

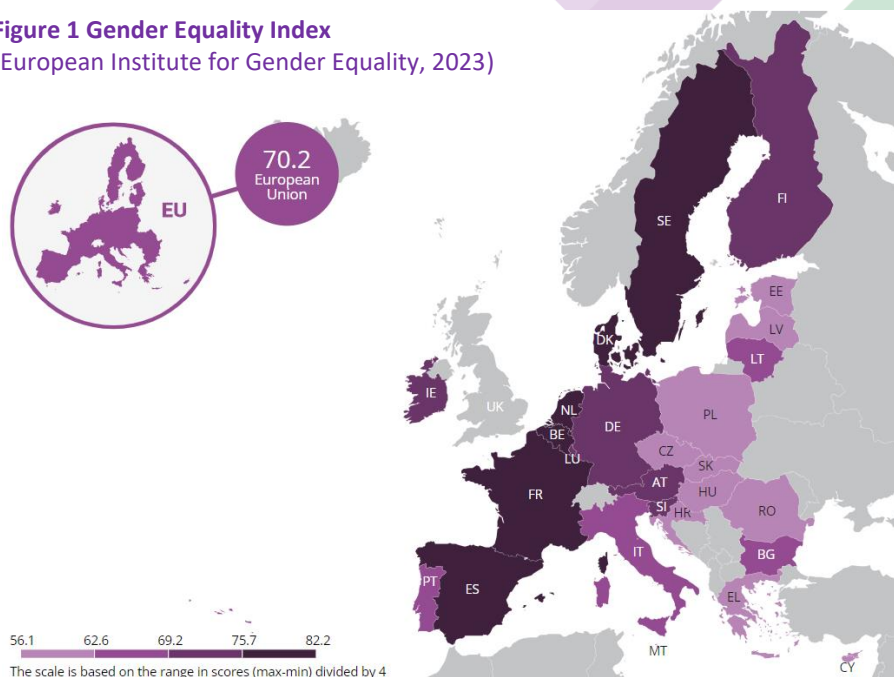
Advancing gender equality in Widening countries through stakeholders' mobilisation

Introduction

The category of “Widening countries” initially refers to the category of countries concerned by latest EU enlargement waves. In the field of Research and Innovation, it designates European Union member states evidencing lower research and innovation intensiveness as reflected in low participation rates in previous FP7 and H2020 framework programmes¹. Studies show that a substantial gap remains between the EU-14 countries and those which have joined the bloc after 2004, hampering their full contribution to a knowledge-based, innovation-driven EU. Based notably on EU member states' ranking in the European competitiveness reports, the geographical perimeter of lower research-intensive countries has evolved over time. Under Horizon Europe, this perimeter comprises the EU-13 countries which have joined the EU in 2004, 2007 and 2013, as well as Greece and Portugal. EU's outermost regions from the Northern Atlantic, Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, along with 14 associate countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Northern Africa complement this list as beneficiaries of Widening actions.

Hence, while this category is instrumental to EU Research & Innovation policy, it is not consistent in terms of institutional and policy environments, heritages, or cultural backgrounds. However, countries from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), despite considerable diversity, tend to share several challenges both in terms of research intensiveness and gender equality record, as captured by EIGE's Gender Equality Index (Figure1)² combined with research excellence indexes (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 1 Gender Equality Index
(European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023)



¹ https://rea.ec.europa.eu/horizon-europe-widening-who-should-apply_en

² <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/about>



Except for Slovenia, Widening countries in general, and notably those from CEE, score below the EU average on this index. Although the current situation of gender inequality in each country depends on socially and historically constructed local arrangements regarding the social division of roles between men and women, it is also path dependent to recent (or not too remote) political processes such as the transition from authoritarian rule or state socialism, and Europeanisation³. This path dependency largely accounts for the variety of gender equality regimes in the EU, but also for different R&I settings in terms of (infra)structures, fields of specialisation or work cultures.

