Conclusions

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Abstract

This chapter provides some concluding reflections on the different experiences of structural change encountered by the TARGET partners. The various TARGET partners had different roles in the structural change processes: seven organisations designed, implemented and monitored gender equality plans (GEPs) for the first time, two organisations provided tailored support to implementing institutions and one organisation evaluated GEP implementation. This edited volume provides an account of these diverse experiences of engaging with and catalysing structural change in very different research organisations operating in extremely different contexts both within the EU and beyond. The volume thus contributes to the growing body of literature generated from structural change projects by offering a specific focus on the TARGET approach. The TARGET process of structural change – undertaken through the development and implementation of tailored, evidence-based GEPs – was found to be strengthened through formal top management commitment and by taking a reflexive approach that was powered by communities of practice and supported by financial resources, gender expertise as well as gender and organisational change competences. Engaged institutions thus managed to overcome unfavourable conditions and implement tailor-made, context-specific interventions, some of them in areas at the cutting edge of topics and issues linked to gender equality in research and innovation such as tackling sexual harassment, sustainability and integrating the gender dimension into research content and curricula.

Keywords: Gender quality plan; European research area; research-funding organisation; research performing organisation; higher education; gender dimension in research content; gender in curricula

Introduction

The European Commission's gender equality plan (GEP) eligibility criteria require the following organisations to have GEPs in place in order to be eligible for Horizon Europe funding from 2022 onwards (EC, 2021a):

- public bodies such as research-funding bodies, national ministries or other public authorities, including public-for-profit organisations;
- higher education establishments, public and private; and
- research organisations, public and private.

Whilst this requirement is rightly acknowledged as a game changer for gender equality in research and innovation (R&I) organisations throughout Europe and has been welcomed by gender equality scholars, caution has also been voiced. Could these eligibility criteria enforce and magnify existing inequalities related to differing levels of policy action throughout Europe? Will organisations in countries with long trajectories of gender equality in R&I policies have an advantage over those that are newcomers to this field? How can this requirement move beyond a mere tickbox exercise to encourage real structural change? What resources are needed and where and how should they be channelled to ensure that research organisations in countries without a strong legacy of developing gender equality policies in R&I do not get left behind?

In this concluding chapter, we reflect on the TARGET experiences of GEP implementation in research-performing organisations (including universities), research-funding organisations, a national quality assurance agency and a network of engineering schools operating within Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Morocco as well as (in the case of the network) across Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries. These conclusions – whilst primarily reflecting on the chapters in this volume – also include a brief overarching section that synthesises the key 'takeaways' from the TARGET project articulated by each implementing institution as discussed in the final project meeting on 2 and 3 December 2021 in Rome. The conclusions drawn in this edited volume do not claim to be a systematic assessment of the GEP implementation in each institution during the four-year project. This assessment is reserved for the comparative evaluation of the project, which is based on a thorough analysis of all systematic monitoring reports, an analysis of semi-structured interviews as well as a documentary analysis for each implementing institution.

We do however seek to briefly reflect on those key factors of the TARGET approach that enabled institutions to successfully engage with structural change. We argue that the TARGET approach can be useful for those research organisations and higher education institutions that are currently operating in a less than optimal national policy context for gender equality in R&I (GEECCO & TARGET, 2021). This volume provides reflections from academics and practitioners who have been involved in the implementation of structural change and thereby operates at the nexus of knowledge production and practice. It also contributes to the growing body of literature generated from structural change

projects (see Bencivenga & Drew, 2021; Ferguson, 2021; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019).

Some elements of the TARGET approach are useful for all structural change projects regardless of the political context, that is, taking a reflexive, evidence-based approach that encompasses the following elements:

1. an in-depth analysis of gender inequalities within the institution and the identification of underlying mechanisms;
2. the formulation of gender equality objectives, target groups and targets based on the above;
3. the development of specific measures to address and achieve these objectives;
4. a close monitoring of GEP implementation and an evaluation of its effects; and
5. the reflection on the process and results achieved based on monitoring that may lead to adjustment of the GEP and/or specific measures (GEECCO & TARGET, 2021).

