

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Bulgaria

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

As of the end of 2020, Bulgaria had not adopted any specific laws or regulations on promoting gender equality in research and innovation.

However, in April 2016, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted the Equality between Women and Men Act (EWMA). The EWMA imposes obligations on the Minister of Labour and Social Policy to "coordinate the establishment and the maintenance of a system for gender equality monitoring and the drafting of a report on gender equality in the Republic of Bulgaria". The Act also regulates the role of the relevant institutions in the development and functioning of the monitoring system. It does not, however, mention any specific provisions for gender equality in research and innovation.

Policy framework

The National Strategy for Research Development in Bulgaria 2017-2030 was adopted by the Council of Ministers in May 2017. It stipulates that "according to the data provided by the National Statistical Institute in 2015, relative gender balance has been achieved, taking into account that women make up 53 %, and men 47 % of the total number of researchers in the country, including those in the higher education sector. In this respect the country is among the leading ones in EU. For that reason, the present Strategy does not envisage any specific measures for raising the number of women researchers, but there will be monitoring on the equal representation in the selection and promotion of staff to academic and management positions in research organisations" (p. 18).

Gender equality is mentioned just once in the Strategy for Higher Education Development in Bulgaria 2021-2030. In outlining the strengths of the current higher education system, the Strategy notes that "there is a relatively balanced share of women researchers in science and ICT" (p.34).

The National Strategy for Promotion of Equality of Women and Men 2016-2020 was adopted by the Council of Ministers in November 2016. Again, it makes no specific reference to research and innovation. It seeks to guarantee equal treatment, equal access to public resources, and equal participation in decision-making for women and men, to promote successful personal and social realisation, and to encourage equality of women and men in all spheres of public, economic and political life. The Strategy includes objectives, priority areas and implementation indicators. It is implemented by annual national action plans, which are chiefly concerned with pursuing a unified policy of equality of women and men, raising awareness of the importance of gender equality, and overcoming gender-related stereotypes.

Since 2017, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has coordinated the compilation of annual reports on national plans and state policies on equality between women and men in Bulgaria. These reports are adopted by the Council of Ministers and subsequently published.

Other stimulatory initiatives

Several other initiatives are in place, although none are directly related to gender equality in research and innovation.

The Equality Monitoring System was developed as part of 'Together against Violence'. That project was implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), in partnership with the Social Assistance Agency (SAA), between 2017-2019. The Equality Monitoring System identified and monitored areas with gender imbalances in order to introduce temporary mitigation measures.

The principles of equality and non-discrimination (including gender-related discrimination) in all areas of social life are priorities for the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD), particularly analysis and prevention. In 2018, the CPD issued a report on discrimination in employment. It assessed the legal framework and its implementation, as well as women's position in the labour market and in employment.

The principle of equality between women and men is monitored through data collected as part of the annual reporting of the National Strategy, the National Statistical Institute (NSI), and periodic reports by monitoring mechanisms on the implementation of international legal instruments applicable in Bulgaria.

Key actors

Given the lack of laws and policies promoting gender equality in research and innovation, no public actors appear to be active in this area.

The Bulgarian Centre for Women in Technology (BCWT) is part of the European Centre for Women in Technology. As well as implementing regional innovation projects, the Centre stimulates research cooperation, exchange of good practice, and the creation of new technology resources. However, it has very limited impact on gender equality in research and innovation.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Bulgaria has yet to introduce a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) requirement at national level. At the end of 2020, two Bulgarian universities were developing a GEP within the Horizon 2020 project, Supporting and Implementing Plans for Gender Equality in Academia and Research, 2019-2023 (SPEAR). As members of the SPEAR consortium, the universities had organised a number of initiatives, training sessions, awareness-raising activities, workshops, etc. during the period 2019-2020.

The South-West University (SWU), *Neofit Rilski*, participated in the structural change project, FESTA (2012–2017), funded under the 7th Framework Programme. Together with other European universities, it conducted interviews, workshops and formal/informal discussions on gender equality. It also created manuals to raise awareness of gender equality within the university. It subsequently extended its work on gender equality into the new project, SPEAR. Another Bulgarian university, *Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski* (PU), was also involved in the new partnership.

SPEAR is a coordination and support action funded by Horizon 2020 Science with and for Society (SwafS) programme. Its main aim is to support and implement GEPs, using a step-by-step guide to GEP implementation devised by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Both the SWU and PU are members of the SPEAR consortium and act as GEP implementing partners.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Raising individual and organisational awareness of gender equality and the development of a GEP at PU

As a partner in SPEAR, *Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski* (PU) began to develop its institutional GEP. Gender equality had never been a matter of concern at PU and no gender work or capacity-building had taken place prior to its participation in SPEAR. Researchers started with interviews, workshops, discussions and other initiatives to get in-depth information about staff and management attitudes to gender, and to raise individual and organisational awareness of gender equality. Their efforts also targeted capacity-building through specialised training and expert support from other members of the SPEAR consortium. Those supports particularly targeted young researchers and doctoral students involved in learning and dissemination activities organised by the university's Centre for Supporting Young Scientists (*Academia luventutis*). The university's management bodies committed the university to supporting gender equality sustainably, creating a gender-sensitive culture, and introducing the gender dimension in research and education. The main challenge to acceptance of the GEP was overcoming resistance. For example, Bulgarian words, terms and expressions for different aspects of gender were carefully chosen to avoid negative and/or sensitive connotations. In addition, they had formal and informal discussions on the gender equality issues in the GEP, and involved those with formal or informal influence. One concrete measure has already been implemented, with the university now ensuring that gender equality is an integral part of its Ethics Policy. The GEP is expected to be approved by the Academic Council of PU in 2021.