Figure 2 Scatter plot of Gender Equality Index and Adjusted Research Excellence Indicator
(Wroblewski, 2020)

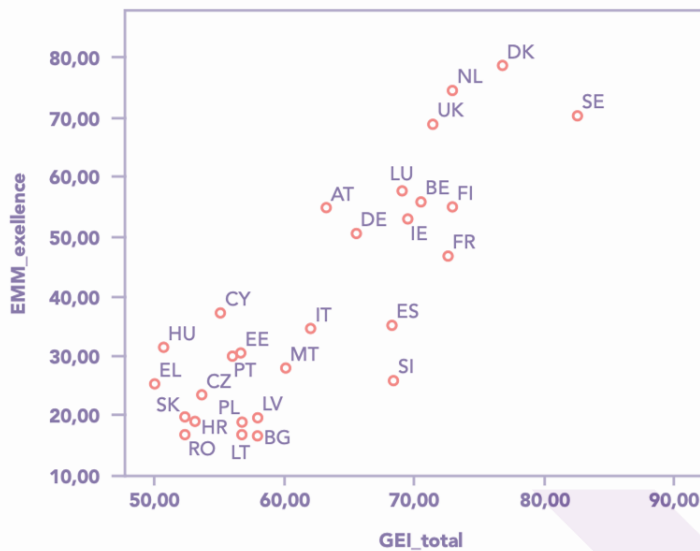
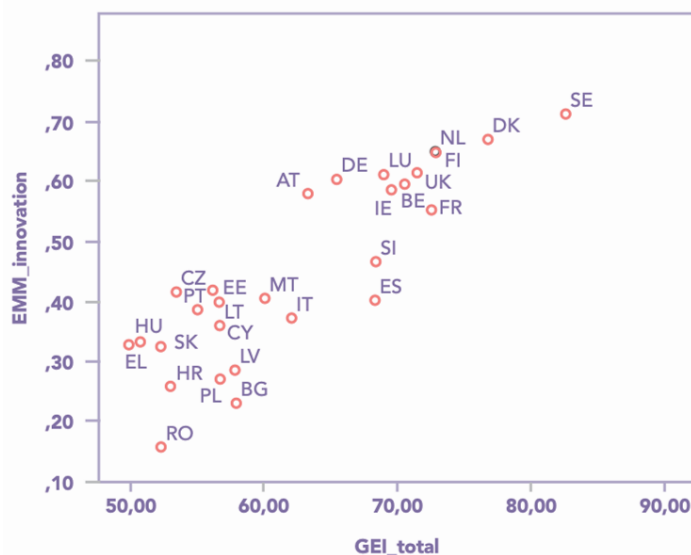


Figure 3 Scatter plot of Gender Equality Index and European Innovation Scoreboard Summary
(Wroblewski, 2020)



Note: EMM stands for European Monitoring Mechanism

³ AGRIGEP (2023) : Implementing GEPs in Higher Education and Research in Widening Countries: The case of agriculture & life sciences

The present factsheet, issued at the end of the first year of the AGRIGEP project, which brings together implementing universities from three Widening countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia), elaborates upon the lessons learnt in terms of stakeholders' engagement and mobilisation for the implementation of inclusive and comprehensive Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in line with Horizon Europe criteria. It highlights key takeaways about the nature of the change process, the organisational and policy conditions and challenges encountered in the three national implementation contexts and summarises hints about how to overcome them. It also flags difficulties specific to the STEM field and to the focus on Widening countries as pursued by the European Commission.

Lesson learnt #1: Gender Equality Plans are a political process

Adopted under the Slovenian Presidency of the European Council in November 2021, the Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation⁴ refers to GEPs as one of the “most transformative policy developments” to achieve long-term, sustainable advancement towards gender equality in R&I. Yet this document also highlights the need for flexibility of the specific instruments to be used at national level and/or by universities and other Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), and the support required for them to conform with Horizon Europe criteria, especially where there is no GEP requirement enforced nationally. The Ljubljana Declaration thus acknowledges that GEPs are implemented within specific policy and institutional frameworks, and that Widening countries need specific support for their implementation. As learnt by AGRIGEP implementing partners, GEP implementation is a political process also due to the idiosyncrasy of each organisational context, and to the strategic framing expected from those in charge of its design and implementation.

❑ What makes a GEP political?

