

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Croatia

COUNTRY: Croatia

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

Significant positive change is evident in gender equality in Croatia in the last 15 years. These improvements, however, largely centred on legislative change and developing central key structures for gender equality.

The legal framework ensuring the promotion of gender equality in Croatia has several intertwined parts. Gender equality is first guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, and then developed further in the Gender Equality Act. Provisions on gender equality are also found in other laws, such as the Anti-Discrimination Act (2009), the Labour Law (since 1995), the Law on Same-Sex Communities (2003) (repealed by the new Law on Life Partnership of Persons of the Same Sex (2014)), the Law on Science and Higher Education, the Law on Healthcare, the Law on Political Parties, the Law on Elections of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament, the Law on Local Elections and the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence (since 2003). As of September 2021, there were no laws explicitly promoting gender equality in research.

Policy framework

The National Policy for Gender Equality (2011-2015) was a fundamental strategic document that aimed to eliminate discrimination against women and promote gender equality. It contained seven key areas of action and obliged the State to include a gender dimension in all policy areas. One of the seven action areas referred to improving the application of a gender-sensitive approach in education and training. More specifically, measure 3.3.1 called on education providers to establish measures to increase the participation of the underrepresented sex among students.

An earlier national report listed the fourth National Policy for Gender Equality (2011-2015) as the essential strategic document for the development of gender equality in Croatia. However, the fifth National Strategy for Gender Equality (for the period after 2015) has yet to be adopted. The Croatian translation of the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023) was presented to the Croatian Parliament in 2018. The Working Group for the new National Plan for Gender Equality 2021-2027 was appointed in October 2020.

The Ministry of Science, Education and Sport adopted an Action Plan on Science and Society^[1] in 2012. The plan promoted socially responsible science in four areas, including endorsing/achieving gender equality in science. The Plan also included an activity to balance gender ratios in research organisations, particularly managerial positions. It targeted women as a minimum one-third of national decision-making bodies, such as national councils, regional councils, field committees and scientific and political bodies.

The EU Competitiveness Council adopted the European Research Area (ERA) Plan 2015-2020 in May 2015. The Plan identified several crucial implementation priorities at national and European level, with Member States themselves deciding on the development of their national plans. Rather than drafting a national strategy, the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education developed an Implementation Plan for the ERA Plan already adopted. That Implementation Plan outlined the national strategic framework, guidelines for the development of science and technology, and a brief overview of the current situation in Croatia, by priority. It stated the goals, measures and activities that should contribute to the development of science as a driver of long-term economic and social growth by 2020, in line with the objectives set out in the ERA Plan.

Priority 4 (Gender Equality and Gender Awareness Policy in Research) of the Implementation Plan outlined the state of gender equality and non-discrimination in Croatia. It noted that scientific organisations are responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of gender equality policy. According to the principles of gender equality, the emphasis is not on equal outcomes for women and men. Rather, it seeks to address inequalities between women and men in respect of resources, including differences in the extent to which the science and technology system meets their specific needs, as recognised in the Action Plan on Science and Society of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport from 2012. According to the report 'Women and Men in Croatia', women are dominant in the total number of students enrolling in universities and the total number graduating. In the population generally, there are slightly more women than men with high-level qualifications. Nevertheless, occupational choices for many women in Croatia are still influenced by traditional gender roles. Among graduates, women are still underrepresented in computer science, engineering and transportation services, although data show that numbers of women in these areas are growing steadily.

There is a significant representation of women among doctoral candidates and in the scientific research community, yet the glass ceiling phenomenon is evident in career advancement. The Implementation Plan aims to transform national equality regulations into practical action to address gender inequality in research organisations and decision-making bodies, and to better integrate the gender dimension into research and development (R&D) policies, programmes and projects. The Plan also lists various goals, measures and activities, including:

- Improving the coherence and networking of public policies by establishing a system for collecting information and data on women's entrepreneurship;
- Improving systematic support for women's entrepreneurship by developing new models of education and training in business management (ICT systems, new technologies, creative industries, application of innovations, cluster management, etc.);
- Introducing women's entrepreneurship within the entire institutional infrastructure by strengthening institutional and professional supports for women's entrepreneurial projects in new technologies and innovations.

The Implementation Plan sets out the data that will be used to evaluate success:

Input indicator: share of doctoral candidates (Eurostat);

Output indicator: share of scientific articles with gender content;

Outcome/impact indicator: percentage of women in category A positions in the higher education sector (professors).

In May 2019, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the proposal to sign the Declaration of Commitment to Women in the Digital World (WiD). The Declaration recognises gender bias and sociocultural constructions as major barriers to the representation of girls and women in the digital world. As a cross-sectoral problem, solutions must encompass the education system, the economy, the media and public services. Signatory States committed to cooperating with public authorities, representatives of the public and private sectors, and civil society to address the phenomenon of underrepresentation of women. At national level, signatories will take action to:

Create a national strategy to encourage women's participation in the digital economy;

Encourage broadcasters to promote a positive public image of women in the digital economy;

Establish a European Girls and Women in ICT Day;

Encourage companies to combat gender discrimination at work;

Advance gender-balanced composition of boards, committees and bodies dealing with digital matters;

Improve monitoring mechanisms and data collection in order to set improved targets.

