Sustaining and Expanding Gender Equality Plans in RPOs from Faculty to Institution Level

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Abstract   Through a challenging 36 months period, EQUAL-IST project have addressed the issue of gender inequalities in Information Sciences and Technology research and institutions and influenced organizational structures through the enhancement of gender equality at six (6) Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), through the design and implementation of tailored Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) containing specific measures (activities/practices/interventions) to address gender imbalance. In order to maximise the project impact a dedicated sustainability plan was developed, to ensure the optimal use and institutionalisation of EQUAL-IST results and for ensuring that the GEPs design processes and implementation will be expanded from the Department-Faculty Levels to the whole Academic Institution. The EQUAL-IST project applied a sectoral approach to GEPs design and implementation: Faculties-Schools-Departments specialised in IST/ICT took the lead in initiating the process and achieved the goal to expand the GEPs since the initial steps of the process. In addition, balanced bottom-up and top-down design and implementation were carried out both ensuring engagement and commitment of highest hierarchical representatives (academic and administrative levels), taking into account needs and voices of employees, students and stakeholders at the involved research organisations. It has been impressive the fact that all RPOs designed their sustainability plans and secured the commitment of the higher management level, to continue the actions the next years.

Keywords   Sustainability. Gender Equality Plans.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Sustainability & Structural Change. – 2.1 Background. – 2.2 The EQUAL-IST approach towards sustainability. – 3 EQUAL-IST Sustainability Plans Overview. – 4 Evidence of impacts. – 5 Conclusions and future work.

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1   Introduction

Women remain a minority among academic leaders, especially in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. The under-representation of women in the Information Sciences and Technology (IST) field, aside from its implications for gender equality in career progression, also has far-reaching negative consequences for human capital utilisation and innovation potential (Trauth 2011). Presence of women in key areas of academia is increasingly recognised as one factor in the gendering of research content, including the shaping of science priorities, research agendas, and methods (Ranga, Etzkowitz 2010).

Towards this direction, the Horizon 2020 EQUAL-IST (Gender Equality Plans for Information Sciences and Technology Research Institutions) project supported six (6) Universities across Europe (Italy, Lithuania, Germany, Ukraine, Finland, Portugal) to design and implement Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) and actions towards gender equality, with a specific focus on the ICT/IST area. This goal was achieved by creating awareness among management, employees, and students of the participating IST institutions at the partner Universities (Research Performing Organisations (RPOs)), making the institutions reconsider their culture, improving the communication, and supporting women in their career persistence and advancement.

In order to maximise the project impact and to ensure the optimal use and institutionalisation of EQUAL-IST results after project's completion and therefore, speed up the potential of their wider use and impact to the economy and society, a dedicated **sustainability** plan was developed. At the core of the overall EQUAL-IST strategy was the participatory approach to the design of the GEPs based on a co-design methodology and the crowdsourcing collaborative online platform, as it is demonstrated that these methods increase the sense of ownership of the designed policies, services and actions by the engaged communities. Complementary to this, was the active engagement and constant dialogue which the GEPs Working Groups (a multidisciplinary and multi-sectorial team of staff inside the Research Organisation, with the mission to implement, monitor and assess the GEP process) ensured with top managers and the highest governance levels at each involved RPOs.

In addition, a specific target of the strategy was represented by promoting dialogue with national, regional, and EU level Research Funding Organisations in order to initiate discussions on how to more effectively integrate gender indicators among crosscutting requirements in Calls for Proposals for funding research in the disciplines at stake as well as in research results evaluation, both in terms of balanced gender presence and leadership of researchers and with regards to research contents.

The Sustainability phase was started two years after the project start (June 2018) along with the completion of the 1st phase for the GEP implementation and run until the end of the project (May 2019) with the goal to develop key strategies for ensuring that the GEPs design processes and implementation would be expanded from the Department-Faculty Levels to the whole Academic Institution.

