

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Cyprus

COUNTRY: Cyprus

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

As of August 2021, Cyprus has not put in place any laws or regulations explicitly promoting gender equality in research and innovation.

Policy framework

The most recent policy document on gender mainstreaming in education and research is the Strategic Plan for the Equality of Women and Men in Education 2018-2020, replacing the earlier 2014-2017 Plan. Developed by the interdepartmental Gender Equality Committee of the Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth^[1], it promotes three targets, two of which apply to universities.

The first target refers to the inclusion of gender equality in the structure of the Cyprus Educational System (CES), while the second concerns the inclusion of gender equality in CES training programmes. The third target refers to empowering the family in promoting gender equality. The first intermediate target implemented by the Department of Higher Education (DHE) was promotion and monitoring of the gender equality target. It designated one person from each higher education institution (HEI) to set up an action group/team to promote gender equality. The third intermediate target was to promote gender equality within schools and/or other educational institutions (research/preventive/interventions/other programmes). It included three actions for the Department of Higher Education (DHE):

- Recording and updating programmes and actions on gender issues that are in progress or planned for the future by HEIs and that may concern academic and administrative staff or students;

- Collection and display of material promoting gender equality (art, articles, photographs) produced by universities' academic and administrative staff or students;

Encouraging HEIs to formulate a Gender Action Plan (GAP) encompassing institutional practices and procedures for the promotion of gender equality. This may include policies on equal opportunities, inclusion, (sexual) harassment and bullying, encouraging women to apply for academic positions, inclusion of gender equality in research programmes, participation of more women in decision-making bodies, parental leave, equal pay for equal work, training and development, or childcare (for students, parents of both sexes)^[2].

A new strategy for 2021-2023 is being prepared.

Gender mainstreaming in research organisations and business is regulated by soft laws. The National Action Plan for Equality between Women and Men (NGEP), for example, was approved by the Council of Ministers, making it a legal obligation for stakeholders. The National Action Plan for Equality between Women and Men 2019–2023 (Ministry of Justice and Public Order, 2019) deals with gender mainstreaming in education and research, among other areas. The NGEP includes actions for the Ministry of Justice and Public Order to certify compliance with national and European legislation on gender equality, in line with the RESTART 2016-2020 research programmes. Similarly, it addresses the certification of corporations by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (National Gender Equality Certification Body)^[3]. According to the Europe 2020 Cyprus National Reform Programme (European Semester), the various obstacles, difficulties and challenges faced by women in their effort to enter and familiarise themselves with the digital technology world were considered. The third Action Plan on Gender Equality 2019-2023 includes several actions to tackle the issue through education and training for women in ICT. The NGEP plan will act to increase the numbers of women in computer studies and develop their professional technological skills. Several actions under the thematic area 'Eradication of Stereotypes and Social Prejudices' similarly seek to increase women's participation in technical areas. The Minister for Transport, Communication and Works signed the Declaration on the Commitment on Women in Digital (WiD) on 5 April 2019, and thus reports relevant national actions to the European Commission^[4].

A Gender Equality Certificate was created as part of the project 'Actions for Reducing the Gender Pay Gap'. The Department of Labour Relations in the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance implemented the project between July 2010 and December 2015. It comprised a broad range of measures to combat the root causes of the gender pay gap, including:

Theoretical and practical training of Labour Relations Officers and Inspectors on enforcement of equal pay and equal treatment legislation;

Labour Relations Officers and Inspectors visited other Member States to observe the procedures and techniques used by other inspection mechanisms;

Establishment of a Gender Equality Certification Body to evaluate companies' application of best practice in equal treatment and/or equal pay principles in their working environment;

Measures for eliminating occupational and sectoral segregation, including educational interventions, e.g. specialised training programmes for career guidance professionals and 10,000 primary/secondary school teachers;

Training management on the use of codes of practice on equal pay and job evaluation tools;

Training programmes for trade unions and employers' organisations, and developing manuals, guides, self-assessment tools, codes of practice and job evaluation tools for managers/human resource professionals;

Examination of all collective agreements for direct discrimination regarding pay;

A tripartite conference on best practice in equal pay (government officials, members of trade unions, employers' organisations) in October 2012;

Campaigns to raise awareness of equal pay^[5].