However, there are some elements of the TARGET approach that are specific to the national political contexts of the TARGET implementing partners in countries that have been classified as rather inactive at the national level regarding gender equality in R&I (e.g. Lipinsky, 2014; Wroblewski, 2021). Hence, TARGET-implementing institutions are located in countries that lack a national policy framework with concrete measures to support gender equality in R&I in the three key EU dimensions of careers, decision-making and integrating the gender dimension into research content and teaching.

TARGET aimed to provide tailored support for the development of a GEP that considered the respective organisation's own specific needs and context. Tailored support in the form of gender expertise and financial resources was essential because although the implementing partners formulated a clear commitment to gender equality, they did not have specific experience in this field prior to the TARGET project. Commitment from top management to structural change likewise became all the more important in the absence of a national policy discourse on gender equality in R&I. As Anagnostou argues in this volume:

> In the absence of a developed discourse that focuses on the institutional processes, structures and cultural norms (…) what made a difference in the development of the GEP was a) support from leadership and top management and b) the existence of gender-related expertise.

Whilst top-down commitment was a pre-condition to ensuring that the structural change project could bring about real change, the bottom-up approach was a key driver of change. Bottom-up support was provided by feminist activists, gender scholars, experts, practitioners, etc., within and outside the institution, mainly in form of a community of practice (CoP) established in each implementing institution. This provided the vehicle for driving the process forward through the sharing of experiences, development of competences and crucial engagement

in shared practices, that is, gathering data, designing the GEP and developing monitoring indicators. In some instances, the GEP-implementing institution became a 'pioneer' at the national level, either by becoming a 'role model' university whose GEP experience was shared with other universities operating in the same national context or by setting national quality standards that cascaded down to other research organisations through the involvement of key stakeholders from the local R&I ecosystem.

Key Reflections

It has been argued that a weakness of past and current structural change projects is their very tailored nature, which hinders the 'possibility of evaluating and using GEP data at EU and even national level' (Bencivenga, 2020, p. 186). Whilst we agree that this has hindered a standardised approach that facilitates comparison, the particularities of the policy focus in each round of projects, the specific thematic focus of each funded project, the tailoring of GEPs to the current, national context (policy and legislative) and the institutional particularities have given rise to a rich tapestry of structural change experiences across the European landscape. TARGET experiences contribute to the current state of discussion by covering diverse contexts in EU Member States (Cyprus, Italy, Greece, Romania), an EU candidate country (Serbia) and countries outside the EU (Morocco and the North African and Middle Eastern nations that form part of the RMEI network).

The first three chapters in this volume offer a more theoretical reflection on the TARGET approach, looking thereby at how structural change can ensure that the dual logic of academic organisations does not impede GEP implementation and highlighting the importance of monitoring and a CoP for a reflexive, evidence-based approach.

Wroblewski and Palmén examine the issue of the dual logic – organisational logic and scientific logic – in academic organisations as one of the main barriers to the effective implementation of GEPs in this sector. GEPs often refer to the organisational logic but do not challenge academic practices. For example, academic freedom is frequently used as the justification for resistance to the implementation of gender equality interventions, an aspect that is particularly evident in attempts to integrate the gender dimension into curricula. So how has the TARGET experience helped to build the necessary bridges? The reflexive approach developed through the TARGET project and applied at both the individual and the institutional levels has proved key in bringing together these two logics. Including top and middle management – who can be seen to represent the organisational logic (i.e. human resource managers, information system managers as well as heads of departments) – as well as faculty, researchers and academics in the CoPs has created space for dialogue between the two logics. A theory of change approach supports reflexivity in all stages of GEP development and implementation, and a CoP can provide a space to facilitate an organisational reflexive process for GEP implementation in which both logics can be addressed.

Wroblewski and Leitner highlight the relevance of monitoring for a reflexive gender equality policy not only to demonstrate the success of interventions but also – and crucially – to document any failures. This monitoring can also lead to increased gender competence and build up the gender discourse within the institution, thereby underpinning an effective evidence-based policy. Wroblewski and Leitner argue that gender analysis is much more than collecting sex-disaggregated data; it should also

> contain a discussion of the underlying gender concept (How is gender defined?), the gender equality objectives (What should be achieved?) as well as assumptions on reasons for gender inequalities (What are the underlying mechanisms?) within the organisation.

