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gender equality to unlock
research potential

D6.7 Policy brief for feedback to the European Commission - 1

Project Acronym: ATHENA

Title: IMPLEMENTING GENDER EQUALITY PLANS TO UNLOCK RESEARCH POTENTIAL OF RPOS AND RFOS IN EUROPE

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[1] PU= Public, CO=Confidential, only for members of the Consortium (including the Commission Services), CL=Classified, as referred in Commission Decision 2001/844/EC

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

D	Deliverable
ERA	European Research Area
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
GE	Gender equality
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
R+D+I	Research, Development and Innovation
R&I	Research and Innovation
RFO	Research Funding Organisation
RPO	Research Performing Organisation
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
WP	Work Package

Executive summary

The sustainability strategy aims to ensure the sustainability of the Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) developed within the ATHENA project and investigate the potential for their further deployment at larger scale.

This project consortium has executed different tasks in this field, and the aim of this document is to provide feedback to the European Commission on the project advances and related policy recommendations. It will aim to report the achievements reached so far under WP6 for sustainability and provide an update of the project progression on the set-up, implementation, and monitoring of GEPs under WP4 and WP5. Based on these activities, preliminary project recommendations have been drafted for the current deliverable and will be fine-tuned in the next version.

The deliverable is composed of the following sections:
- Progress on GEPs
  - Initial GEP implementation and monitoring results
- Progress on sustainability strategy for replication
  - Database of Stakeholders
  - Workshops report 1
  - ATHENA e-platform for action
  - EURAXESS webinar
- Policy recommendations.

These topics form the structure of this report. These outcomes have been achieved thanks to the efforts of all ATHENA project partners:

P1. CE	Consulta Europa Projects Projects and Innovation (Canary Islands, Spain)
P2. JSI	Institut Jozef Stefan (Slovenia)
P3. UJK	Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego W Kielcach (Poland)
P4. UB	Universitatea Din Bucuresti (Romenia)
P5. ULPGC	Universidad De Las Palmas De Gran Canaria (Canary Islands, Spain)
P6. IRPPS (CNR)	Consiglio Nazionale Delle Ricerche (Italy)
P7. UVSK SAV	Ustav Vyskumu Socialnej Komunikacie Slovenskej Akademie Vied (Slovakia)
P8. URAK	University Of Ruse Angel Kanchev (Bulgaria)
P9. GOBCAN	Gobierno De Canarias (Canary Islands, Spain)
P10. FRCT	Fundo Regional da Ciência e Tecnologia (Azores, Portugal)

In 2024 a second "Policy brief" will be prepared to give a summary of the entire project work of the ATHENA consortium in the field of preparation of activities for sustainable application of the GEPs.

1. Progress on GEPs

During the first year of the project, the ATHENA partners embarked on the process of selecting indicators for their Gender Equality Plans. The development of all GEPs followed a standardised project approach, which involved defining common targets that had to be incorporated by the participating ATHENA institutions within their individual plans. This approach, outlined in document *D4.2 - Gender and Diversity Standards*, was based on the requirements and recommendations provided in the Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans from the EC.

To ensure successful implementation, comprehensive training was provided to both the partners and the GEPI committee, responsible for the design and implementation of the GEPs. In June 2022, deliverable D4.4 - Gender Equality Plans, was submitted, providing a detailed presentation of each GEP.

Institutional approval for the ATHENA GEPs was obtained in January 2023, marking a significant milestone. Currently, the project is in the implementation phase, with the partners actively involved in the ongoing efforts of implementation and monitoring. Also, all partners have uploaded their GEPs in a way to be easy accessible.

The development of the GEP by the ATHENA partners is a fundamental step towards the establishment of long-time conditions for equal opportunities in the science. The GEP is a strategic document and selected strategic stakeholders are expected to learn about it.