2 Sustainability & Structural Change

2.1 Background

The wide literature available on gender mainstreaming has provided the main conceptual frameworks for reflecting on the sustainability of institutional change in the EQUAL-IST project. The institutional change incorporates both elements from gender mainstreaming policies and positive actions or equal opportunities, and along the years it has been tailored specifically to research and research funding institutions, while gender mainstreaming methods and tools were designed for the public sector more broadly meant. Still, there are many areas of intersection between the respective policy tools. Sustainability has been addressed in gender mainstreaming concerning evaluating the impact of the undertaken policies. A thorough evaluation model for gender mainstreaming is the one proposed by the African Development Bank (ADBG 2011), which identifies a series of impact drivers, for gradually developing the capacity of institutions for gender mainstreaming, such as:

- effective leadership
- adequate financial and human resources
- availability of appropriate procedures and processes
- appropriate organisational incentives and accountability structures

The preconditions mentioned above can be considered as applicable to research organisations as well. It can be noted that sustainability of gender equality policies and GEPs implemented within an EU funded project such as EQUAL-IST had to be thoroughly pursued and monitored, precisely due to the fact that change has been promoted within a project and time-bounded frame and further enabled by the financial resources made available within the project itself: this implies a stronger initial drive, potentially able to fuel efforts towards change at the beginning, while at the same time such special, project-related, conditions might pose higher dismissal risks for gender equality policies and measures after the project conclusion.

For this reason, a conceptualisation used and proposed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), once more in the con-

text of broader gender mainstreaming policies (see below, Table 1), reveals to be useful for highlighting the risk for gender equality policies to remain circumscribed to the project life cycle and being subject to isolation once it is ended, in this case foreclosed within RPOs GEP's Working Groups and their committed teams.

Table 1   Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming and use of Methods, Tools and Good Practices (EIGE 2013)

Institutional capacity	
Degrees of Institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming	
Project	Gender equality actions are initiated as **short-term, low-priority, one-off projects** that are not related to 'core business'.
Isolation	Gender mainstreaming tends to be **driven by service or a unit**.
Growth	Gender mainstreaming is **driven by a set of Institutional structures** within the institution.
Integration	Gender mainstreaming is a **part of the mandate of a high profile person**.
Institutionalisation	GM is **structurally embedded in all processes**.

When evaluating outcomes and sustainability of gender equality policies, it is important to shift the focus from policy adoption to the actual policy implementation: political scientists Engeli and Mazur have proposed an interesting categorisation for adoption of gender equality policies trying to distinguish between more adaptive and radical/transformative efforts, including resistances in the model as well. The same authors have also relied on several other studies in assessing the impacts of gender equality policies and have stressed the role played by contextual/institutional legacies and the fact that backlash is also a possible outcome, especially when policies aim at more radical change than proceeding through a more gradual approach (Engeli, Mazur 2018).

Table 2   Outcomes of Gender Equality Policies (elaborated from Engeli, Mazur 2018)

Gender Equality Policies_Outcome type	Features
Gender neutral	Failed; no tangible effects; poor resources invested
Gender row-back	Derailed from their original intention, equality policies end up having unexpected negative impacts on women's lives
Gender accommodation	accommodating or compensating traditional gender relations instead of transforming them.
Gender transformation	Changes in gender and sexualized norms

The above typology is interesting and useful to guide the operationalisation of sustainability as a goal in the framework of EU funded projects, precisely thanks to its critical approach: it recalls the always present, although extreme, possibility of 'no impact', and even the possibility of unintended consequences: this is particularly important to be kept in mind especially whereas change processes are implemented via EU funded projects or funds from external donors, where favorable internal conditions might slowly change, once the obligation to comply with grants' conditions expires.

All previous projects focused on institutional change funded by FP7/H2020 similar to EQUAL-IST have had to tackle sustainability aspects to guarantee the continuation of GEPs and make sure that the initiated change process could progress after the overall short terms objectives of 3 years-long projects.