A national model was developed to certify enterprises that adopt gender equality policies, with a National Certification Body established in April 2014. The Body is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (represented by the Director of the Department of Labour Relations) and comprises the Gender Equality Commissioner and representatives of employers' and employees' associations. The model gives companies the opportunity to apply for two types of certification: (1) Best Practice for individual practices applied and (2) Equality Employer for adopting a comprehensive system of promoting gender equality.

A call for applications is announced annually for enterprises or organisations interested in being certified. Each application is examined by one or more evaluators, who may ask for additional information or documents. They visit the workspaces of the applicants and interview the management team and a representative sample of employees. The evaluators then submit their evaluation report to the National Certification Body, which decides whether or not to award certification. Successful companies are presented with their certification during a special ceremony organised by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, which is publicised in local media. Certification is an advantage for enterprises in public procurement tenders. Certification is valid for four years, after which enterprises/organisations can apply for renewal (i.e. another audit). Renewed certifications are valid for another four years. To date, 57 companies have been certified, 20 of which renewed their certification^[6] and six of which are universities and/or research organisations^[7].

The Cyprus Academy of Public Administration (CAPA) was established by a Council of Ministers Decision in 1991. Its central task is to modernise Cyprus' civil service through learning and development and related activities^[8]. Since 2011, it has organised seminars on gender equality issues (e.g. sexual harassment in the workplace) in cooperation with the Gender Equality Committee for Employment and Occupation. In 2019, it organised training on gender mainstreaming in public administration. A new Gender Mainstreaming Handbook and Action Plan for public administration were approved by the Ministerial Board and announced at the end of 2018. The Handbook and Action Plan aim to contribute to gender mainstreaming and the introduction of gender budgeting.

In 2019, CAPA organised and implemented several programmes:

- Two five-day training programmes on 'Integration of the Gender Dimension in Public Policy', with 41 participants;

- 20 training programmes to promote the (legally required) Code of Practice for the Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Harassment and Harassment in Public Administration. The Code of Practice was adopted by the Council of Ministers in July 2018 (Decision No. 85.394 of 12 July 2018). At the end of the training, all participating ministries were expected to set up a Workplace Equality Committee or appoint an Equality Officer. CAPA provided three specialised training sessions for those ministries that already had those mechanisms in place;

- CAPA secured funding under the European ERASMUS+ programme to develop training to

prevent and combat sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as the tools and skills to deal with incidents of sexual harassment^[9].

Other stimulatory initiatives

As of August 2021, there were no stimulatory initiatives specifically dedicated to mainstreaming gender in research and innovation.

Key actors

The Pedagogical Institute's mission is to advise the Ministry of Education and Culture on continuous education and development of teachers at all education levels (including research). It undertakes educational research, assessment studies, and publication of books of educational interest. Within this framework, the Institute has developed a strategy for gender mainstreaming in education through the development of gender equality plans (GEPs), teaching gender equality, and providing gender training to educators.

The Department of Higher Education (DHE) aims to create appropriate conditions for the provision of tertiary education and training in academic and professional programmes and thus to increase the number of students in tertiary education. The Department of Higher and Tertiary Education is responsible for monitoring GEPs in educational and research institutions, among others^[10]. It is also charged with monitoring the implementation progress of the Strategic Plan for Equality of Women and Men in Education.

The DHE has undertaken several actions within the framework of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth's Strategic Plan for Gender Equality: (1) informing all HEIs of the National Action Plan for the promotion of gender equality and the importance of developing actions to foster gender equality; and (2) HEIs were asked for information on their actions/policies to promote gender equality. The majority of HEIs appear to have taken relevant actions:

Promotion of policies related to the administration/operation of universities, with the aim of promoting equality (e.g. equal numbers of women and men students in the various representative bodies, development of a policy on sexual harassment);

Training on gender equality issues for human resources managers;

Support/facilitation measures for pregnant women and women returning to work after maternity leave (e.g. flexible working hours) and provision of paternity leave;

Efforts to update the operating regulations of the HEIs to ensure gender equality;
Offering selected courses on gender equality in HEIs' curricula;
Organising events/lectures on gender equality.