The monitoring systems developed in an evidence-based approach must be meaningful – not only with regard to the implementation of the action but also to its desired outcome and impact. Learning from failure forms a key part of the reflexive process and can lead to improvements in existing measures or the development of new ones. Failure should not be punished but instead turned into 'constructive lessons'. Whilst effective monitoring forms part of any attempt to implement structural change, institutional data gathering becomes harder in a context where national data collection is not routine. In the TARGET project, data collection and the setting up of data gathering and monitoring systems within each organisation required considerable effort, particularly in the larger organisations in the project (i.e. the universities). Collecting data and establishing relevant data and information systems helps to build solid foundations for future actions and interventions.

Palmén and Caprile examine how the different CoPs established as part of the TARGET project helped to facilitate structural change by expanding on the conceptual lens of the domain, community and practice and integrating reflections on empirical evidence into the process. In the TARGET project, the importance of defining the 'knowledge' domain by negotiating a shared meaning of gender equality – which brings together the organisational and scientific logics – was deemed particularly important in contexts where there was a lack of congruence with the EU three-dimensional construct. Engagement in this discussion proved to be part of an important process: whereas the meaning of gender equality was initially interpreted merely as the representation of women and men, it evolved over the course of the project into a more complex understanding that included gender competence in decision-making as well as the gender dimension in knowledge production and teaching. The involvement of different stakeholders was likewise seen as key when it came to the aspect of power. In the large organisations, involving top management and professors, that is, representatives of both the organisational and the scientific logics, was a key driver for structural change, whilst involving key stakeholders from the local R&I ecosystem facilitated structural change in the smaller organisations. Involving and engaging a broad yet strategically powerful base throughout the GEP development and implementation process was key to tackling resistance – through the direct engagement of

stakeholders but also the signalling message that it sent to those responsible for implementation lower down the organisational hierarchy. Furthermore, the CoP approach with its emphasis on practice proved congruent with highlighting the necessity of developing gender competences for successful GEP implementation.

TARGET implementers also engaged in a role of knowledge production which aims at effecting structural change. In the second section of this volume, the authors provide cutting-edge reflections on the substantive issues of policy transfer, sustainability, sexual harassment and the integration of the gender dimension into research content and curricula. More impressively, they have in the majority of cases also implemented these cutting-edge approaches in often unsupportive policy contexts and reflect on their actual experiences with their contribution to this volume.

Anagnostou examines gender equality policy transfer, specifically how well the three dimensions travel from North-Western to Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. She recognises that the understanding of those factors which facilitate or hinder structural change efforts for gender equality is still in its infancy, particularly in countries that have only recently started to develop gender equality measures in R&I. In her chapter, Anagnostou identifies those factors that impede the implementation of GEPs in research and higher education institutions across five countries (Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Italy and Serbia). She argues that a lack of shared and coherent discourse on gendered structures and practices has particularly hindered the pursuit of common ERA objectives and emphasises how the interpretation of policy discourse on the ground effects implementation. This highlights the importance of tailor-made GEPs as a contextually relevant instrument to facilitate customised interventions – premised on buy-in and engagement.

Zabaniotou et al. reflect on the process of developing a gender equality strategy for a network of 90 engineering schools in 17 Mediterranean countries and integrating the gender dimension into its mission statement on sustainable development. The network (RMEI) embraces the diversity of cultures, religions, political and socio-economic differences that exist in Southern Europe and North Africa. It envisions equitable and sustainable development for the Mediterranean region. Through its participation in the TARGET project, RMEI achieved learning potential, inspired informal and structural changes for gender equality among its members by developing a tailored gender equality strategy, unravelled the link between gender equality and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and integrated gender equality into interventions for the sustainable development of the region by mobilising the network's human resources – from professors and students to academic managers (rectors, deans). The gender equality policy statement was unanimously approved thanks to the commitment of RMEI member institutions to SDGs (Zabaniotou, 2020). The transformative learning and implementation process formed part of the network's vision for sustainable development and contributed towards a shift from wicked global challenges and inequalities to equality through co-existence (Zabaniotou, Boukamel, & Tsirogianni, 2021). This experience shows the utility of linking gender equality and the gender dimension in content to a specific topic (in this case, sustainability in the

Mediterranean basin context) where their relevance can be easily demonstrated. This approach proved to be particularly helpful since gender equality has not (yet) been formulated as a priority for national R&I policy in many of the countries in which the RMEI members are located.