For example, the STAGES (D6.3, 2015) project has approached the issue setting a **clear-cut difference between sustainability and institutionalization**: the former is referred to financial, human and technical resources, both within and outside an organization, while the latter is described as a specific form of sustainability, when the promoting organization is ensuring "permanent" commitment to all or some of the foreseen actions of GEPs, by integrating it into its structures. This distinction offers an interesting lens to look at the EQUAL-IST sustainability plans, wherein several cases internal and external resources were leveraged to ensure continuity and different 'embedding mechanisms' to integrate gender equality measures in existing rules, procedures and routines that have been put in place. The STAGES methodology towards sustainability is quite similar to the one adopted within EQUAL-IST, and it has proceeded via 4 phases, whereas each partner institution has set up its Sustainability Plan:

- a screening phase to identify viable options and actions from the GEPs to be confirmed as sustainable; consultation phase to collect recommendations from both internal and external stakeholders;
- a design phase leading to a provisional sustainability plan;
- a transition phase to test the new arrangements during the last six months of the project for delivering a final and updated Sustainability Plan.

The TRIGGER Project Guidelines have articulated sustainability along five strands, shedding light to the multifaceted layers of institutional change spanning from cultural, symbolic, procedural and structural aspects within research institutions, highlighting the need for including gender in different ways:

- "inclusion of gender in monitoring systems: data as a pre-requisite for sustainability ('no data – no policy' motto);
- inclusion of gender in scientific excellence to create awareness of how gender bias pertains not only to science as a specific

working environment but also to science as a specific form of knowledge, and the criteria of scientific excellence, which regulate it, such as merit, creativity, skills or specific moral attitudes (such as courage or commitment);

- inclusion of gender considerations in service provisions to support women through services geared to make science a gender-friendly environment;
- inclusion of gender in the organisation's standards, set of organisational rules, established procedures, norms, protocols, or standardised documents;
- inclusion of gender in the organisation's structure and mission to create institutional spaces, dedicated roles/units". (Deichlich, D'Andrea 2017)

It is worth noting how most of ongoing H2020 projects on institutional change for gender equality experience sustainability of GEPs after the project's life-span as a hurdle: a relatively recent Cluster Workshop organized by Research European Agency (REA) on 28th February 2018 gathering all the structural change projects hosted a dedicated session where sustainability of GEPs was confirmed to be a key challenge. In that framework, a series of ideas and examples were raised to the discussions, spanning from an inward-looking/strictly institutional perspective, to a broader reflection on how external enhanced national/ EU policies (national legislation enforcing GEPs or incentive-based measures such as awarding/ certification systems) could enhance sustainability (European Commission, REA 2018).

2.2 The EQUAL-IST Approach Towards Sustainability

The first elements of the EQUAL-IST approach towards sustainability of Gender Equality Plans were outlined in the State of the Art Analysis Report (Sangiuliano 2017), one of the initial building blocks of the project,whereas some of the dimensions used to identify good practices in the research process pointed to sustainability and stability of change explicitly and straightforwardly, such as:

- Process started at IST/ICT Faculties and expanded to the whole University.
- The EQUAL-IST project is applying a sectoral approach to GEPs design and implementation: Faculties-Schools-Departments specialised in IST/ICT are taking the lead in initiating the process and have the goal to expand the GEPs since the initial steps of the process. Strengths and potential risks-weaknesses of such an approach are of interest for the consortium.
- Balanced bottom-up and top-down design and implementation to be carried out both ensuring engagement and commitment

of highest hierarchical representatives (academic and administrative levels) and taking into account needs and voices of employees, students and stakeholders at the involved research organisations.

Furthermore, a series of GEP's Impact Dimensions where identified, as per the table below, grounded on available literature used in the State of the Art Analysis itself: 6 out of 7 of the selected dimensions are directly related to sustainability: iteration of GEP and time-related sustainability; active engagement of staff with permanent roles, leaders/top managers support; integration into policies, regulations, processes; regular and continuous monitoring activities; assigned resources (both human and financial); embeddedness into national regulations.

