critical scoping review & future research agenda on intersectional equality policies in HE&R organizations
- ✓ Cross-case analysis of facilitating or hindering factors for intersectional equality policy-making
- ✓ Working papers on translating intersectionality into equality policy
- ✓ Open Training Unit on intersectional equality policy-making

Book on *Intersectional Equality Policy-Making in HE&R*

- Insights from 8 in-depth case studies by all involved partners
- Co-edited by Patrizia Zanoni & Koen Van Laer
- Published at the end of 2027 by BUP

Individual publications and PhD





Useful INSPIRE resources

Research articles

- [Scoping literature review on Intersectional policies in Higher Education & Research \(HE&R\) organizations](#)
- [Critical scoping review & future research agenda on intersectional equality policies in \(HE&R\) organizations](#)
- [Scoping literature review on Organising for intersectional gender equality in universities and research organisations](#)

Reports & Working Papers

- [Cross-case analysis of facilitating or hindering factors for intersectional equality policy making](#)
- [Working paper on Translating intersectional policy ambitions into actionable practice](#)
- [Working paper on Cultivating intersectional equality policies and practices in Research & Innovation \(R&I\)](#)
- [Working paper Facilitators, barriers, and case insights for organizing intersectional policy making](#)
- [Working paper on Intersectionality & sustainable equality work: pushback and resistance](#)

Policy & practice-based tools

- [Open Training Unit on Intersectional equality policy making in HE&R](#)
- [Policy brief on Intersectionality in R&I](#)

THANK YOU!

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