

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Slovakia

COUNTRY: Slovakia

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

As of September 2021, Slovakia has not adopted any specific strategies, laws or regulations promoting gender equality in research and innovation.

Policy framework

The National Strategy for Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic 2014-2019^[1] was prepared by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. It partially supported the integration of gender equality into science, research and higher education as one of its six priorities. Planned measures focused on the issue of gender mainstreaming, reconciliation of work and family life, and participation of women in decision-making (fostering women's participation in management and decision-making of universities and research organisations). The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport were responsible for implementing the measures, alongside the Gender Equality Committee of the Governmental Council for Human Rights, Minorities and Gender Equality. Despite being expected to be implemented by 2018, as of 2021 none of the measures were realised, implemented or monitored. Coordination between the key stakeholders was unsuccessful, and the growing influence of populist and right-wing political parties meant that the gender agenda has become a topic of polarisation in the society. The word "gender" is a subject of controversy and misunderstanding and is now used by numerous (even leading) political representatives as a synonym for anti-family policies and the LGBTIQ+ agenda. In short, the gender ideology rhetoric has become an ideological and political battleground, dividing society (and politicians) at a number of levels^[2].

Since the creation of the new coalition government in March 2020, the Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family) has been renamed the Department of Equality between Women and Men and Equal Opportunities (so as to avoid the word “gender”). It was also restructured and moved under the remit of Family Policy. A new Department of Horizontal Principles – Equality between Men and Women and Non-Discrimination was also established under the section of Family Policy^[3].

The funding schemes of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and its equality department(s) demonstrated a new approach to the gender equality agenda. No feminist organisations received financial support - only pro-family and pro-life organisations received funding (despite the efforts of an official independent review panel)^[4].

In April 2021, the Slovak Government adopted the “State Strategy for Equality between Women and Men and Equal Opportunities 2021-2027” and its Action Plan, prepared by the Department of Equality between Women and Men and Equal Opportunities. The Strategy and Action Plan have eight priorities, including “equality between women and men and equal opportunities in education, research and science”. This priority does not meet the requirements of the EU and Horizon Europe, but, rather, focuses on lower-level education, combating stereotypes, violence against women and children, and sexual harassment. In general, it emphasises the importance of combating violence against women and children, supporting families and single mothers, and encouraging men to take-up parental leave^[5].

The Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information (CVTI^[6]) is part of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. It is responsible for supporting the Horizon research programmes and European Research Area (ERA)-related activities. The CVTI is the only public institution carrying out initiatives related to gender equality in research and innovation.

The CVTI organises the annual “Scientist of the Year” competition, in cooperation with the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Union of Associations for Science and Technology. It rewards and publicises outstanding scientific results. In 2015, a new category was added – “Woman Scientist of the Year”, with the competition rewarding women and men scientists separately. Other categories (“Young Scientist”, “Scientist in Technology” or “Lifelong Achievement”) remained gender-neutral. In 2017, “Woman Scientist of the Year” was cancelled with no explanation, with the main award now called “Scientist of the Year”, using a masculine grammar form.

The CVTI managed a sub-webpage, “Women in Science”, focusing on women in science and research. It contained information on relevant national and EU documents, including results from international projects on gender equality in research and innovation. It also promoted women scientists from a historical perspective and presented interviews with successful contemporary women scientists. This initiative ended in 2019, when the Centre’s new website was introduced, featuring a new ERA portal^[7]. That portal presents gender equality in research^[8] by introducing key EU documents and deliverables of selected EU projects with Slovak participation. Inspiring personal interviews with women scientists no longer feature.

The CVTI is a key organiser of information days and workshops on Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. A presentation on gender aspects is always an integral part of these workshops. It also arranges ad hoc seminars on gender equality in research and innovation, such as the gender equality dimension in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. The CVTI’s most recent initiative aims to support research organisations to prepare their Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). It has established a network of research organisations’ representatives and experts to support universities that need help in preparing their GEPs. The Centre is also preparing basic guidelines on developing GEPs. Despite these positive initiatives, the CVTI’s activities do not have a significant impact on official national strategies and policies, which remain lacking.

Other stimulatory initiatives

Between 2007 and 2013, the Slovak-Czech Women’s Fund awarded the Ludmila Cuchranova Memorial Stipend. Stipends were awarded to women doctoral students in STEM disciplines to cover their travel expenses to international conferences. The stipend aimed to support women scientists in research areas where women are underrepresented in order to promote their research and develop their scientific careers.

In 2019, the ESET Foundation (part of the private IT security company ESET) launched the “**ESET Science Award**” to publicly recognise exceptional (women or men) individuals in science. All ESET activities demonstrate an interest in and support for gender equality/diversity policies. The company is an example of how a private sector company can contribute to changing institutional cultures regarding equality/diversity practices and policies. ESET’s award ceremonies are broadcast at prime time by Slovak Television, demonstrating the importance of science in society and celebrating the work of women and men scientists.

Key actors

The CVTI is the only national institution that carries out initiatives to promote gender equality in research and innovation.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Gender equality initiatives in public research organisations are generally project-based and are not embedded within institutions' strategic goals and structural activities. They typically consist of short-term activities (seminars, conferences, training), lacking long-term vision, impact or drive for institutional structural change. Sex-disaggregated data collection and research on the position of women in academia remain rare in Slovak research organisations, largely because the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport does not require the collection of sex-disaggregated data.