Tăriceanu paints a meaningful picture of how gender studies have become part of the higher education system in Romania and also charts the challenges that have been faced on the way. This vision from Romania highlights the importance of factoring in the historical and political contexts in any assessment of structural change. Assumptions of homogeneity in the acceptance of key concepts throughout Europe in the policy 'transfer' process must be questioned. Tăriceanu refers to Susan Zimmermann in her research on the institutionalisation of women's and gender studies in Central and Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space. Zimmerman (2007, p. 137) argues that:

> the category of gender was used not only for its critical potential of examining existing social, economic and political asymmetries, but also for the means for imposing a specifically western model of liberal democracy and free-market economy.

Tăriceanu in turn argues that the concept gender was seen as a 'symbolic marker' of Western culture and that gender studies were subsequently viewed as a 'borrowed concept from Western culture that did not fit the social and political realities of former communist Eastern European countries'. This highlights the importance of taking a post-colonial approach to the assessment of the implementation of gender equality policies. Notions of 'policy transfer', 'catch-up' or 'lagging behind' can be interpreted as part of a Western-centric hegemony that needs to be questioned, probed and called out. This recognition should not however give legitimacy to an under-prioritisation of gender equality but (at the very least) entail an acknowledgement of how gender equality policies intersect with a range of historical and political contextual realities that affect its implementation. The first GEP in the Romanian higher education system was developed by the state-run quality assurance agency ARACIS through the TARGET project and marks an important benchmark for the entire system – sending out a clear message that gender equality should be a quality standard for all higher education institutions in Romania. ARACIS successfully included gender on the list of criteria for the evaluation of universities and established a working group with university gender experts who support the development of a gender course which should be introduced into existing curricula.

Boiron et al. highlight their experience of incorporating the gender perspective into engineering curricula in the École Centrale de Marseille (ECM) in France and discuss the integration of the gender dimension into its 'informal' engineering curricula. ECM is a member of the RMEI network and formed part of its gender equality working group, thus benefiting from the capacity-building activities organised in the TARGET context when strengthening the gender dimension in its PhD curriculum and increasing the gender awareness of future engineers in the long run.

Alongside the integration of the gender dimension into teaching and research content, the topic of sexual harassment and gender-based violence has recently become one of the most pressing issues in higher education institutions around the globe. This is due in part to the emergence of the #metoo movement, which initially rocked the film and media industries and then spread to other industries and sectors, including higher education. As a form of gender-based violence, sexual harassment represents one of the most serious obstacles to gender equality in higher education institutions. In their chapter, Mirazić and Duhaček describe the development of a specific policy to tackle sexual harassment at the University of Belgrade (UB) in Serbia. Interestingly, whilst the development of a sexual harassment protocol was not initially foreseen as part of GEP development at this university, the reflexive process used in the TARGET approach enabled interventions to be tailored to its real needs. Mirazić and Duhaček chart the factors that hinder and support the development of a sexual harassment protocol in a decentralised university. With three member faculties already having previously introduced their own rulebooks, the first UB 'Rulebook on the prevention of and protection from sexual harassment' was adopted university-wide in 2021. This document represents an important step forward and provides substantial support to all the university's member institutions in the process of regulating the prevention of and protection from sexual harassment. It thus also contributes substantially to gender equality at all levels of the institution and could be replicated in other universities in Serbia.