1.1 Detailed progress of each GEP

P2 – Institut Jozef Stefan (JSI, Slovenia):

Before the ATHENA project, JSI did not have a systematic approach to gender equality. However, with the introduction of the project and the development of their Gender Equality Plan, JSI has taken significant steps towards fostering gender equality within their organization. Their GEP received formal approval in October 2022.Throughout the implementation process, the main challenge JSI has encountered is related to disaggregated data collection.

More information on JSI Gender Equality Plan can be found in following links:
https://www.ijs.si/ijsw/EnakostSpolov?action=AttachFile&do=get&target=20221020slo.pdf
https://www.ijs.si/ijsw/EnakostSpolov?action=AttachFile&do=get&target=20221020.pdf

P3 – Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego W Kielcach (UJK, Poland)

The UJK Gender Equality Plan received formal approval in March 2022. In terms of progress, a majority of the planned activities for 2022 have been successfully implemented. However, there are still three actions that have yet to commence, primarily due to their connection with the Labour Law. UJK remains committed to initiating these actions as part of their ongoing implementation efforts..

More information on UJK Gender Equality Plan can be found in following link: https://ujk.edu.pl/plan_rownosci_plci.html

P4 – Universitatea Din Bucuresti (UB, Romania)

The UB Gender Equality Plan includes eight areas of interventions and obtained formal approval in April 2022. Establishment of an official location within the UB organigram for the implementation, delivery of various tailored training, launching of an interdisciplinary platform on GS as part of the University Research institute, promotion of the project, enlargement of the stakeholder data base are among the activities already implemented. Shortage of human and financial resources and limited involvement of the GEPI committee members (due to busy schedules) have been challenging aspects.

More information on UB Gender Equality Plan can be found in following link: https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/mobile/folders/1bDghYbleAa07TGEMalUmWnGNHMHDTjhN?usp=sharing
Dedicated website: https://gep.unibuc.ro

P5 – Universidad De Las Palmas De Gran Canaria (ULPGC, Canary Islands, Spain)

ULPGC's Gender Equality Plan was approved in July 2022. The implementation of the GEP has included actions such as disseminating the plan among the university community and coordinating with responsible agents. Key activities carried out so far include workshops on gender equality and research, training to raise awareness, integrating a gender perspective into research, and raising awareness about gender-based violence against women. During the implementation process, ULPGC has identified the need to strengthen coordination with responsible agents and regularly review the measures.

More information on ULPGC Gender Equality Plan can be found in following link: https://www.ulpgc.es/sites/default/files/ArchivosULPGC/igualdad/ii_plan_de_igualdad_ulpgc_28-07-2022.pdf

P7 – Ustav Vyskumu Socialnej Komunikacie Slovenskej Akademie Vied (UVSK SAV, Slovakia)

The UVSK SAV Gender Equality Plan obtained its first formal approval in December 2021. The updated version of the plan was then approved in December 2022. The implementation of the GEP has encountered several challenges, including a lack of clear coordination, limited personnel and time resources, and institutional resistance. Despite those challenges, the most notable success in the implementation of the GEP is the inclusion of several balance schemes for researchers facilitating return after parental leave.

More information on UVSK SAV Gender Equality Plan can be found in following link: https://www.sav.sk/?lang=sk&doc=sas-gender

P8 – University Of Ruse Angel Kanchev (URAK, Bulgaria)

The URAK Gender Equality Plan was approved in May 2022. The main challenges faced include busy schedules and a prevailing acceptance of the existing high level of gender equality mentality at URAK. To overcome these challenges, it is important to present the advantages of the GEP tailored to the institution's needs and combine dissemination events with other activities to reach a larger audience.

More information on URAK Gender Equality Plan can be found in following link https://www.uni-ruse.bg/Directorates/NIS/Documents/GEP-URAK-Proekt-approved-17-05-2022.pdf

P9 – Gobierno De Canarias (GOBCAN, Canary Islands, Spain)

In 2021, GOBCAN conducted a diagnostic process to identify current legislation, existing measures, and proposals for improving gender equality institutionalisation within the organisation. In early 2022, indicators from the ATHENA project were updated, and online meetings were held to prepare the Gender Equality Plan. On June 2022, ACIISI organized a workshop with the quadruple helix community to present the draft GEP and gather feedback. Finally, the GEP was officially approved in December 2022.