Other stimulatory initiatives

Each year, the Croatian Commission for UNESCO, the Ministry of Culture and L'Oréal Adria award four scholarships to women scientists. The first edition of 'For Women in Science' took place in 2007. The award aims to raise awareness of outstanding young scientists and reward them for their contribution to science and society. In the last years, the amount of the award has been increased: from EUR 4,000 to EUR 5,000 each (HRK equivalent).

In 2008, the Centre for Women's Studies established the Award for the Best Student Papers in Women's and Gender Issues. The competition seeks to support future professionals interested in topics related to gender and women's issues and to encourage the implementation of gender-sensitive policies in higher education. It is open to all undergraduate and graduate students in Croatia.

In 2016, the Agency for Science and Higher Education joined the project 'Towards Real Equality between Men and Women: Reconciling Business and Private Life', carried out by the Office of the Gender Equality Ombudsperson. The Agency successfully assessed organisational culture using the Mamforce^[2] methodology. In 2017, the Agency became the first public sector organisation to receive Mamforce certification.

In May 2019, the first round table – 'Become YOU, IT girl!' – was held at the Student Centre in Zagreb following the signing of the Declaration of Commitment to WiD. There, high school girls gained an insight into women's work experience and positions in the IT industry. The participants were prominent women employed in private or public institutions (e.g. Kristina Posavec, Deputy State Secretary of the Central State Office for the Development of Digital Society; Helena Štimac Radin, Director of the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of the Republic of Croatia; Lidija Kralj, Assistant Minister of Science and Education). A similar round table marked the Day of Girls and Women in ICT (Osijek, 2020).

Key actors

The Ministry of Science, Education and Sport adopted its Action Plan on Science and Society in 2012. It is responsible for implementing policy, including fostering gender equality in research.

The Ministry is the umbrella institution responsible for all science and research policy in Croatia and thus regulates gender issues in science and research. Measures pertaining to gender equality in science and research are usually implemented by universities and faculties.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

There were no gender equality plans (GEPs) in universities and research organisations before October 2015. Although ad hoc gender-sensitive or gender-specific courses have been organised in several universities, no other instruments, tools, approaches or initiatives have been developed systematically or within a strategic framework. However, 16 universities and public institutes have adopted the European Charter for Researchers, which could be considered a first step towards progressing gender equality in research. Under the Charter, some institutes and universities have developed action plans and human resources strategies featuring gender equality measures. For instance, the Institute of Social Sciences, *Ivo Pilar*, developed a Human Resources Strategy (2012–2015) that promotes non-discrimination, gender balance at all staff levels, and better working conditions. The University of Zadar also developed an Action Plan for Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (2011–2015). Measure 27 addressed gender equality and comprised two activities: 27.1 - continue to raise awareness about gender-balanced representation among employees, employers and funding providers through round tables, research and workshops; and 27.2 - stimulate part-time employment to reconcile family and professional obligations, if needed.

In 2019, as part of the Supporting and Implementing Plans for Gender Equality in Academia and Research (SPEAR) project, the University of Rijeka developed a GEP, which will be implemented between 2021 and 2025. To date, it has analysed the status quo and defined the priority areas of the GEP. The goals, measures and actions envisaged concern four strategic areas: (1) institutional culture of gender equality; (2) gender equality in scientific and artistic research; (3) gender equality in learning and teaching; and (4) life-work balance. The GEP was adopted in May 2021 by the Decision of the Senate of the University of Rijeka.

In 2020, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing (FER) at the University of Zagreb started developing a GEP within the project CALIPER. As a member of the CALIPER consortium, FER seeks to promote internal procedures towards tailored gender equality policies and sustainable structural changes that will favour a gender-balanced and competent environment. The organisation will assess current gender-related conditions and create a GEP to introduce specific steps to enhance career opportunities for women researchers.

Having accepted the Charter for Researchers (2019), the University of Dubrovnik is now developing a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (2019–2022). Gender equality policies will form part of an information pack for all job applicants, together with information on competencies, obligations, etc.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Promoting gender equality

The Centre for Women's Studies at the University of Rijeka's Faculty of Philosophy was founded in 2016 and is the only formally confirmed academic centre of study for gender and feminist topics. The Centre links the academic and civil sectors, and is a platform for interdisciplinary domestic and international research.

The Student-Teacher Association (*Za-Pravo*) within the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Law was founded at the end of 2020. It seeks to create a safe, supportive environment, including organising weekly open meetings, conferences, round tables and guest lectures. It also offers education and campaigns for teachers and students in the Faculty of Law, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Numerous university courses in Croatian universities include gender-relevant topics. In addition, gender-relevant papers are published by Croatian scientists in both the domestic scientific area and in foreign publications. Despite this, however, higher education curricula in Croatia do not systematically and strategically include gender education.

Footnotes

[1] <https://mzo.gov.hr/>

[2] Mamforce is an assessment and business certification method that combines corporate responsibility with family and gender equality.