The TARGET approach also involved the implementation of tailored GEPs in very heterogenous organisations. The aim thereby was to support implementing institutions in developing GEPs through a guided process that began with an audit and continued with the design of the GEP and the development of monitoring indicators in conjunction with a supporting partner (gender experts specialised in GEP development). Throughout this process, the implementing institutions developed key gender competences, crucially positioning them as pioneers in their national contexts. Caprile et al. reflect on this process and the challenges of engaging in structural change in two large, complex organisations (i.e. the participating universities), whilst De Micheli and Vingelli look at it from the perspective of implementing GEPs in small yet strategic organisations (including RFOs). The implementing institutions in the TARGET project all have enormous potential to contribute to the national discourse on gender equality in R&I in their respective countries due to the multiplier effect of research funding and accreditation as well as their roles as think tanks or large state universities which could become pioneering institutions in gender equality.

Caprile et al. reflect on the experiences of GEP implementation in two large and complex universities in very different contexts: the UB in Serbia and the University Hassan II Casablanca (UH2C) in Morocco. Each of these organisations took a different approach to GEP development and the composition of the CoP. UB developed a small yet very effective CoP to collect sex-disaggregated data at all levels and data on the sex/gender dimension in curricula for the first time. UH2C established a larger CoP that included top management but was mainly driven bottom-up and ultimately led to a proposal to adopt an Equality Charter.

The different national and institutional contexts were particularly relevant in the choice of approach to GEP development and composition of the CoP. TARGET has been a catalyst in both universities for building up the evidence base on gender inequalities, raising gender awareness and institutionalising gender equality policies. In both cases, however, the process was complex, nonlinear and slow, due in part to the size and complexity of the organisations. Whilst there was an interplay between top-down and bottom-up approaches in both universities, these manifested themselves differently. Actual change relied on decades of bottom-up activism by feminist movements and networks both inside and outside the universities, whilst the bridge between gender scholarship and practitioner's expertise was seen to be highly relevant in addressing both the institutional and the scientific logics.

In contrast to these large universities, De Micheli and Vingelli examine the experiences of the smaller organisations that participated in the TARGET project. These organisations (two RFOs and one RPO) were in a privileged position to significantly reshape the R&I landscape – not only by implementing their own GEPs but also in terms of their relationship and potential impact on the local R&I ecosystems in which they are embedded. All three organisations are small in size (between 10 and 100 employees), have a low level of organisational complexity (in comparison to the universities) and enjoy excellent network connections with the highest regional or national political powers in the field of research and science. One of the organisations is a national research-funding organisation, the second is a regional funding body for biomedical research, which promotes and supports scientific research in the life sciences, whilst the third is an independent, non-profit, policy-oriented research and training institute with a focus on European and foreign policies. Through their participation in TARGET, they have made progress in collecting sex-disaggregated data (also related to funding activities) and organised specific training events or meetings to increase awareness and link gender equality to scientific excellence. Policy briefs and/or position papers outlining the importance of gender equality policies in their scientific environment have likewise been developed, whilst one of the organisations has brought gender equality to the attention of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy as a key priority.

Main Benefits of the TARGET Approach for Structural Change

In this section, we analyse and reflect on some of the questions that were highlighted in the introduction to this book. How can approaches to gender equality in R&I be geographically inclusive yet promote a shared, progressive understanding and policy approach? Part of the success of the TARGET project has been the enablement of a reflexive, tailor-made participatory approach that allowed crucial local 'ownership' of the GEP process. This local ownership has been facilitated by four main factors: formal top-level institutional commitment, reflexivity, a CoP and support in the form of human and financial resources, gender expertise and competence.

Formal and Top-Level Commitment

Formal and top-level institutional commitment becomes all the more important in contexts where there is a gap in national policies for gender equality in R&I. In the TARGET institutions, the levels of commitment ranged from full top-level commitment (in one case, a key member of the local TARGET team was also the rector of the university) or support by middle management (as members of either the TARGET team or the CoP) to active resistance from top management. In the best case scenario – full commitment from top management – gender equality policies were implemented in a context where gender equality had not previously been a priority, with TARGET opening the door for gender to become a legitimate and debatable issue. In another case, resistance from top management was also experienced, which led to the temporal derailing of the GEP process. However, the majority of implementing institutions were able to gain and sustain top-management commitment (in the formal sense), thus sending a strong signal to staff and key stakeholders in other organisations in the local R&I ecosystem and easing the implementation of the GEP.