- ➔ It requires knowledge about ones' institution
- ➔ It requires leverage to change the status quo
- ➔ It is bound to already set priorities and available resources
- ➔ It requires people to commit their own credit, time and to align with their own agenda/priorities
- ➔ It follows a standard policy cycle: data gathering > design > implementation > evaluation
- ➔ It fits within a broader policy framework: existing or upcoming laws, regulations, strategies

❑ Implications

- ➔ GEP/project team to act strategically and navigate their environment
- ➔ Objectives, outcomes and impact to be clearly set, and a pathway devised for their achievement
- ➔ Resistances to change to be acknowledged and addressed
- ➔ Allies to be found, based on their own interest and leverage
- ➔ GEP to be synergized with other equality and diversity-related activities and change processes
- ➔ Windows of opportunities to be timely identified and seized

⁴ https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/Dokumenti/PSEU/Ljubljana-Declaration-on-Gender-Equality-in-Research-and-Innovation- endorsed_final.pdf

Lesson learnt #2: Institutional and domestic policy context matters

The political nature of GEP implementation is also evidenced by the importance of each domestic (national or subnational) and institutional (at university level) context to set policy and legal frameworks, priorities, juggling potentially competing agendas, electoral cycles or available bodies and resources. Each context comprises a range of demographical, cultural, institutional and policy/politics-related features that determine how the university (or other type of RPO) will be put into motion to achieve gender equality, and how stakeholders can be engaged.

❑ What is context about?

- ➔ University's background, structure or demographics defines constraints and opportunities for GEP implementation and organizational change
- ➔ Cultural values and "gender regimes" are reflected both in organizational settings and attitudinal dispositions to change
- ➔ Work and disciplinary (STEM) cultures can be more or less inductive for participation & engagement
- ➔ Institutional politics can be supportive of or hindering change
- ➔ Policy environment (Law, regulation, policies on GE and Research & Innovation) can provide support/resources for internal change
- ➔ National politics create incentives or barriers to change

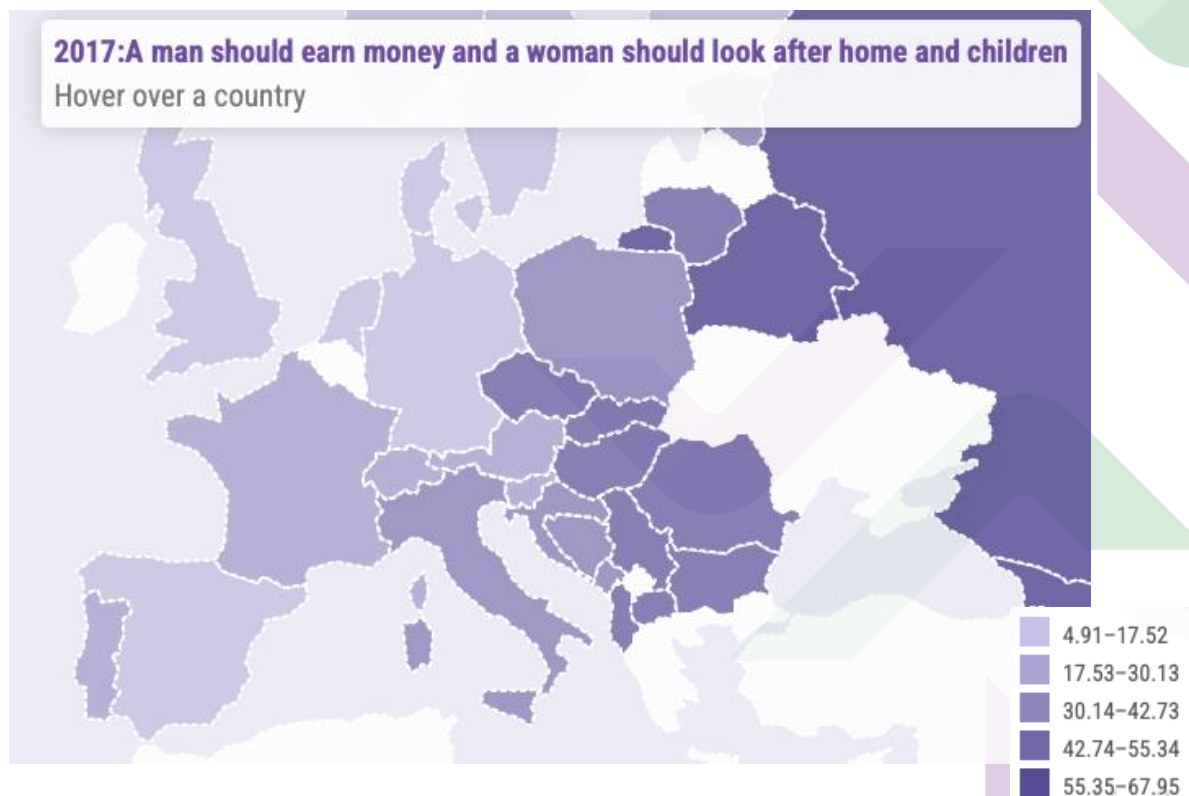
The AGRIGEP project shows that contexts are not static: they provide both constraints and opportunities for conducting change and incentivising stakeholders' participation. Below are a few examples of possible windows of opportunities. Although those primarily open on the national level, their materialisation also depends on a combination of factors at the RPO's level. For instance, expected legislative and/or policy changes at national level can rely upon inputs brought by university stakeholders, as shown below for AGRIGEP's Slovenian partner, whose rector will chair the national conference of rectors consulted for the framing of a new law on universities to be adopted in 2024. As for the Czech partner, new requirements for universities to be legislated soon, combined with an intensive national debate on the performance of universities in tackling sexual harassment and gender-based violence, can support stakeholders' mobilisation in GEP support structure for activating anti-discrimination and anti-harassment protocols.