More information on GOBCAN Gender Equality Plan can be found in the following link:
https://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/cmsweb/export/sites/conocimiento/galerias/doc/ATHENA-Plan-de-Igualdad-de-Genero-ACIISI-Firmado.pdf

www.athenaequality.eu

P10 – Fundo Regional da Ciência e Tecnologia (FRCT, Açores, Portugal)

The FRCT Gender Equality Plan was approved in September 2022. Progress has been made in implementing key actions, including raising awareness for GEP in regional entities, supporting their development using ATHENA's practices, and coordinating efforts with regional authorities. Efforts have also been made to adopt more inclusive language, improve flexible working schedules, and raise awareness of gender discrimination. However, challenges remain that can only be overcome with the adoption of specific measures in terms of the legal framework.

More information on FRCT Gender Equality Plan can be found in following link: https://portal.azores.gov.pt/documents/37201/0/Plano+para+a+Igualdade+de+Género+do+FRCT.pdf/75cf2984-9582-c3ac-ef24-498e45998113?t=1667565116213

2.Progress on sustainability strategy

Sustainability strategy in ATHENA is developed through WP6 activities. This Work Package aims at ensuring the sustainability of the GEPs within the project and investigate the potential for their further deployment at larger scale. Such a strategy is based on the identification and engagement of key stakeholders at regional/ national and European level as well as on the development of replicable tools (e.g., e-platform) and actions (e.g., dedicated workshops) to share project results and facilitate their adoption and replication at a wider level. A summary of the main outcomes achieved so far under WP6 is provided below. The learnings emerged from these activities feed the development of the first version of policy recommendations in Section 3 of the present deliverable.

2.1 Stakeholders' database and engagement

Under Task 6.1 "Stakeholder identification and involvement", deliverable 6.1 "Database of Stakeholders" was produced as a first step in the ATHENA WP6 sustainability strategy. Its main objective is to collect data related to the stakeholder that can be engaged in ATHENA for dissemination and exploitation purposes, organising them in a database. The database has been and will be periodically updated during the project life. The access to the Database is restricted and only the project members are eligible to reach it.

At the proposal stage, the ATHENA consortium already carried out an overall stakeholder analysis, identifying key networks and organisations to which they will disseminate project activities and results. A deep analysis complemented the list of already identified networks and organisations under Task 6.1.

Under Task 6.2 "Stakeholder engagement at local level", partners have worked on the engagement process of the identified stakeholders not only at European/international level but also nationally and locally. This activity therefore deals with contacting each potential organisation, setting out the terms of reference for ATHENA activities and the expectations for the organisation in terms of onward dissemination and response requirements. The engaged stakeholders are already involved in actions aiming to guarantee the sustainability of GEPs during the project life and after the end of the ATHENA activities.

For updating the database partners have been sending proper invitation letters to the stakeholders and a template containing the informed consent asking for an explicit request of consensus for collecting personal data from the primary and secondary contact from each organisation. Another way to attract stakeholders has been realised during dissemination and other project events – then some of the participants agree their data to be uploaded in the database.

Each partner of the ATHENA project, when uploading data, confirms that the primary and secondary person (optional) included in the database: i) reached the age of legal majority in their jurisdiction, ii) understood that their inclusion within the ATHENA database is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time, iii) they agree that they have received adequate information about their inclusion in the database, iv) they confirmed that understand, agree, and are willing to be included as contacts in the database.

The ATHENA project aims to engage different types of stakeholders in the framework of the Quadruple Helix. More in detail, ATHENA considers:

1) Academia & Research: University, Research Performing Organisation, Research Funding Organisation, Sister project,

2) Government & public sector: local/ regional /national authorities (Policymakers),

3) Industry & business: STEM-related companies, start-up incubators, etc.,

4) Civil society: (Women's) NGOs, Networks, Sister project, Association of women.

