



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

Regendering Science. For an inclusive research environment

PLOTINA Final Conference  
BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



Promoting gender balance and inclusion  
in research, innovation and training



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# **Towards a European GEP System (EGEPS): a strategy to measure and promote gender equality**

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## **Aims of the contribution**

This paper links the measurement of gender equality in academe to the fundamental rights of EU citizens: to move freely, live, work and study in any EU state. Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) could provide a useful comparable tool among higher education institutions if data requirements were harmonised, using a standard template. This would allow evaluation and strategic planning at international level to promote gender equality. The resulting European GEP System (EGEPS), would accelerate the process toward gender equality and facilitate researchers and students in their choice to work/study at institutions across the EU.

## **Description of the research**

### **Introduction**

The EU has been promoting the implementation of gender equality plans in research performing organisations (RPO) for almost two decades and higher education institutions are engaged in creating and implementing GEPs. Despite the numerous dissemination and exploitation activities connecting past and current EU funded projects, the learning and training material available through the outputs of previous projects and the support offered by the EU and EIGE, each project establishes a specific way to create a GEP. All institutional GEPs are similar in their aims, but their structure and contents differ. This hinders the possibility of evaluating and using GEP data at EU and even national level.

Ireland has adopted the Athena Swan Charter (AS) to promote gender equality in the academic sector to promote good employment practices in higher education. The Higher Education Authority the Athena SWAN award a requirement for institutional and research funding. In Italy, the law 183/2010 established the creation of Unique Guarantee Committee for Equal Opportunities in Public Administrations for workers' wellbeing and against discriminations (CUG - Comitati unici di garanzia per le pari opportunità, la valorizzazione del benessere di chi lavora e contro le discriminazioni). Public Administrations (and therefore Universities) must adopt a Positive Action Plan (PAP). The plan lasts three years and must assure the removal of all obstacles hindering equal opportunities at work between men and women. Attempts have been made to confront PAPs at national level (Galizzi and Siboni, 2016).

### **Materials and methods**

The presentation draws upon experience of three EU funded Projects. INTEGER (FP7) and SAGE (H2020), in which the Trinity College Dublin acted as a partner/coordinator. An INTEGER (now SAGE) Wheel model was produced to support the implementation of institutional GEPs around four main themes: career progression; work-life balance; institutional governance and engendering knowledge, underpinned by the collection of gender-disaggregated data. FIAGES (MSCA H2020), a Project promoting gender equality in Higher Education through an in depth knowledge of pros and cons of different strategies.

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Other primary data were collected in Ireland on Athena SWAN and in Italy on the national association of the equality bodies – CUGs for Italian Universities. In addition, desk research through the collection and analysis of scientific literature, legislative documents, EU gender equality projects on GEPs, websites and other materials, was conducted. These data allowed a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between the Italian and Irish initiatives (Bencivenga, 2019) and contributed to the general debate about GEP implementation (Drew, Bencivenga, Ratzer, Poggio and Sağlam, 2018).

GEP-related data were examined through the lenses of two initiatives: the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS); and the Functional Independence Measure (FIM) System. ECTS is an essential element of the Bologna process to help international students make the most of their study abroad. The FIM is a measurement tool that explores an individual's physical, psychological and social function (Linacre et al., 1994). The FIM System® includes a centralised database and statistic service, allowing organisations to understand the quality of health services offered and improve them in case the comparison shows levels lower than the average.

## Results

The EU attaches increasing importance to the free movement of citizens, including opportunities for training and education. The internationalisation of the academic sector is one of the key priorities assigned to Higher Education institutions. In addition to Horizon 2020, other EU programs such as ERASMUS+, the European programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, stimulate the mobility of students, researchers and teachers. There is increasing recognition of the difficulties related to gender issues experienced by undergraduate, graduate, doctoral students and researchers (Murgia and Poggio, 2018). Such students/research staff would benefit from access to an open and transparent system that demonstrated the degree of commitment to gender equality, through GEPs, in host institutions. This would require the harmonisation of GEPs to allow cross institutional comparisons to be undertaken, similar to the European Credit Transfer System. The FIM System® demonstrates the advantages of comparing institutional results nationally and internationally. A European GEP System (EGEPS) could become a standard for comparing the level of gender equality in higher education across the European Union and other collaborating countries. It could stimulate, as a virtuous circle, the path towards gender equality.

## Conclusions

The principles of gender equality are embedded in the EU treaties and Member States are progressing at different speeds. In all countries, gender inequality is being addressed to some degree in the academic sector. However, what is lacking is the harmonisation of terminology, tools and measures that would allow the academic sector to benchmark, exchange experience and reflect collaboratively on the future challenges. The pooling and engagement of expertise and experience for GEPs would accelerate the process toward a harmonised and integrated European GEP System (EGEPS) with a common goal, while respecting cultural and social diversity.

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