The Centre for Gender Studies and the UNESCO Chair for Gender Equality and Gender Empowerment at the University of Cyprus are engaged in research, training, information, and documentation in the field of women's studies, research and interventions on gender issues:

Coordination of the European project 'Commitment to Democracy through Increasing Women's Participation';
Coordination of the research project 'The Gender Gap in Higher Education in Cyprus';
Running a competition to produce a TV spot on gender equality;
Organisation/participation in conferences/seminars on gender equality issues^[11].

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Cyprus University of Technology (CUT) was the only university to develop a GEP during the period 2016-2019. However, the Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics (CING) and the Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF) also developed GEPs during that time. Cyprus University (public) and Frederick University (private) are preparing their own GEPs.

CING adopted its Sexual Harassment and Harassment Policy and Procedures in 2018. It follows rules and procedures to protect employees, patients and the public from harassment and sexual harassment. The Policy provides appropriate procedures to prevent instances of harassment or, if necessary, to deal with what it views as serious and unacceptable incidents. In 2018, CING adopted the Dependent Care Leave Policy and expressed its commitment to equality of opportunity and to developing work practices and human resource policies that support work-life balance. Regardless of employment status, employees are entitled to seven days' unpaid leave each year for accidents/incidents involving family members or dependents. Alongside that entitlement, CING provides paid dependent care leave to support staff during serious health emergencies. Up to 10 days' dependent leave can be granted after the employee has exhausted their annual and unpaid leave (seven days)^[12].

The Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF) is the national authority charged with supporting and promoting research, technological development and innovation. RIF is a partner in the Horizon 2020 project, 'Taking a Reflective Approach to Gender Equality for Institutional Transformation' (TARGET)^[13]. As part of that project, it created a Community of Practice with project partners, executive management and the managerial board to create and implement its own GEP^[14]. RIF seeks to address gender inequalities and imbalances in research and innovation (R&I) through the development and implementation of a context-specific GEP, formalising a set of actions targeting long-term institutional transformation. The actions took place from 2018 to 2020 and were prioritised in line with RIF's Gender Equality Audit. The overall objective of GEP 2018–2020 was to build institutional capacity to facilitate cultural change beyond the formal adoption of a GEP. It aims to remove existing gender inequalities and mitigate factors that limit equal participation and advancement of women. Accordingly, it set several interim objectives:

Promote a gender-inclusive organisational culture and eliminating unconscious gender bias in all aspects of human resource management, i.e. recruitment, retention, career progression, work-life balance, care and family life;

Create awareness among the decision-making body to ensure gender-sensitive internal processes and procedures;

Foster integration of the sex and/or gender dimension into R&I content to increase excellence in research;

Work systematically to address gender challenges through transversal measures within the scope of RIF.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Cyprus University of Technology (CUT)

CUT is part of the Horizon 2020-funded 'Gender-SMART university' project that links seven European organisations (from Cyprus, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain) and two expert technical partners (from Belgium and Czechia). Organisations within Gender-SMART commit to formulating and implementing an Equality Plan between 2019 and 2023. The Plan must aim to achieve equality in the workplace. It must have concrete and targeted actions and, where possible, include gender mainstreaming in its research and teaching activities. Accordingly, in 2019, CUT developed a GEP for 2020–2023, following a Rectors' Council decision.

