

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Hungary

COUNTRY: Hungary

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities is the main legislation guaranteeing equal treatment in Hungary. It recognises a number of protected grounds, including gender, pregnancy, motherhood and fatherhood. According to the Act, a person cannot be treated less favourably than a person in a comparable situation because of their status in respect of one of the protected grounds. Direct and indirect discrimination is forbidden and punishable. Positive actions targeting vulnerable groups are allowed under certain conditions. Article 63(4) provides that “budgetary organisations and legal entities that are mainly owned by the State and that employ more than 50 employees are obliged to draw up an equal opportunities plan.” State universities and colleges, as well as the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, are obliged to draw up equal opportunities plans. Article 63(4) does not apply to research institutions not (primarily) owned by the State.

Policy framework

Chapter V, sub-chapter 3 of the National Strategy for the Promotion of Gender Equality – Guidelines and Objectives 2010-2021 (1004/2010 I.21) contains a section on women in science. It sets out the goal to promote women’s and men’s equal participation in the sciences. The change of government in 2010 meant that this strategy was never implemented.

In October 2020, the government prepared the action plan “Empowering women in family and society for the European Union (2021-2030)”^[1]. Chapter five pays special attention to education and science. The plan underlines the significance of “gender equality and harmonious cooperation between women and men in education”, as well as the promotion of gender balance in education. The report mentions the need to support equal participation of women and men in research and innovation, with a particular emphasis on areas where women are underrepresented.

The National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) (2021-2030) (1456/2021 VII. 13. Governmental Order) targets gender equality as one of its six horizontal objectives. The Strategy highlights three main issues: (1) the investigation of causes behind women's underrepresentation in certain areas of RDI and their overrepresentation in some fields (e.g. education); (2) policy interventions, such as career guidance to increase the proportion of women in education and RDI projects in the fields of mathematics, science, technology and informatics, campaigns to make (potential) researchers (with or without children) aware of atypical employment opportunities (e.g. part-time, teleworking) and the benefits available for those with young children (e.g. increased age limit at applications, additional supports), as well as fostering reintegration into the labour market after having children; and (3) strengthening family-friendly institutions in the area of RDI^[2].

While these official strategies raise issues of gender equality to some extent, other governmental steps provide evidence that suggests the opposite attitude. In October 2018, a governmental decision abolished the accredited Gender Studies MA programmes^[3] in the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) and in the Central European University (CEU). Today, only some courses are taught connected to Gender Studies.

Other stimulatory initiatives

No women were elected members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (*Magyar Tudományos Akadémia* – MTA), leading to heated debate within the official journal of the MTA (*Magyar Tudomány*) on the absence of women. Accordingly, in 2016, the President of the MTA set up the "Presidential Committee Facilitating Women's Academic Advancement in 2017"^[4]. The Committee aimed to identify obstacles to women's academic careers and formulate suggestions and policies to overcome those barriers. After mapping the academic fields and engaging in intensive discussions with senior and junior scholars, the Committee prepared a package of proposals for the General Assembly of the MTA. The proposals were complex, some focused on young women scholars, particularly those with young children, and looked at work-life balance, return to work or career support. Other proposals paid attention to increasing women's visibility at different career stages and activities, e.g. monitoring gender balance in scientific programmes. The Committee suggested reviewing and revising the election rules for the MTA and reminded academics of the importance of nominating women. Finally, 10 women (29 %) were elected to the MTA in 2019, which was considered an important success.

In 2020, the Committee was reappointed by the newly elected president of the MTA. Its work now concentrates on publicising successful women's careers, and in 2021, it will publish two volumes on outstanding Hungarian women scientists, in both Hungarian and English. Similarly, a research competition invites entries on writing the history of women scholars. The Committee also works to facilitate women's whole academic careers and formulated four recommendations for the Academy's General Assembly and the general scientific community:

Increase the numbers of women speakers at professional events and support the participation of those with young children^[5];

Ensure a healthy and dignified workplace, particularly avoiding sexual misconduct^[6];

Pay special attention to ensuring that a high number of women candidates are on the list of potential academics^[7];

Committees and scientific bodies of the MTA should promote gender balance and include as many women as possible on their boards^[8].