These representatives are used to elaborate the types of stakeholders to be included in the ATHENA database and the structure of the Stakeholders database. The database of stakeholders is a tool that will be used and populated during all the project life. The database has been organised using EU Survey, and the ATHENA consortium can add new stakeholders at any time. As of now, the database already contains more than 120 stakeholders.

2.2 Workshops

Another action of the ATHENA sustainability strategy relates to the organisation of workshops. In this sense, deliverable 6.2 "Workshops report 1" was produced and submitted to the European Commission.

As eight GEPs have been developed in ATHENA by the involved eight project partners, eight local workshops with strategic stakeholders have been promoted under Task 6.2. Each workshop has been an open public event for interested stakeholders, such as professors, researchers, public authorities, etc. identified in the database (D6.1).

The purposes of these workshops have been to present to the stakeholders the barriers and challenges and the solutions to overcome those encountered during the development of the GEPs and the activities that will be implemented thanks to the adoption of the GEPs. Thus the stakeholders from the database (D6.1) have been involved in the further replication of the gender equity achievements under the ATHENA project to other appropriate communities.

The duration of these workshops have been between 1 hour and 2 hours. The speakers/moderators have been representatives of ATHENA project, who have been involved in the development of the GEPs. The venue was in: face-to-face format, virtual format or hybrid format, as described in Table 1.

Table 1. General descriptions of the workshops at D6.2 under Task 6.2

Partner organization	Date of the Workshop 1 under Task 6.2	Number of stakeholders	Typology of event
P2 – Institut Jozef Stefan (JSI, Slovenia)	15.09.2022	49	Hybrid
P3 – Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego W Kielcach (UJK, Poland)	28.06.2022 17.10.2022	7 15	Virtual Virtual
P4 – Universitatea Din Bucuresti (UB, Romania)	25.10.2022	34	Virtual
P5 – Universidad De Las Palmas De Gran Canaria (ULPGC, Canary Islands, Spain)	27.10.2022	38	Hybrid
P7 – Ustav Vyskumu Socialnej Komunikacie Slovenskej Akademie Vied (UVSK SAV, Slovakia)	28.03.2022	65	Virtual
P8 – University Of Ruse Angel Kanchev (URAK, Bulgaria)	10.06.2022	43	Face-to-face
P9 – Gobierno De Canarias (GOBCAN, Canary Islands, Spain)	16.06.2022	31	Hybrid
P10 – Fundo Regional da Ciência e Tecnologia (FRCT, Açores, Portugal)	29.09.2022	34	Virtual
Total participants:		**305**	

We consider Workshop 1 under Task 6.2 as very successful, because of several reasons. One of them is the attendance at the workshops: according to the project description at least 20 stakeholders are expected to participate each event, which means at least 180 for the entire consortium. As shown in Table 1 the project has managed to involve 305. The overall attendance almost doubled the consortium's expectation. In the case of Ruse University – the Minister of Education of Bulgaria was among the participants, too.

In 2024 a second Workshop round will be organized to showcase the results emerged from the medium-term implementation of GEPs and demonstrate how promoting gender equality can unlock research potential, boosting the performance of the organizations and unlocking the research potential.

2.3 ATHENA e-platform for action

The ATHENA e-platform for action (hereinafter referred to as e-platform) is a central means for project sustainability activities, embedded on the project website (www.athenaequality.eu), to publicly share the project material, advances and results. Specifically, the e-platform includes tools that contribute to achieve gender equality in science and research by:

- Sharing the material developed by the project, like the trainings that have been carried out so far and further trainings and webinars that will be implemented throughout the project.
- Supporting the visibility of women researchers and communicating their achievements (open-source database/compendium of women researchers at EU level).
- Providing a toolkit with an array of tools and resources that may assist project institutions with examples, guidance and inspiration useful for tailoring their institutional plans (ATHENA Toolkit).
- Facilitating the exchange of experiences and information in the field of gender equality in research and innovation and more specifically in the development and implementation of organisational GEPs (Community which includes a Q&A interactive forum).