Gender-SMART is the first project at a university in Cyprus that directly addresses equality in the workplace. The GEP concerns all departments and the administration of the university. The Working Group includes members of the academic and administrative staff, as well as students. CUT committed to developing and implementing a GEP based on four pillars: (1) building a culture of gender equality; (2) developing measures targeting equal support for professional careers; (3) reforming decision-making and governance; and (4) integration of gender in funding, scientific research and teaching. Gender-SMART's aim of achieving equality in the workplace will be addressed through human resources (recruitment, career development, management), and as a parameter in research and teaching processes. The curriculum of the university also includes lessons on health promotion, community health, cultural health, sexual and reproductive health, domestic violence, partner violence, etc.

CUT received several human resources awards: a silver award in Excellence in Employee Work-life Balance at the 2016 HR Awards; Best Working Environment award at the 2016 Education Business Awards; distinction as a National Champion in the Employer of the Year Award at the 2016/17 European Business Awards; and certification by the National Agency for the Certification of Businesses for the Implementation of Good Practices on Gender Equality at the Workplace (2017)^[15].

European University of Cyprus (EUC)

The EUC introduced academic courses on Gender and Sexual Diversity, Women in Literature, Gender and Power^[16].

Frederick University

In 2019, the university launched the campaign 'It starts with ME, together WE can' as part of the international campaign '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence'.

The campaign aimed to demonstrate that everyone is personally responsible for taking the first step to end gender-based violence by challenging stereotypes and making small everyday behavioural changes that can lead to a large-scale shift in culture and attitudes to eliminate violence against women. During 2020, the campaign took place online, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The public could sign an online petition as part of their personal commitment to challenge gender stereotypes and promote respect. The initiative is part of Frederick University's longstanding action to raise awareness of gender equality, violence against women, and healthy relationships between men and women. It has also introduced academic courses on gender equality, particularly gender violence (domestic violence, trafficking, sexual abuse, etc.)^[17].

Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education

The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education was established in 2015 by Law 136 (I) of 2015. It seeks to create appropriate conditions for the provision of tertiary education and training in academic and professional study programmes and to increase the number of students. The Agency has assumed the responsibilities of the Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (CEEA), the Advisory Committee on Higher Education (ACTE) and the Evaluation Committee for Private Universities (ECPU)^[18]. It has policy of equitable balance between women and men, as far as practicable, in the External Evaluation Committees and in its activities. The Agency urges HEIs to develop policies on gender equality and on equal opportunities between women and men. It also emphasises the importance of gender-inclusive language in shaping attitudes and promoting gender equality^[19].

Footnotes

[1] https://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=911...

[2] https://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/files/epimorfosi/isotita_fylou/schedio_drasis_is...

[3] http://www.mjpo.gov.cy/mjpo/mjpo.nsf/sectorgend02_el/sectorgend02_el?Ope...

[4] EUROPE 2020 Cyprus National Reform Programme, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2020-european-semester-nat...>, p. 60.

[5] http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dlr/dlr.nsf/reductionofwage_en/reductionofwa...

[6] http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dlr/dlr.nsf/nationalcertificationbody_en/nat...?

[7] http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dlr/dlr.nsf/page46_gr/page46_gr?

[8] https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/capa/cyacademy.nsf/page08_en/page08_en?

[9] Information received by Ms Nicoletta Agrotou, Training Officer, Cyprus Academy of Public Administration

[10] EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA, Progress Report 2018 Country Profile CYPRUS
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/er...

[11] Official information from the DHE.

[12] Information obtained from the HR Services Manager, Finance and Administration Department.

[13] <http://www.gendertarget.eu/>

[14] Research Promotion Foundation, Gender Equality Plan 2018–2020, https://www.research.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/SxediosotitasFilwn2018_2...

[15] Information received from Dr Christiana Kouta, Associate Professor Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences and Dr Panagiota Polykarpou, Project Manager, GenderSMART Department of Agricultural Sciences, Biotechnology and Food Science at CUT.

[16] Information received from Charis Xinaris, PhD., Associate Professor, Critical and Cultural Theory, Department of Humanities.

[17] <http://new.frederick.ac.cy/itstartswithme/>

[18] <https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/cyqaa-en/about-us-en>

[19] Gender equality and inclusive language, <https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/news-and-events/announcements/413-1...>