In recent years, the government has advertised a call for "Family-friendly Workplaces". Companies and public institutions awarded a project received financial support to become a family-friendly workplace (e.g. play areas for children). In addition, they could advertise themselves as a "Family-friendly Workplace". The award is presented to companies/organisations that support work-life balance, including measures that support employees with families (e.g. breastfeeding rooms). In 2020, the University of Óbuda, the Semmelweis University and the University of Pécs were each awarded this funding to create family-friendly workplaces. The award has been in place every year since 2000 (with the exception of 2010 due to the change in government) and is attracting a growing number of applicants.

The action plan "Empowering women in family and society" and its implementation plan for 2021-2022 have a strong focus on supporting family-friendly workplaces and family-friendly universities. The recent National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation (2021-2030) similarly emphasises supporting family-friendly institutions.

The L'Oréal-UNESCO Hungarian Grant for Women and Science is given to women scientists in the natural sciences or materials sciences. The most recent call specified two age categories (under-35 and under-45)^[9].

Since 2013, the Association of Hungarian Women in Science (*Nők a Tudományban Egyesület, NaTE*) has granted an Excellence Award (*Kiválóság Díj*) to three women scientists each year in the fields of materials technology, biotechnology and space technology.

Some universities began projects to increase numbers of female students in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. In 2018, the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Szeged hosted “You should be a STEM Star!”. The event promoted engineering among secondary school girls in a bid to increase the numbers of girls studying engineering at the faculty in the future^[10].

The University of Pécs has focused its initiatives on women scholars at different career stages and in different faculties. Since 2019, it has been worked with NaTE to organise the “Women on Difficult Career Tracks” events and the Women in Science conference. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it organised online conferences and introduced academic role models for younger women.

NaTE and Morgan Stanley launched a joint initiative in 2018. SMARTIZ is a one-year education programme for secondary school girls who need extra support to stay in education and to study mathematics and IT. Girls participate in tailored extracurricular learning activities and receive mentoring and personalised career planning support from employees at Morgan Stanley, including a work shadowing opportunity. The teaching team helps the girls to develop their confidence and self-awareness^[11].

Organised by NaTE, “Girls’ Day” took place in Hungary for the first time in 2012. Since then, several companies and organisations have participated, holding open days to give high school girls an insight into the work of universities and companies in technology and natural sciences.

ABB Ltd. launched a mentorship programme for five women university/college students in technology, engineering or IT. They expanded the programme to eight students during the COVID-19 pandemic. An open call is launched at selected colleges and universities. ABB assesses the applications and selects the women students, each of whom will have a high-profile mentor for five months. They meet once a month and the students have the opportunity to visit the company (perhaps abroad), meet with women leaders and the human resources department for one-on-one counselling, or join the company as an intern^[12].

Key actors

The MTA set up the Presidential Committee Facilitating Women's Academic Advancement to identify and develop ways to overcome barriers to women's participation.

Since its foundation, NaTE has played an important role in attracting girls to scientific careers. In addition to the Girls' Day, it has launched an ambassador network for girls in secondary schools, organised summer camps for girls in STEM subjects, launched the Excellence Award, and worked closely with companies and teachers. It also participates in international studies on women and science.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Research organisations typically have general equal opportunities plans in place, which usually include initiatives to promote gender equality in research. Some have also developed initiatives outside of those plans.

As a result of the governmental actions and communications on family friendliness, numerous universities began to work to create a family-friendly workplace or applied for the Family-friendly Award. The University of Debrecen offers its employees training and programmes to promote work-life balance and better mental health^[13]. Other universities refer to their family friendliness on their websites, for example Budapest Business School^[14], University of Szeged^[15] and Óbuda University^[16].

The most comprehensive gender equality activities are evident at the CEU. In 2012, for example, it created a policy on gender equality at academic events and summer schools. The CEU has introduced several gender equality policies, such as the CEU Policy on Harassment, which has contributed to real gender equality in academic life. In 2020, the CEU Senate approved the university's Gender Equality Plan (GEP) 2019-2022. These changes contribute to the institutionalisation and strengthening of gender equality policies at the CEU^[17].

ELTE experienced several violent and harmful incidents, including sexual harassment in first-year camps, sexist language at student events, and sexist behaviour by the Dean. In light of that experience, it undertook a general investigation throughout the university campus. Researchers used questionnaires and interviews to assess the status of gender equality. Employees spoke out against all forms of violence and aggression, oppression, abuse and harassment. The investigation demonstrated the importance of setting up institutions to defend employees' and students' dignity. The Ombuds Office was approved by the ELTE Senate and established in 2018. It is charged with tackling all kinds of inequalities and guarding ethical standards^[18]. ELTE is the first Hungarian university to set up an Ombuds Office and the first Ombudsperson was appointed in 2019^[19].