Gender equality initiatives at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS) included a 2002 empirical survey (including in-depth interviews) of the situation of women working as researchers in SAS. The survey examined the need for a specific intervention and led (indirectly) to the creation of the so-called children's corner. In 2005, SAS sought to contribute to structural change by establishing an Equal Opportunity Committee. The initiative did not last long, with the Committee active for only a few years. In 2020, SAS became a member of the Horizon 2020 ATHENA project, and is in the process of preparing its first GEP.

The Faculty of Informatics and Information Technology of the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava implemented the "You, too, in IT" (*Aj ty v IT*) project since 2013 (together with the civic association, *Aj ty v IT*). This project aims to attract women and girls into informatics and IT. The project webpage^[9] promotes women in informatics through personal stories, information on IT professions and study programmes. The Faculty and civic association organise workshops for girls and young women, as well as mentoring programmes for students interested in studying informatics. Since 2014, they have organised "Girls' Day", which sees IT companies and institutions welcome girls aged 14-18 to visit their facilities (e.g. ESET). In 2021, the Faculty started developing a GEP in order to meet Horizon Europe programme requirements. The Project Management Department was charged with preparing the GEP.

Research funding organisations have not been active partners in gender equality in the research and innovation agenda. Some progress is evident, however. The Slovak Research and Development Agency (*Agentúra pre podporu vedy a výskumu*, SRDA) is participating in the Horizon 2020 project “Grant Allocation Disparities from a Gender Perspective” (GRANteD)^[10].

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Gender Equality Strategy/GEP

Pavel Jozef Šafárik University in Košice was the first Slovak university to voluntarily prepare a gender equality strategy. In 2017, a working group consisting of five people from several faculties was formed, on the initiative of top management. The group undertook a gender audit, analyses of numerous international documents, studies and report and qualitative surveys before drafting the Gender Equality Strategy. The Rector subsequently restructured the group as an advisory body, the “Advisory Board for Gender Equality”. It built on the Gender Equality Strategy and prepared the Gender Equality Plan for 2020-2022. The plan is connected to the Human Resources Excellence in Research Award, granted to the University by the European Commission in the framework of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) in 2021.

At *Žilina University*, the ERA Chair project, ERAdiate, prompted consideration of a GEP. One of the initiatives discussed during the project was an opportunity to take part in the Horizon 2020 CHANGE project. That project saw the University organise a number of activities, such as an exhibition on women scientists and a series of workshops for research organisations and funding organisations. A GEP was developed and is expected to be adopted by the end of 2021.

Comenius University (*Univerzita Komenského*, UK) is the oldest Slovak university and also the most complex, with 13 faculties. It has a Centre for Gender Studies in the Faculty of Arts, which has provided university education in Gender Studies since 2001 (the only one of its kind). Participation in the Horizon 2020 Equal4Europe project provided the Centre with an opportunity to influence the gender equality strategy at UK. It undertook quantitative and qualitative surveys, which will form the basis of its first gender equality strategy and GEP.

The Faculty of Materials, Science and Technology at the Slovak University of Technology is another research organisation that developed a GEP (2021) within the EU-funded Horizon 2020 “Gender equality in STEM Research” (CALIPER) project.

Career Development Plan (CDP)

In 2013, the Faculty of Health Care and Social Work at *Trnava University* developed a GEP (as part of the FP7 project, GENOVATE). The GEP included a measure to implement a CDP for university research employees. The project team took a participatory approach to developing the CDP. It mapped the state-of-play in two faculties, collected sex-disaggregated data on research and education employees, interviewed the Human Resources Department of the Rectorate and personnel administrators of both faculties, surveyed research employees, and distributed questionnaires on gender equality at awareness-raising activities. The inclusion of surveys, questionnaires and discussions demonstrated evidence-based policy-making, contributed to raising awareness of gender equality and the policy itself, and created a sense of ownership within the two faculties.

Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica developed gender equality policies and a GEP as part of the Human Resources Excellence in Research award (HRS4R). It was the first Slovak institution to receive the award in December 2018. Planning a GEP was part of the HRS4R Action Plan. Working towards the award made it easier to discuss and agree the need to develop a GEP at the top management level. The Vice-Rector for Research established a working group on gender equality that collected sex-disaggregated data and conducted focus groups. The GEP was developed using the EIGE's GEAR tool and results of a number of successful EU projects, and is expected to be adopted by the end of 2021. This example suggests the HRS4R agenda is a useful way of overcoming resistance.

Footnotes

[1] text text

[2] text text

[1] https://www.gender.gov.sk/en/files/2015/06/Strategy_EN.pdf

[2] Valkovičová, V. and Meier, P., "Everyone has the right to their opinion: 'Gender Ideology' Rhetoric and Epistemic Struggles in Slovak Policymaking", *Social Politics*, 2021, pp. 1-20.

[3] This department chose "equality between men and women" rather than "equality between women and men", as per the other department.

[4] <https://dennikn.sk/2078386/krajniak-vymazava-slovo-rod-peniaze-na-rodovu...>, <https://dennikn.sk/2235009/krajniak-utoci-na-feministicke-organizacie-do...>

[5] Celoštatná stratégia rovnosti žien a mužov a rovnosti príležitostí V Slovenskej republike na roky 2021–2027, <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sk/resource-centre/content/celostatna-strateg...>

[6] www.cvtisr.sk

[7] www.eraportal.sk/en

[8] <https://eraportal.sk/en/eraportal/gender-equality-in-research>

[9] <https://ajtyvit.sk>

[10] <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/what-horizon-2020>