

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Czechia

COUNTRY: Czechia

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

As of the end of 2020, Czechia has not adopted any specific legislation dedicated to promoting gender equality in research and innovation.

Policy framework

The State of Gender Equality and Proposal for Mid-Term Strategic Plan in Gender Equality within the Remit of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports^[1] was developed in 2013. The Plan aimed to support the promotion of gender equality in the activities of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. It described the current state of the main thematic areas and outlined mid-term objectives for the Ministry.

In 2014, the government adopted the Strategy for Equality of Women and Men in the Czech Republic 2014-2020^[2]. The Strategy dedicated a section to equality for women and men in research and innovation. It addressed the need to integrate a gender equality perspective into strategic documents for research and innovation, and to incorporate the gender dimension in research content. It was replaced by the Gender Equality Strategy 2021–2030^[3]. Its main objectives in the area of higher education and research are to decrease horizontal and vertical gender segregation, integrate the gender dimension into teaching and research, and apply a gender perspective in the management of education and research institutions.

The Technology Agency of the Czech Republic^[4] is a public funding organisation for applied research. In 2015, it became the first public body to adopt a gender equality policy. The policy addressed both the internal functioning of the agency (working conditions, gender balance in evaluation panels) and external roles (gender dimension in research, impact on society).

In 2016, the National European Research Area (ERA) Roadmap of the Czech Republic 2016-2020^[5] was adopted to implement key priorities in the ERA Roadmap 2015-2020. It set several objectives for gender equality: to prepare and implement an action plan for human resources development that promotes gender equality; to ensure public funding for the activities of the Gender and Science Centre to support evidence-based policy and mutual learning within ERA; and to provide funding for promoting gender equality through structural change.

The National Research, Development and Innovation Policy of the Czech Republic 2016-2020^[6] was also introduced in 2016. It aimed to ensure the development of various components of the Czech research and innovation ecosystem, and addressed gender equality as part of human resources development. It stressed the need to ensure equal conditions for women and men, promote work-life balance, and eliminate barriers related to parenthood. These objectives are developed in the National Research, Development and Innovation Policy of the Czech Republic 2021+^[7], which links research organisations' implementation of relevant measures with their receipt of institutional support.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport introduced the Action Plan for Human Resources Development and Gender Equality in Research, Development and Innovation in the Czech Republic 2018-2020^[8]. The Plan was designed to support the implementation of the National Research, Development and Innovation Policy of the Czech Republic 2016-2020 and the National ERA Roadmap of the Czech Republic 2016-2020. The Plan aimed to provide a strategic framework for human resources development in research and innovation in order to build a quality research environment that meets international standards and promotes gender equality. It focused on removing gender stereotypes related to study fields and gender mainstreaming at all levels of research and innovation. The Plan will continue after 2020.

The Long-term Strategy in Educational, Scientific, Research, Developmental and Innovational, Artistic and other Creative Activities in Higher Educational Area 2016-2020^[9] is the key strategic document of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. It defines the priorities and key measures in the field of higher education policy, including gender equality. The implementation plans for 2019 and 2020^[10] addressed gender aspects of human resources management, the incorporation of cultural and structural changes in the assessment criteria for higher education institutions (HEIs), gender balance in decision-making positions, and sexual harassment. The Strategic Plan of the Ministry for Higher Education 2021^[11] emphasises the role of human resource management in preventing the loss of talent as a result of staff caring responsibilities. It also stresses the need to consider career breaks in employee evaluations and appropriate measures to eliminate unconscious bias.

In 2021, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport adopted the Plan for Supporting Gender Equality 2021–2024^[12]. It also serves as a tool for fulfilling the Ministry's national and international commitments in gender equality.

Implementation of these policies is supported by several financial instruments, detailed below.

Centralised Developmental Programme^[13]

This programme supports the implementation of the Long-Term Strategy in Educational, Scientific, Research, Developmental and Innovational, Artistic and other Creative Activities in Higher Educational Area 2016-2020. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport sets priorities each year, and universities apply for project support from the State budget. In 2019 and 2020, institutional and cultural change for gender equality was one of the priorities selected.

Operational Programme Research, Development, Education^[14]

Managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, this programme uses European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds. Under the call 'Development of Capacities for Research and Development', it supported research organisations to set up their strategic management in accordance with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment, and to apply for the Human Resources Excellence in Research award. In 2019, the call explicitly listed organisational activities for promoting gender equality as a thematic priority.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport provides funding for the Centre for Gender and Science^[15], ensuring expert support. The Centre is a department of the research Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Using Ministry funding, the Centre focuses on policy advice for various bodies at national and EU level. It also supports research organisations to launch institutional and cultural change towards gender equality (consultations, workshops, national community of practice) and raise awareness about gender issues in science. Up to the end of 2020, the Centre also implemented a mentoring programme for early career researchers.

Other stimulatory initiatives

There are two awards for women researchers in Czechia:

The L'Oréal UNESCO and Czech Academy of Sciences award^[16] for early career women researchers;

The Ministry of Education Milada Paulova Award^[17] for lifelong achievements by women in science, with a monetary award of CZK 250,000 (approx. EUR 9,842).

Doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers in natural sciences with young children can apply for the Martina Roeselová Memorial Fellowship^[18] (CZK 120,000) awarded by the Martina Roeselová Foundation. The fellowship is designed to enable researchers to combine their careers with family life and must be used to cover childcare services.