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

MTA age limit extension for women researchers raising young children

In 2009, the MTA adopted an equal opportunities framework programme (Presidential Decision no. 13/2009. II. 24). One element of the framework programme is the extension of age limits for women researchers with young children. This means that for all MTA calls (scholarships, fellowships, grants) with an age limit, the age limit is extended by two years per young child for women (and men) researchers who can certify that they took parental leave to stay with their child(ren). From early 2016, the Academy extended the scope of the programme to single parents.

MTA supporting young women's academic careers

The MTA launched a new funding scheme in 2018 for researchers raising young children. The aim of the call is to support women researchers with young children and single fathers of young children preparing a scientific thesis to be submitted for the degree of Doctor of Science (the next academic career step). The application was announced in 2018 and 2020, and will open again in autumn 2022.

Another MTA scheme is intended to support the publication of scientific results written by young researchers. Applicants must meet the following criteria: (1) apply for the grant within four years of the birth of their youngest child; (2) have spent at least one year at home on childcare leave; or (3) raise a disabled or chronically ill child under the age of 14.

Calls by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office feature supportive conditions for women researchers with young children

The National Research, Development and Innovation Office supports young women researchers to reconcile their research and childcare obligations in two main ways. Firstly, researchers can suspend their research grants by between two and six months for the time before and after childbirth (if fathers took parental leave, they can also suspend their research grant). Secondly, the age limit at application can be increased by two years per child, up to a maximum of four years, for those applicants who previously took parental leave.

Attracting more women into technology

The Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics was the first university to join NaTE's Girls' Day programme in 2012. Budapest University opens its doors to high-school girls aged between 14 and 18 years in order to show them the advantages of studying in the faculty. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Girls' Day events were organised online.

Skool is a non-profit organisation that was established in 2014 to teach coding to young girls. It offers free computing courses for girls aged 10–18 years, with the aim of breaking gender stereotypes and making technology attractive to young girls^[20]. Skool also organises summer camps for girls. In the 2019-2020 period, it built a mentoring network, “STEMsisters” with women working in technology companies. It also ran a campaign showcasing women role models in technology.

Gender balance in decision-making

The Association of Women in Technology Hungary (WiTH) was founded by three technology companies operating in Hungary – Vodafone, Lenovo and BOOKR Kids. It aims to bring together women leaders in the technology sector and to represent women in different areas of this sector^[21]. Vodafone is seeking to fill at least 40 % of its management positions with women by 2030^[22].

Achieving gender balance at academic events

The CEU has a mission to promote an open and just society based on equal opportunities. In 2012, it approved the policy on gender equality at academic events and summer schools sponsored by CEU. The policy requires events at CEU supported by the Conferences and Academic Events Fund and summer schools receiving CEU SUN financial support to take gender equality into consideration when selecting speakers. The purpose is to ensure a “good balance of women and men speakers” at their events. Where a good gender balance is not achieved, the event organiser is asked to justify its efforts.

Footnotes

[1] <https://kormany.hu/dokumentumtar/a-nok-szerepenek-erositese-a-csaladban-...>

[2] <https://kormany.hu/dokumentumtar/kfi-strategia>

[3] <https://444.hu/2018/10/15/hivatalosan-is-vege-a-gender-szakoknak>

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- [5] <https://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/nok-a-kutatoj-eletpalyan-bizottsag/Aj%C...>
- [6] <https://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/nok-a-kutatoj-eletpalyan-bizottsag/Aj%C...>
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- [9] <http://unesco.hu/palyazatok/loreal-unesco-magyar-osztondij-107339>
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- [12] <https://new.abb.com/news/detail/63826/for-the-sixth-time-abbs-mentoring-...>
- [13] <https://unideb.hu/hu/gondoskodo-egyetem-csaladbarat-intezkedesek-debrece...>
- [14] <https://uni-bge.hu/hu/csaladbarat-egyetem>
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- [18] <https://www.elte.hu/dstore/document/2502/ELTE-ombudsman-szabalyzat.pdf>

[19] <https://www.elte.hu/en/content/hungary-s-first-university-ombuds-office-...>

[20] <https://skool.org.hu/>

[21] <https://womenintech.hu/>

[22] https://www.vodafone.hu/documents/20143/626722/20210308_Vodafone_Nonapi...