

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Slovenia

COUNTRY: Slovenia

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

The Research and Development Activity Act sets out the objective to develop human resources while ensuring equal opportunities for women and men. As of October 2021, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is in the act of preparing the new law.

The Rules on the Procedures of (Co)financing, Evaluation and Monitoring of Research Activities ensure gender equality in evaluating candidates and regulate gender balance in relevant decision-making bodies:

Article 36 - In evaluation procedures for researchers, the five-year period for assessing scientific excellence is extended for the time period researchers spent on leaves (such as parental leave).

Articles 83, 113 - The time limit for applying for PhD positions and postdoctoral projects is extended for one year for candidates who used their parental leave or other leave of absence.

Article 223 - All permanent and temporary expert bodies of the Slovenian Research Agency should be gender-balanced. In all disciplines, a decision-making body needs to be comprised of at least one third of each gender, while for technical disciplines the threshold is one fifth.

Policy framework

The “National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2015-2020” included measures to improve the position of women in science:

Continued support for the Commission for Equal Opportunities in Science, the advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport;

Support for programmes and projects increasing the participation of women in science;

Ensure gender balance in all decision-making bodies nominated in the field of science by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, as well as active encouragement of women candidates for scientific awards and membership of scientific boards;
Raise awareness of the principle of equal opportunities in science and research;
Monitoring EU indicators on assuring equal opportunities for women and men in higher education and research.

All of these measures have been implemented to some extent. The key policy documents set out ambitious general aims, with the operational measures implemented by public bodies proving subpar and limited in reach. A new “National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030” is currently being prepared.

The Slovenian European Research Area (ERA) Roadmap 2016-2020 provided for additional measures:

Support for research projects tackling the issue of gender equality and dissemination of results (postponed);
Implementation of gender equality principles in public funding organisations by ensuring gender balance in evaluation committees (implemented) and in the content of funded research programmes and projects (not implemented);
Establishment of an appropriate national-level analytical system to follow selected indicators relating to gender equality in research (cancelled);
Establishment of an expert government body to coordinate and implement measures for adopting gender equality principles in science (partially implemented through establishing the office of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality^[1]).

The “National Research and Innovation Strategy 2011-2020” charged the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport with creating an “Action Plan for Improving Career Opportunities for Researchers in all career stages and for Ensuring the Gender Equality Principle”. However, the Action Plan was never adopted. A new “National Research and Innovation Strategy for 2021-2030” is being prepared.

Other stimulatory initiatives

Since 2006, the initiative “UNESCO – L’Oréal For Women in Science”^[2] has awarded three scholarships each year to young women scientists.

Since 2018, the award “Woman Engineer of the Year”^[3] has given visibility to women engineers, with the winner and 10 shortlisted candidates presented publicly.

Since 2019, the community of practice “Alternative Infrastructure for Gender Equality in Academic Institutions” (Alt+G)^[4] has brought together professionals interested in implementing gender equality measures at their various institutions. Slovenian institutions tend not to have a Gender Equality Office(r), thus Alt+G focuses on building an alternative institutional infrastructure to share knowledge, experiences and strategies for implementing gender equality measures at both organisational and national level.

Key actors

The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (Equal Opportunities Department) is responsible for the area of gender equality. It is in charge of preparing and monitoring the periodic “Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men”, which also covers gender inequality in science.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is responsible for preparing, implementing and monitoring the periodic “National Research and Innovation Strategy”. The Ministry supports an independent consultative expert body, the Commission for Equal Opportunities in Science (previously the Commission for Women in Science), which is very active in collecting data and research, suggesting changes in legislation and commenting on draft policy documents, organising awareness-raising activities and promoting principles of gender equality through public outreach.

The Slovenian Research Agency is in charge of financing and administering review processes for research projects and programmes, including young researcher programmes (financed doctoral positions) and post-doctoral projects. It is responsible for implementing the “Rules on the Procedures of the (Co)financing, Evaluation and Monitoring of Research Activities” and monitoring career progress standards for researchers.