Table 3   GEP's Impact Dimensions: the EQUAL-IST approach

	Criteria	Description – analytic categories
1	Effective Impact	The GEP has provoked visible and measurable results: "positive change of access to goods, services, status, decision-making and opportunities; rectification of power imbalances; expansion of the subjective and objective range of legal, social and psychological choices available to both men and women; break gender stereotypes, norms and patterns" (EIGE 2013)
2	Sustainable impact in time	The GEP has undergone a full implementation phase and has been eventually renewed for more than one cycle
3	Sustainable impact _actors involved	Promoters/institutional owners have permanent roles at the University; Top Managers in strategic sectors are supporting the Plan Implementation
4	Sustainable Impact as integration into internal policies, regulations, processes	The GEP is integrated into internal policies such as Performance Evaluation Plans, ERA Human Resources Strategy 4 Researchers Processes. Gender Equality Actions are embedded into existing and well established institutional processes and working routines
5	Regular monitoring against defined indicators & KPIs	Indicators and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) have been defined and monitoring, evaluation procedures are in place
6	Assigned resources	The University is assigning both human and economic resources to the structural change process and the GEP management
7	Integration into national regulations	The GEP is stemming from national provisions and/or is monitored upon the initiative of National Authorities or has lead (or has functioned as the best example leading) to significant changes in national regulations policies.

The criteria mentioned above were informing the 19 in-depth interviews with the RPOs implementing GEPs conducted and analysed always in the framework of D2.1: 11 of the presented good practices had GEPs in place which has already completed their first cycle of implementation, most typically lasting three years. As far as the sustainability of GEPs was concerned, the key lessons learned were the following ones:

- Sustainability is enhanced for RPOs where the GEP is framed into national –federal level regulations which make it compulsory for Universities to establish such policies and national resources are invested in specific programs to make Higher Education more Gender Equal. Still, even in such conditions, it is frequent that GEPs are designed and approved to comply with regulations but end up staying on paper only. Even the most solid GEPs experiences benefitting from State funding can consider their achievements under fragile conditions, and in continuous need of an institutional owner, i.e. an Office for Equality as, without this is a place, all provisions could quickly evaporate.
- Establishment of an Office – Unit which is in charge of Gender Equality within the administration to complement the work of Equality Officers and Commissions seems like a key element to facilitate sustainability or at least a path that several RPOs have been pursuing.
- Making (human and financial) resources to RPOs to proceed with GEPs implementation, is a key aspect influencing sustainability.
- Integration into internal policies and regulations includes many different aspects, and several respondents have referred it to particular documents or policies where gender has been mainstreamed as a parallel effect of having a GEP in place: recruitment guidelines and procedures, official University Strategy Document, work-life balance provisions are some examples.
- Establishing active collaboration networks with local, regional and national level stakeholders has proved to be important for strengthening their internal strategies at different stages of implementation.

All EQUAL-IST partners received clear-cut guidelines about the importance of taking sustainability issues into account since the design phase of their GEPs, and in the capacity building sessions organised to support the gender audit process and crowdsourcing of GEPs. All supporting actions within the two GEP implementation iteration phases relied on a concept of GEP's implementation as geared towards building sustainable change.

Additionally, all evaluation activities from self-assessment to the external evaluation addressed sustainability issues and provided the needed reflexive elements to the process.

After the first iteration, from September 2018, the EQUAL-IST sustainability strategy was defined and agreed upon more in details, by taking all the elements drawn from the available literature, solutions implemented in other similar projects, and results from the State of the Art Analysis into account: this led to focus on a set of specific sustainability dimensions to be explored throughout each one of the Areas of Interventions the project has focused upon (HR and Management Processes, Teaching and Services to Students, Research Design and Delivery Institutional Communication). The table below illustrates the final choice for the sustainability dimensions.

Table 4 Dimensions of the EQUAL-IST Sustainability Plans

Sustainability Dimension	Description/guidelines	Examples
Rules and procedures	Integration of actions into existing management policies and regulations. Ensuring constant monitoring. Set up material and immaterial Incentives	Mandatory Sustainability Plan including short, middle and long-term solutions, Integrate GEPs into existing management policies and regulations, Mandatory annual Gender Monitoring Report, Establishment of budgetary incentives to Departments and faculties, at local or national levels
Structures	Assign existing structure the responsibility to carry out the activities. Establish a new structure/body. Make both of them accountable	Clear attribution of the activity as a task of a given structures/position; establishment of a (funded) GE Board/Committee, Establishment of a (funded) GE Office; creation of a new position to support the activity;
Resources	Safeguard the allocation of the needed resources, both financial and human, for each activity. Balance internal and external funding sources	Ensuring continuing financial resources for activities and human resources to support to GEPs both by establishing incentives such as freedom from other tasks to already employed staff or by hiring new personnel
Knowledge and expertise	Make sure that the necessary (internal or external) Gender Knowledge in place internally to sustain this activity.	GE knowledge mandatory in job profiles and integrated into leadership training, Gender equality training regularly offered by the RPO, GE Implementation Logbooks
Consensus	Ensure support from internal and external stakeholders from the regional national Research and Innovation ecosystem.	Internal/regional/national interdisciplinary networks or communities, Setting up GE Portals within the RPOs' websites