The ATHENA e-platform is structured in the following pages/sections:

- Trainings.
- Women researchers.
- ATHENA Toolkit.
- Community.
- GEP Vision tool.

The ATHENA e-platform will be constantly updated with new material and tools as the project progress. The women researcher's database and the Toolkit will be continuously populated and efforts will be put in place to keep the forum active throughout the project duration. The GEPVISION tool for reporting on the GEP monitoring has been embedded into the platform for restricted use by partners. In the next months, when more data is collected upon GEP progress, aggregated statistics and updates will be publicly uploaded on the platform for external users' consultation. Overall, the e-platform will be kept online throughout the project lifespan and for at least two years after the project has finished.

2.4 EURAXESS webinar

The ATHENA consortium has successfully executed the Task 6.5 Establishing synergies with the EURAXESS initiative and network. The related deliverable is entitled "EURAXESS Webinar", submitted in 2022 to the European Commission.

One of the ATHENA tasks foresees the establishment of synergies and connections with the EURAXESS initiative. These synergies have entailed the organization of a webinar, entitled 'Gender equality and researchers' mobility – Synergies form EURAXESS initiative' to 1) present the EURAXESS network, and more specifically their two initiatives for researchers: the Charter & Code (C&C) and the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R); 2) jointly discuss on the relevance of gender equality measures as element of attractiveness for researchers and to engage them in a mobility experience.

The EURAXESS Webinar took place on 20 June 2022 online. Within the ATHENA project, specific efforts have been dedicated to establishing a communication and dissemination partnership with EURAXESS. During the event, named 'Gender equality and researchers' mobility – Synergies form EURAXESS initiative', the EURAXESS initiative and network were introduced and the areas for collaboration between EURAXESS and ATHENA were discussed. Moreover, the Charter & Code (C&C), the two documents established within this initiative, as well as the HRS4R have been a topic of discussion, in particular focusing on how these could inform the design of tailored GEPs within the project, especially when it comes to gender non-discrimination and work life balance measures.

The objective of the event was to highlight existing and potential synergies between the services of EURAXESS and the implementation of gender equality plans in the ATHENA project and eventually the sister project MINDtheGEPs. The relevance of gender equality measures were discussed as element of attractiveness to attract researchers and for researchers engaging in a mobility experience.

Key external speakers were contacted and invited to attend the webinar:
- Angela Balzano | MINDtheGEPs coordination team member - University of Turin.
- Slaven Misljencevic | EURAXESS Policy Officer – European Commission.
- Michele Rosa-Clot | HRS4R Portfolio manager – European Commission.

The discussion session was enriched with the participation of:
- Michelle Perello, ATHENA Coordinator,
- Ivana Radonova, ATHENA Advisory Board member from the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria,
- Mark de Vos, EURAXESS Bridge Head for Denmark.

Originally, it was planned to attract 40 participants, but the consortium has managed to have over 50 attendees from 16 countries:
- Belgium – 1
- Bulgaria - 11
- Czech Republic – 2
- France – 1
- Great Britain – 1

- Ireland – 2
- Italy – 3
- Philippines - 1
- Poland – 2
- Portugal – 6
- Romania – 2
- Slovakia – 4
- Slovenia – 6
- Spain – 8
- Turkey – 1
- USA – 2

The event was considered successful, not only for the number of participants that attended but also for the content of the presentations and the discussion held at the end of the event. The event topic, the connection between researchers' mobility and the gender equality measures, was somewhat unfamiliar not only to many of the project partners, but also to the other participants. The event was an opportunity to introduce these key topics at the same time as become them familiar with the EURAXESS network, the C&C and the HRS4R.

3. Policy recommendations (v1)

The initial policy recommendations have been formulated, taking into account the collective expertise and achievements of the project consortium thus far. However, these recommendations go beyond the confines of ATHENA itself and are also informed by the valuable lessons learned and best practices identified in sister projects such as SPEAR, CALIPER, GENDERACTION, and LeTSGEPs. These target: i. European and national policy makers and practitioners working in Research and Innovation (R&I) sector and ii. Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) providing them with the knowledge and experience gained so far throughout the ATHENA project and more specifically with tips on the design and implementation of inclusive GEPs.