Reflexivity

The reflexive approach implemented in TARGET has proven to be successful precisely because it was built on the premises of framing 'gender equality' and subsequent interventions in a context-sensitive way, both externally and internally. Whilst the European Commission's three priority objectives for gender equality and mainstreaming (women's representation in careers, gender balance in decision-making and integration of the gender dimension into research content and teaching) proved useful for structuring the GEPs, the reflexive TARGET approach was flexible enough to enable the participating institutions to develop context-sensitive and relevant measures. Reflexivity throughout the GEP process (gathering data, tailoring GEP design, developing monitoring indicators) meant that a continuous cycle of data collection, self-reflection, tailored actions, self-assessment, etc., was not only employed to ensure that each stage was well thought out and grounded in its predecessor but also enabled the addressing of issues that had not initially been foreseen (i.e. sexual harassment). The constant feedback loop between data collection and the development and monitoring of tailored actions proved a powerful motor for change in which the role of gender experts and practitioners within the institution or in the external CoP was a key driver. Whilst the reflexive approach proposed in TARGET may be time consuming and slow down the process of defining and adopting a GEP (acknowledging the context and defining a tailored solution takes time), it has proved powerful in creating the conditions for activating a lasting and sustainable process of change. The reflexive approach supports organisations not only in the beginning but also throughout their learning process of examining how they function, documenting the relevant power structures, determining the role of gender and identifying how these elements are linked, thus enabling them to at least begin and engage with a (disruptive) change process.

Furthermore, we argue that the reflexive approach used in TARGET has provided a crucial space in which the shared meaning of gender equality can be discussed. In some cases, this has resulted in the development and enactment of a more complex understanding of gender equality. The gender dimension has been innovatively incorporated into a mission statement of a Mediterranean network of engineering schools in North Africa and Southern Europe (Zabani-otou, Tsirogianni, Cardarilli and Guarascio in this volume), it has been integrated into evaluation criteria for higher education curricula in Romania (Tăriceanu in this volume) and engineering curricula in the ECM in France (Boiron, Deumié, Raviol and Benech-Kopelianskis in this volume), and initiatives have been taken to integrate gender into curricula at the UB in Serbia and the UH2C in Morocco (Caprile et al. in this volume). Integrating the gender dimension into research content has also proved central to research funders as an evaluation criterion in their calls for proposals (De Micheli and Vingelli in this volume).

Community of Practice

The CoP has proven to be a powerful mechanism to leverage change – and also provide a space for reflexivity. In the TARGET project, the CoPs have promoted both change at the institutional level and a policy discourse at the national level. Some of the TARGET CoPs focused on internal structural change and thus engaged relevant actors with different functional responsibilities (human resources, information technology, etc.) and hierarchical positions within the organisation, whilst others enlisted relevant key stakeholders from the respective national R&I ecosystem. Ultimately, the participation of different stakeholders depended on the key changes that were to be made. The constant effort to involve a wide range of different stakeholders meant that the GEP 'spoke to all' and resistance was more likely to be minimised. Bringing allies on board through the CoP, either from within or beyond the organisation, proved crucial in combatting isolation of the change agent and providing a key infrastructure of much-needed support. The intra-institutional CoPs also promoted friendly competition by providing an informal space for organisations to share and encourage the take-up of good practices and using peer pressure to propel advances for institutions in their field. The RMEI CoP, for example, was described as a 'flame' in the Mediterranean engineering domain, which managed to mobilise engineers from Northern African and Middle Eastern countries to factor in social change in a technocratic, often male-dominated field.