❑ Examples of windows of opportunity for change

- ➔ Czech Republic/CZU: a new legislation is being discussed, that is expected to require universities to adopt new measures on gender equality
- ➔ Czech Republic/CZU: public debate on sexual harassment in academia
- ➔ Slovenia/UP: legislative and policy changes are expected for universities, to which the Rectors' conference is invited to contribute
- ➔ Slovenia/UP: New framework contract with Ministry to be signed in 2024
- ➔ CZU/MATE/UP: diverse student communities = intercultural dialogue

While generic contextual features apply to all countries of the European Research Area, how they will play out in the cultural and political environments of Widening countries is however quite specific. AGRIGEP teams of institutions located in the Czech Republic and Hungary report greater conservatism and both individual and organisational resistances to institutional change for gender equality. Although the two countries score differently in EIGE’s Gender Equality Index and reflect diverging values with respect to gender issues in comparative values’ surveys⁵ (Fig. 4), the politicisation of gender in the public realm and its framing as part of “cultural wars” opposing different notions of Europeanness⁶ are likely to influence how they will be dealt with within universities and other RPOs. Another contributing factor shaping the implementation context consists in culturally embedded work culture, largely inherited from the socialist past, which limits the ability and willingness of stakeholders to participate in university-wide processes, to take credit for it, or to express their own interest and motivations.

Figure 4 Percentage of respondents agreeing with the following statement (EVS, 2022)



Comparatively, the context appears to be more favourable in Slovenia, which scores above the EU average in EIGE’s Gender Equality Index and counts among European pioneers of gender mainstreaming⁷, and more specifically at Univerza na Primorskem (UP), a university born in 1993, two years after the country’s independence, which soon championed women’s participation in senior academic positions. Moreover, AGRIGEP partners also exhibit more conducive institutional features, such as an ongoing process of transformation for MATE, the Hungarian partner, a strong profile in international development projects at CZU (a field familiar with adopting a gender lens due to the

⁵ <https://www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu/maptool.html>, based on European Values Survey

⁶ Forest, Maxime (2021) Europeanization in Abels, Gabriel et al. *Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU politics*

⁷ First gender mainstreaming mechanisms were established in 1990 in Slovenia.

many incentives and tools developed by international development agencies), and very diverse student communities requiring inter-cultural dialogue at all partners' institutions.

To make the best possible use of those windows of opportunities and navigate the constraints and challenges linked to each GEP implementation context, specific steps are to be taken in terms of internal communication and interactions with stakeholders, knowledge and incentives.

□ How to work with context

- Pick up your profile: competitive, progressive, forward-looking
- Listen to your interlocutors: what/who do they care for?
- Reach out to those who know about (part of) the context & resources
- Adapt to your audience(s): use the best channels, frame the right topic
- Offer project's resources, ideas or support for ongoing change agenda
- Bring topical knowledge or information on gender in research
- Pick up on good will, including from students, and reward it!
- Highlight opportunities for change in your institutional/domestic context

Lesson learnt #3: GEP is not the only game in town

Mirroring the lower institutional capacity evidenced for Widening countries in comparative studies of ERA's priorities' implementation⁸, AGRIGEP partners have all experienced challenges to gather and analyse relevant institutional data on gender equality and to fully monitor GEP implementation. This is primarily due to the absence of central Gender Equality Offices or services, to the weak mandate granted to equality bodies and/or GEP support structures where those exists, and to gender equality currently not featuring among priorities stated in strategic university documents.