Additional effort was spent from the side of each RPO on emphasising the internal sustainability aspects of institutional change processes and elaborated a dedicated Sustainability Plan to actively seek for the approval/endorsement of their highest management levels before the

end of the project. This proved to be very useful in the overall process of self-reflection on the impacts and the achievements and to design a strategy to make on the one hand the first initial steps in structural change more stable, and on the other hand to build pre-requisites to further and more transformative changes in the upcoming years. The figure below illustrates the process which was followed to approach sustainability within the project.

Sustainability Plans of each partner RPO were prepared following the guidance/instructions contained in a template which was designed on purpose. It was suggested to:

1. Structure the Plan along the EQUAL-IST Areas of Interventions already in use for the GEPs, and will build on the results of two rounds of implementation.
2. Design it away so to answer two main questions:
   - what actions/measures initiated within EQUAL-IST are foreseen to be continued in the years beyond the project's termination? How will they be sustained?
   - are any new actions/measures going to be established as a result of the EQUAL-IST GEPs? If yes, how will they be sustained?
3. Articulate it along with a 3 years timeframe approximately, although this can be adapted to the specific contexts and circumstances.
4. Frame it by reflecting what the University is actually committed to doing in the next 3 years to continue with gender equality measures
5. Build consensus from the side of the Management level on its content: the ambition as a consortium, was to ideally aim at having each Sustainability Plan approved and signed by the Department and/or the University high management levels.

Figure 1 EQUAL-IST steps toward sustainability

3   EQUAL-IST Sustainability Plans Overview

All the six (6) EQUAL-IST Sustainability Plans were elaborated with the full involvement of the GEP Working Groups in an iterative process of different meetings/rounds of discussions; in some cases, further specific meetings were organised with the main stakeholders involved in the implementation of specific actions.

The table below illustrates how in almost all RPOs an expansion process featured the Gender Equality policies along the 2 GEPs iterations and also thanks to the design of Sustainability Plans: while at the beginning of the project most of the actions included in the first design and the first version of the GEPs were focusing on the Unit or Departments levels, the majority of actions kept in the Sustainability Plans are implemented at the Faculty or the whole University levels. Still, this dynamic did not appear as related to factors such as equality policies being already existing and functioning at the central level. The diagram below shows how the scope level was distributed between the different RPOs: "higher level" approaches are prevailing: they correspond to actions taking place at the entire university level for UMINHO, UNIMORE, and KHNUE, and at Faculty or School levels for WWU and KTU.
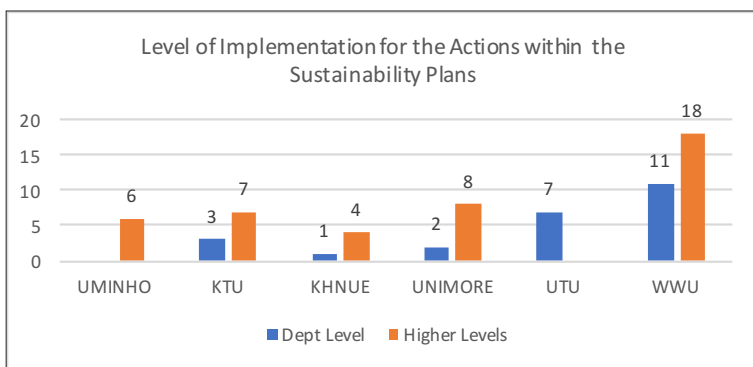
Further elements which proved to be of key importance for the Sustainability Plans' design are to be highlighted, such as:
- include/embed the EQUAL-IST GEP Actions into strategic Documents on EQUALITY at the University Level (achieved at Unimore; foreseen at UTU)
- leverage on existing policy documents/rules and regulations to enhance the sustainability of GEPs (strongly pursued at WWU and UNIMORE)

- having the opportunity of real planning of change-related actions if compared to the initial GEP design phases, when most efforts had to be put on raising the awareness and overcoming resistances.