The non-governmental organisation (NGO) Konsent^[19] focuses on various forms of gender-based violence. Since 2020, it has supported HEIs to establish efficient mechanisms for preventing and eliminating gender-based violence in higher education settings.

Key actors

In addition to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, the Office of the Government – Science, Research and Innovation Section – is also responsible for science, research and innovation policy. The Council for Research, Development and Innovation is an advisory body to the government, with executive functions. It is charged with defining the research and development (R&D) budget. The Technology Agency of the Czech Republic is a public funding organisation for applied research, with a budget. Finally, the Czech Science Foundation is a public research funding organisation that supports basic research across all scientific fields.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

The number of research organisations engaged in promoting gender equality is steadily growing. However, most implement only limited measures (awareness-raising activities, work-life balance measures, eliminating recruitment bias), usually as part of efforts to obtain/retain the Human Resources Excellence in Research award. As a consequence, the approach is not mature and only three research organisations have implemented a gender equality plan (GEP). These were implemented as part of EU-funded structural change projects: TRIGGER at the University of Chemistry and Technology (UCT); EGERA at the Centre for Climate Change Research – CzechGlobe; and LIBRA at the Central European Institute of Technology (CEITEC). The areas of action thus align with ERA and Horizon 2020 priorities of gender balance in research careers and in decision-making, and the gender dimension in research.

All three GEPs contain actions at three levels: cultural, institutional and individual. At the cultural level, actions aim to increase the visibility of women scientists' achievements through interviews and posters (UCT) and integrate gender equality in strategic documents and visions (UCT, CzechGlobe). At institutional level, actions address work-life balance (flexible work arrangements, childcare services), evaluation practices (e.g. academic age versus biological age) and research staff contracts (collective agreement provisions). At individual level, actions focus on raising awareness (gender equality training, gender bias training), encouraging gender-sensitive leadership (for top management), providing career support through mentoring early career researchers, soft skills training for women in early career stages (communication, negotiation, leadership, personal development, time management) and integrating a gender dimension into research (training for all groups of researchers, particularly early career (doctoral/post-doctoral) researchers, developing teaching materials).

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Initial institutional analysis

As part of its GEP, UCT established the Julie Hamackova Award to support the integration of gender aspects into research and pedagogical work. The prize is awarded annually in three categories: (1) extraordinary contribution of women employees to the development of research, pedagogy and work in the academic sphere; (2) extraordinary contribution of employees in the field of support and promotion of equal opportunities in work relations and research at the University; and (3) best papers integrating sex/gender analysis in research (for Bachelor, Master and doctoral students). Trained staff from different faculties cooperate to organise the award. The organisers suggest possible paper topics in order to support students' interest in the gender dimension in research and broaden their thinking on potential applications of gender analysis in their fields.

The Grant Agency of Masaryk University developed its Career Restart scheme to support researchers returning after a career break (e.g. after parental leave) and assist their reintegration into research teams. The funding (CZK 500,000 per year) is to be used for personnel costs only, including supporting researchers' families and covering childcare expenses. This measure may help to reduce the leaky pipeline effect, which is quite evident among post-doctoral academics in Czechia, especially due to long parental leave and a lack of affordable childcare for children under three years.

The Technology Agency of the Czech Republic applies gender equality criteria in two funding programmes – ZÉTA (a junior programme) and ÉTA (supporting applied research in social sciences and the humanities). In each case, it evaluates how the gender perspective is reflected and integrated into research proposals. It has developed guidelines for applicants and evaluators and provided training for evaluators and staff. As part of its evaluation criteria, it focuses on gender balance in research teams and assigns a higher flat rate (extra points) for research organisations active in improving the gender equality of their environment.

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.msmt.cz/ministerstvo/genderova-rovnost?lang=1>

[2] <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/pri-uradu-vlady/jiri-dienstbier/ak...>

[3] <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/gcfge/Gender-Equality-Strategy-2021-203...>

[4] <https://www.tacr.cz/en/>

[5] <https://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj-2/narodni-era-roadmap-cr-pro-leta-201...>

[6] <https://www.vyzkum.cz/FrontClanek.aspx?idsekce=782691>

[7] <https://www.vyzkum.cz/FrontClanek.aspx?idsekce=932081>

[8] https://www.dataplan.info/img_upload/7bdb1584e3b8a53d337518d988763f8d/ap...

[9] https://www.msmt.cz/uploads/odbor_30/Jakub/DZ_2016_2020.pdf

[10] <https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/vysoke-skolstvi/strategicky-zamer?lang=1>

[11] https://www.msmt.cz/uploads/odbor_30/DH/SZ/strategic_plan_2021_.pdf

[12] https://www.msmt.cz/uploads/III_Material_VPR_Plan_rovnosti_FINAL_2021.pdf

[13] <https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/vysoke-skolstvi/centralizovane-rozvojove-...>

[14] <https://opvv.msmt.cz/o-programu>

[15] <https://genderaveda.cz/en/gender-and-science/>

[16] <https://www.forwomeninscience.com/authority/czech-republic--national-pr...>

[17] <https://genderaveda.cz/en/milada-paulova-award/>

[18] http://www.nfmr.cz/en_GB/

[19] <https://konsent.cz/univerzity/>