Support (Including Gender Expertise, Organisational Development Expertise, Financial and Personnel Resources)

A further aspect identified as key was support – both in the form of financial and human resources (dedicated time) as well as the provision of gender expertise and expertise in gender and organisational change. Structural change is a costly process, and budget needs to be allocated to staff to coordinate change processes as well as to the measures in the GEPs, training activities, etc. In this context, the

funding received from the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme to engage with the structural change process was seen as key and was particularly important in contexts where national level funding for gender equality in R&I is scarce. The funding from the European Commission meant that there were dedicated resources for a change agent in each institution to coordinate the CoP and spearhead the GEP process. Without this funding, it is unlikely that the implementing institutions would have been able to engage in such a complex change process. Funding was also seen to be key in leveraging top-management commitment. Structural change, in turn, was seen to require a specific mix of gender expertise and expertise in gender and organisational change. Gender experts tend to be gender scholars, who may also be familiar with gendered processes and procedures (e.g. gender stereotypes or unconscious bias in recruitment procedures). People with gender competence, in contrast, can come from different professional backgrounds and engage in a range of functions. An IT systems manager with gender competences, for example, would know how to develop a useful information and data collection system that gathered relevant gender data. Gender competences can be developed through the structural change process and moderated by gender experts. Gender and organisational change experts, in turn, have the skills to engage in change processes, i.e. knowledge of how to develop and implement an effective institutional audit and carry out a gender analysis with a view to developing relevant objectives for an organisational change process outlined in a GEP. Hence, support from both gender and organisational change experts was seen to be key for developing gender competences within the implementing institutions throughout the GEP process. The TARGET approach – which delivered tailored support through two specific partners (gender experts with organisational change expertise) matched to the implementing institutions and coupled with the support from the co-ordinator – seemed to provide a solid structure to enable the development of gender competences within each implementing institution.

Future Research and Policy Implications

Data collection on gender equality actions and measures in research-performing organisations and higher education institutions varies depending on the national context. According to the She Figures 2021, in most EU-27 countries more than 50% of higher education institutions document actions and measures towards gender equality on their websites. However, variations between countries do still exist. The data for 2020 shows that whilst more than 50% of higher education institutions in the majority of EU Member States (19 of 27) mention such actions and measures on their websites, the figures for other countries are much lower (Poland: 37%, Slovenia: 26%, Bosnia and Herzegovina: 15%) (EC, 2021b). Ferguson (2021) stresses that involving those institutions and countries that have not been involved in structural change in R&I to date is the current major challenge. The more active countries in this respect began their commitment to gender equality in R&I more than 20 years ago – or at the latest when gender mainstreaming became a European strategy. Compensating for the absence of

this process therefore becomes key in terms of sharing institutional experiences, providing resources and facilitating access to expertise.

The TARGET project shows how inroads can be made through an approach that provides substantial resources directly to institutions engaging in structural change, facilitates access to experts and creates a forum for the development of a reflexive gender equality policy. The recent report from the Standing Working Group on Gender in R&I, stresses that:

> the absence of a GEP requirement in a country is not an indicator of quality or absence of activity. In some instances, progress has been achieved through softer measures or more bottom-up approaches, which may be related to differences between countries and the socio-cultural factors that affect gender equality policy design. (ERAC 2021, p. 4)

The TARGET approach has been particularly successful in enabling a contextually relevant tailoring of the GEP, which has resulted in local 'ownership' of the process, strengthened by the CoP. Our reflections on the experiences with the TARGET process highlight the importance of taking a post-colonial approach in the assessment of the implementation of gender equality policies. Local struggles for gender equality have been a key factor in driving forward GEP implementation (from Serbia to Morocco). Those involved in the process stress that gender equality is not an 'alien Western' concept (even if conservative or far right movements portray it as an external imposition) but instead forms part of the rich tapestry of local struggles. Grassroots movements have been working on gender issues for decades (including the meanings of gender equality, actions and measures), which does not necessarily mean that they are less complex or comprehensive. Whilst engaging with the process of structural change is often an arduous, slow and difficult task replete with obstacles, an approach that engages key local stakeholders, is based on a reflexive process iterating between data collection and action and can harness the power of existing feminist networks with top-management commitment, has proven to be a powerful catalyst in igniting the structural change process.

With the availability of targeted support and resources, real advances can be made and experiences shared and documented, thus creating a butterfly effect that recalibrates the complex landscape towards a greater gender equality in research organisations throughout Europe and beyond.

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