To understand whether a significant shift occurred along the project life-cycle in terms of the contents and type of actions included in the Plans, we compared the aggregated results from the 1st GEP iteration with (Sangiuliano, Canali, Gorbacheva 2019) divided by area of intervention, with a count of the actions included in the Sustainability Plans of all RPOs. The two pie-charts below illustrate how a substantially similar distribution of actions across the main areas of interventions featured the entire process
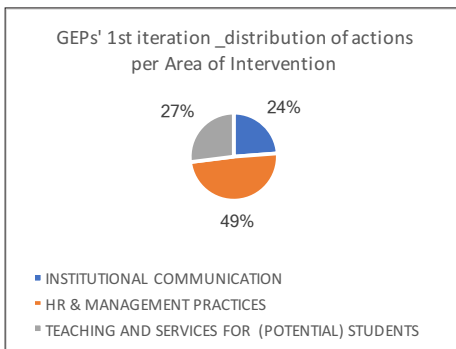

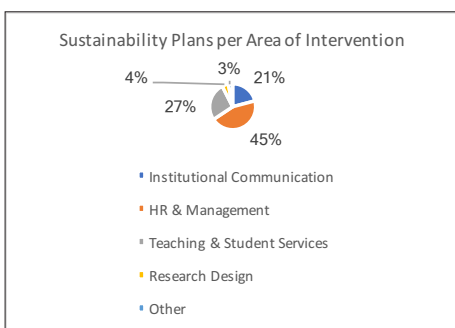Figure 3   EQUAL-IST Results GEPs First Iteration. Distribution of actions per Area of Intervention

Figure 4   EQUAL-IST Sustainability Plans. Distribution of actions per Area of Intervention

HR and Management clearly appears to be as the most populated area in Sustainability Plans as it was the case during the first iteration as well, mainly due to the fact that it is quite a comprehensive one and it includes two different already quite broad domains: Human Resources (including staff recruitment, retainment and career progression, and well-being/work-life balance) and Governance (entailing functioning of internal structures/bodies involved in consultations and/or strategic policy design and approval; gender equality machineries; inter-institutional agreements and framework protocols). We can also notice some minor progress in respect to the Research Design Area of Intervention: this proved to represent a difficult issue to be tackled for all RPOs, and in fact, no actions were foreseen during the 1st GEPs iteration. During the course of the GEP's firt iteration, the need and importance for specific actions aimed at embedding a gender perspective in ICT/IST research design and content was stressed in different occasions at the consortium level and an additional specific support action was delivered in the form of a dedicate webinar: as a consequence a few partners (UNIMORE and UMINHO) managed to initiate dedicated actions along the second GEP's iteration and to stabilize them in their Sustainability Plans. The Teaching and Students' Services and Institutional Communication areas of intervention remained relatively stable.

4 Evidence of Impacts

A set of suggestions was drawn on how to make GEPs sustainable relying on the experience of our partners and exploring sustainability along the five main dimensions presented in figure 1, with a cross-cutting approach to all possible areas of interventions. When reflectively elaborating our experience transferring it to other institutions, we refer to the following type of stakeholders:

- RPOs which have already set up Gender Equality Plans and Gender policies, still being at an initial stage of development
- Partners of new or ongoing H2020 projects on institutional change for gender in research.

A few overall considerations can be shared in the first place. In terms of the process to follow for achieving sustainable institutional change, lessons learned from the EQUAL-IST experience point at the importance of using bottom-up participatory methodologies jointly and in parallel with an iterative top-down series of consultations and discussions. It is very important to get the active engagement of those stakeholders and people who will play a role in the execution of each action foreseen in the Sustainability Plan.