The Advocate of the Principle of Equality is an independent and autonomous public institution, which provides counselling and legal assistance in proceedings related to discrimination. The Advocate is also mandated to conduct supervisory inspections and has the power to evaluate whether a regulation or a legal act is discriminatory.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Before adopting a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) became a requirement for participation in Horizon Europe in 2021, only a handful of research organisations had implemented a GEP (e.g. Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana). As of 2021, an increasing number of research organisations have adopted such a plan, either building on gender equality measures developed as part of previous European projects (e.g. National Institute of Chemistry, National Institute of Biology) or via peer-to-peer knowledge exchange (e.g. Research Centre Koper, University of Maribor).

These GEPs vary in their form and comprehensiveness and do not always correspond to the areas recommended by the European Commission. However, all GEPs are based on available sex-disaggregated data on employees, academic titles and job positions, as well as student population, where applicable. In some cases, GEPs envision more systematic collection of this data, together with monitoring of career paths, career progress, income and type of contract, all disaggregated by gender and organisational unit (e.g. departments, institutes).

The most common measures included in GEPs are:

- Raise awareness of the importance of gender equality in research and innovation;
- Activities relating to mentorship, involving at least one of the following measures - training for mentors or future mentors, mentorship schemes between senior and junior academics, training for mentees/younger researchers on various academic skills;
- Use of gender-sensitive and/or gender-neutral and/or gender-inclusive language in official documents. As the Slovenian language expresses grammatical gender, language policy in this area is relevant, especially in the use of the feminine form for academic titles and job positions for women, generic use of both masculine and feminine forms, use of expressions that are neutral or gender non-defining, and the use of specific graphic solutions (e.g. underscore) suggesting the inclusiveness of all genders;

Channels for secure reporting of sexual harassment and procedures for sanctioning;
Analysis of work-life balance measures and their adaptation to the particular needs of different groups of employees;
Measures to enable researchers to achieve career promotion criteria, recognising the circumstances of their private and family lives;
Science outreach to improve the visibility of women's achievements.

In accordance with their GEPs, research organisations have established new (or transformed existing) bodies. In most cases, a Committee/Commission on Equal Opportunities (or gender equality) was established, or the responsibilities of the Ethical Commission/Committee were extended to gender equality.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

In 2019, the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) became the first academic organisation to implement a fully-fledged GEP. Created within the framework of the European project "R&I PEERS"^[5] (2018-2022), it built on the qualitative and quantitative assessment of gender equality in the institution that was conducted as part of the GARCIA^[6] project (2014–2017). The GEP covers five target areas: (1) mentoring; (2) work-life balance; (3) promoting excellence of women researchers; (4) raising awareness of gender equality in the organisation; and (5) improving gender neutrality and sensitivity in the language of official documents. Integration of the gender dimension in research content was not addressed, as the "Toolkit for Integrating a Gender-Sensitive Approach into Research and Training"^[7] was previously developed and published as part of the GARCIA project.

The use of gender-sensitive/inclusive language

In May 2018, the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana changed its practice of writing official documents (regulations) using exclusively the masculine form. Instead, it uses an asterisk, denoting that this form is to be understood generically and refers to both women and men. The new rule (in place for three years) states that the regulations are to be written in feminine forms so as to be recognised as gender-neutral/inclusive. After that time, newly adopted regulations can use either the feminine or masculine form. The measure seeks to contribute to more inclusive communication and counteract the norms that make non-male genders invisible.

Enabling the option of remote work

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, some organisations had increased the availability of telework for a larger number of their employees (ZRC SAZU), or extended the option to work from home for a higher number of days (National Institute of Chemistry). This facilitates researchers to balance work and family life and organise their own time. The measure targeted employees of all genders, but is more beneficial to those with caring duties. During the first COVID-19 lockdown, the National Institute of Chemistry organised a series of webinars on how employees could balance their work, family and personal well-being.

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.zagovornik.si/en/>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/zazenskevznosti/>

[3] <https://www.inzenirka-leta.si/>

[4] <https://altg.act-on-gender.eu/>

[5] <http://ripeers.eu/>

[6] <http://garciaproject.eu/>

[7] <https://www.genderportal.eu/resources/toolkit-integrating-gender-sensiti...>