More context-specific features have also resulted in GEPs not being "the only game in town". Those consists in the existence of competing agendas, either dictated by mid- or long-term goals, such as increased internationalisation and attractiveness to students and staff or improving university infrastructures and the overall architecture of a recently founded university (MATE) reuniting older institutions dispersed across Western Hungary. Institutional agendas competing with gender equality for stakeholders' mobilisation can also be dictated by economic and political circumstances, such as the rising cost of energy (CZU, MATE) in the context of the war in Ukraine, or increased competition for national and international research funding, as access to EU funding was temporarily severed due to a political dispute between the Hungarian government and EU institutions over the rule of Law. However, GEPs not being "the only game in town" also more positively denotes that gender equality initiatives may be implemented outside the realm of the GEP, requiring strategic steps to bridge the

⁸ [Wroblewski, Angela \(2020\): Report on Monitoring of ERA Priority 4 implementation, Gender Action: ISAS, Prague](#)

gap(s) in terms of data collection, coordination between all Gender Equality initiatives (within and outside the GEP) and of the gender equality agenda with other, potentially competing agendas.

❑ **Competing priorities?**

- ➔ CZU/UP: attractiveness and internationalisation
- ➔ CZU/MATE: energy crisis and rising costs
- ➔ MATE: increased competition for non-EU funding, enhancing cross-campus communication

❑ **Gender Equality initiatives on parallel tracks**

- ➔ CZU: sexual harassment through the prism of ethical behaviour
- ➔ MATE: Equal opportunity and equal treatment directive being implemented as from 2023
- ➔ MATE : Equal Opportunity Office planned (would incorporate gender equality)
- ➔ UP: conferences, girls in science contests, informal positive actions
- ➔ UP: annual data collection by law, no gender analysis

❑ **How to bridge the gap**

- ➔ Centralise information on gender equality initiatives & carry out gender analysis of existing data
- ➔ Consider integrating external initiatives into your GEP
- ➔ Suggest a gender lens and support on competing priorities
- ➔ Frame gender equality and gender knowledge as *resources*

Intermediate conclusions

Based on the lessons learnt and the stakeholders' mapping exercise carried out by AGRIGEP partners, a few intermediate conclusions and ways forward have been devised.

The first one consists precisely in the necessity of identifying stakeholders relevant to the change process. Stakeholders can be identified in line with two axes: power (or leverage – their capacity to act upon the status quo of gender equality) and interest (their willingness and availability to the change process). They can be found within (among different services, staff categories or collectives constitutive of the academic community) and outside the institution (among policy or economic agents, civil society organisations or communities of knowledge or practices on gender equality issues, forming the wider ecosystem within which the institution is functioning). Hence, locating and reaching out to those stakeholders is key to strengthening institutional capacity for gender equality, and to mobilising the adequate body of data, knowledge, skills and expertise in conducting change.

This endeavour is especially important for Widening countries, where this combination is not always readily (nor fully) available, and where university bodies and services can prove more reluctant to commit their often more limited resources in such a broad, cross-institutional agenda. In these contexts, carefully identifying allies, pooling resources, and crafting messages to be conveyed through specific channels can prove instrumental to advancing a gender equality agenda.

Below recommendations, formulated for the AGRIGEP implementing partners, illustrate the steps that can be devised to increase stakeholders' participation and engagement with GEP-related activities. Along with other ways forward suggested in response to each of the lessons learnt by our community, they are instrumental to confront the challenge of advancing gender equality through fostering greater agency for individual stakeholders to act as change agents in universities and other RPOs of Widening countries marked by constrained institutional and domestic environments.

☐ Increasing stakeholders' engagement

- ➔ Synergising or teaming up with gender expertise available within or outside the university, on national level (cross-participation in events...)
- ➔ Activating and incentivising GE(P) structures where those do exist, offering thematic activities based on stakeholders' concerns & interest
- ➔ Providing targeted support to key allies for them to achieve their own priorities while integrating a gender lens
- ➔ Students are stakeholders too! Capitalise upon their initiatives or good will to participate in project related activities, and consider ways to acknowledge their contributions (credits, certificates...)

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