Looking retrospectively at the steps already taken within the project, we learnt how the available time for internal negotiations on

discussing and agreeing on the GEPs Sustainability Plan was found quite limited by partners. Ideally, the process should start at an earlier stage, as soon as the results of monitoring from a first pilot iteration are available, in order to hold an evidence-based analysis and discussion with internal stakeholders. One possibility is, as WWU did, to include a dedicated Action on building sustainability in the initial GEP and/or in its redesigned version GEPs already, or in the design of the specific measure/action, in cases where there is not an umbrella type of policy such as a Plan in place. This would allow to formally address the issue either within meetings and events, or through other forms of consultation and action-research.

More specific suggestions refer to the 5 sustainability dimensions highlighted above **[tab. 4]**, as follows.

Rules and Procedures

Existing rules and regulations as well as strategic documents at the university-wide or School level, can be both leveraged and made more effective, if already favourable to gender equality, or changed and integrated so that they include a reference to gender equalityor specific measures, depending on the nature of the document.

Within the EQUAL-IST project, working procedures both at the administrative and academic levels were possible to be changed for some of the partners, jointly to the regulations that shape their routines and processes. All partners succeeded in changing data collection methods, procedures and tools to enable gender-disaggregated data collection permanently.

Structures

New structures, offices, units are created and assigned specific tasks and responsibilities in terms of gender equality. This can both happen by setting up institutional so-called gender equality bodies or machineries or by integrating already existing structures with new assignments related to gender equality. The first option implies a risk of 'isolation' of GE machineries and policies, while the second might lead to a lack of visibility or reduced prioritisation. Both have positive implications for sustainability as they incorporate an entity in charge of equality and accountable within the RPO's Organizational Chart. In EQUAL-IST, for example:
- KHNUE and KTU have created new commissions in charge of gender equality, the former with a more specific focus and responsibilities in tackling concrete harassment/discrimination cases.

- UNIMORE has set up a new dedicated working group in charge of supporting the continuation of the EQUAL-IST action within the existing Committee on Equality matters, which each University and Public Administration Body is obliged to set up based on Italian national law.
- UMINHO has included in its Sustainability Plan expanding the tasks of an existing Inclusion Office in order to attribute a new responsibility on gender equality
- WWU has succeeded in making the operations of its already existing Equality machinery more effective and impactful both at the School and Department levels, in a context where Universities are bound by national regulations to have Gender Equality Plans in place even though implementation is not always effective at lower (Department) levels.

Knowledge and Expertise

Create, nurture and transfer knowledge and expertise is key to sustainability. It relates both to knowledge and skills in change management and gender policies in particular. To this respect, training, capacity building, mutual learning and Communities of Practices are all extremely important tools. For all partners, the EQUAL-IST project itself played a knowledge transfer and capacity building role, enabling each institution either to build gender and change management expertise and/or to increase and further develop it. At the project level, different face to face and online sessions were held both presenting and discussing good practices on structural and institutional change from the beginning and along with the two implementation iterations. In addition to that, a highly participatory capacity building session was dedicated to training RPOs members on the Participatory Gender Audit methodology, and at the same time to customise it and refine it. Overall, five face to face training days were proposed, and five online webinars. Following this, further internal training sessions were organised at each RPOs. On the same note, EQUAL-IST worked as a 'Community of Practices' making several mutual learning mechanisms and tools operational along the project life-cycle. All Project meetings were functioning as opportunities to share and discuss good practices and challenges in the different phases.

Knowledge and expertise on how gender is relevant to ICT/IST research design and research content are not developed enough, and special efforts are needed to achieve sustainable change in this particular area: additional investment in specific capacity building and awareness-raising are needed.

- UNIMORE created an internal transdisciplinary working group/network of researchers on Gender in Research content and de-

sign promoted by the University Research Office and network-ing among all researchers with knowledge of gender issues and those with interest in developing it. Whereas

- UMINHO has set up a dedicated EQUALITECH annual confer-ence to continue along the years and to increase internal ca-pacities on the topics at stake.

Resources

Multiple strategies need to be put in place to allocate human and fi-nancial resources for the sustainability of GEPs, in times of shrink-ing funds and increased academic competition globally. The emerg-ing model points at a mixed approach based on three levers: relying on internal staff with formal approval from management to incorpo-rate gender-related tasks to their working hours, safeguarding addi-tional basic funds for activities and actively fundraising from local/national stakeholders or by applying to calls for proposals for more ambitious projects.

The issue of making financial and human resources available for gender equality policies needs to be framed in the broader context of a continued austerity and economic stagnation in the EU, leading to shrinking available resources to Universities particularly and state-owned research institutions, along with an increased competition at the global level calling for greater efficiency in resources' allocation. The present scenario is posing some limitations, although it opens up to a proactive fund-raising approach based on collaboration with ex-ternal actors and the local/national innovation ecosystems and/or ap-plying to calls for proposals at various levels. Therefore, in the tran-sition from an EU funded project to the next phase, there is a high risk to experience a significant gap: RPOs are endangered to shift from a starting/piloting period featured by the possibility of having dedicated staff in charge of gender equality issues and resources to organize activities to an after-project time with reduced or near-to-zero resources. Paradoxically, this might happen precisely in a mo-ment when the institution would be ready to push toward even more ambitious steps to achieve gender equality.

The resources' dimension for sustainability is for sure one of the most critical ones for EQUAL-IST partners as well, as in the RPOs' Sustainability Plans the prevailing approach is clearly to rely on in-ternal personnel for carrying out the foreseen actions on Gender Equality. On one side this is to be seen as a feature of a gender main-streaming approach, and it is sustained by the fact that the persons (to be) in charge and their supervisors/managers have been consult-ed and agreed on the additional tasks to be performed. On the other hand, the risk of over-burdening a limited pool of committed people

has to be taken into account, especially if, as it is often the case, they happen to be women researchers whose scientific productivity could be paradoxically hindered precisely by their commitment to equality.

Consensus

Consensus building on the the University/RPO continuing to promote gender equality policies proactively needs to be a constant endeavour, and it is strictly related to communication. Indeed, making the facts and figures about gender inequalities in the institution visible; communicating monitoring results on the actions that have been taken to clearly show what works; using multiple arguments and discursive incentives to convince as many stakeholders as possible, are all core elements of achieving enlarged institutional consensus. An additional yet important trigger for building consensus from managers in particular, on which more research and practice would be needed, is to use gender equality a way to raise the profile and position the institution towards external stakeholders in the relevant innovation ecosystems (at the local, regional, national or global scale): several of the EQUAL-IST partners have experimented at this level, and with positive outcomes, RPOs from Portugal, Italy and Ukraine in particular

Within the EQUAL-IST consortium, all partners have set gender-disaggregated data collection and gender analysis as continued efforts which will feature their Sustainability Plans. Having changed methods and tools for data collection to make them gender sensitive, is actually one of the solid achievements of the 2 EQUAL-IST iterations.

5 Conclusions and Future Work

EQUAL-IST has moved beyond the state of the art with its robust approach of participatory co-design of GEPs. The added value was to deliver new knowledge at fostering permanent institutional changes through the sustainability of the implemented GEPs. The project contributed to the achievement of ERA objectives by preparing the ground set in real action GEP in IST/ICT RPOs that involve more female researchers helping to the advancement of their careers, involving them in decision making and governance structures, improving their working conditions and attracting more women in the IST sector.

In order to maximise the project impact, a dedicated sustainability plan was developed at each organization, to ensure the optimal use and institutionalisation of EQUAL-IST results and for ensuring that the GEPs design processes and implementation will be expand-

ed from the Department-Faculty Levels to the whole Academic Institution. All RPOs have been motivated to embed the gender equality measures in their routine processes, procedures, administrative and strategic documents, to enhance institutional changes. All RPOs designed their sustainability plans and presented them to the highest management level, who finally expressed their interest and confirmation to commit to the Gender Equality Sustainability Plans and the related actions and measures, for the next two years at least.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

WWU	Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (DE)
UTU	Turun Yliopisto- University of Turku (FI)
UNIMORE	Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia (IT)
KHNUE	Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics (Ukraine)
KTU	Kanunas University of Technology (LT)
UMINHO	Universidad do Minho (PT)

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