The present chapter aims at guiding European and national practitioners and policy makers on promoting gender dimension in the scientific context and supporting a greater implementation of inclusive GEPs for gender balance. Additionally, the recommendations include guidance and resources for RPOs and RFOs to develop and execute GEPs that go beyond minimum requirements and that are more tailored and inclusive for the organisations involved. Within ATHENA's time span, two different versions of policy briefs are to be developed under WP6. The present recommendations are the first version in this "series".

3.1 Context

The policy brief can serve as a basic tool to introduce recommendations based on research findings and practical evidence, to a specific audience interested in policy developments under the topics at stake. The policy brief synthesises a large number of details, so the reader can easily understand the heart of the issue, its background, the stakeholders and any recommendations, or even predictions about the future of the issue (Eisele, 2006). Overall, its aim is to raise awareness within the target audience about the urgency of a particular problem that needs to be tackled serving as a 'push for action'.

The first of the policy brief version transfers its knowledge and supports the achievement of structural change by creating a more gender friendly environment. In particular, ATHENA aims at providing practical recommendations to orientate policy makers, practitioners, and research & innovation related institutions.

The primary target audiences are therefore:

- Policy makers and practitioners at EU and national level to facilitate gender equality in R&I for strengthening the environment for women researchers

and valuing the gender dimension in STEM research and innovation policies.

- Staff and management bodies of RPOs and RFOs and more in general public agencies in charge of Gender Equality as well as Higher Education, Research and Innovation at European, national and regional level.

This deliverable can be of practical use for any interested institutions supporting the design and development of their inclusive GEP. In addition, the document can be used as a guide and practical tool for other European consortia aiming at achieving gender-related structural changes.

3.2 Recommendations for EU & national policy makers and practitioners

Strengthen gender equality in the European Research Area (ERA) and Member States' communities and structures as well as innovate gender equality policy implementation in the scientific field.

Advancement towards gender equality have, until now, contributed to changing the way we think about research and innovation but there is still much room for improvement. It is crucial to continue to promote greater awareness in the scientific community and among policy makers on the importance of gender diversity in research teams, evaluation panels and boards as well as on the importance of GEPs in EU Member States' research institutions.

Recommendations

ATHENA recommendations to strengthen gender in R&I across the EU territory include:

Policy Recommendation 1:

Enhance policy provisions by the EU institutions and the Member States for the elimination of barriers faced by women in the research field including:

• Gender balance in decision-making to ensure a balanced number of women and men in leadership roles of RPOs, RFOs, and other R&I and Higher Education related institutions.

• Equal work conditions and work-life balance: women tend to uptake a more active role in the care of their families and frequently this results in fewer possibilities for them for career development. Provisions and policy guidance must be established by governments and EU institutions to drive a systemic change in R&I institutions in this sense. Family reconciliation shall be considered when promoting researchers' careers.

• Any form of gender discrimination and gender-based violence. National common protocols/frameworks shall be envisaged, applied to R&I and Higher Education institutions to better support gender-based violence victims and accompany them in the recovery process to avoid post assault negative experiences that can "revictimize" survivors (Sinko, 2021).

Policy Recommendation 2:

Enhance the integration of the gender dimension in research content of national and EU collaborative projects and research-based initiatives. Prioritise the inclusion of gender perspective across all research areas, with a specific focus on:

• Incorporating gender perspectives in STEM subjects and the development of new innovations and technologies, including artificial intelligence and ICT.

• Addressing societal challenges such as climate change, poverty, and health issues.

Policy Recommendation 3:

Reinforce institutional change through EU/national funding support for GEPs' establishment and implementation, as well as, in general, other actions/projects for gender equality promotion. GEPs have been recognised as an effective gender mainstreaming tool for R&I and Higher Education institutions to tackle the objectives of the ERA via a set of actions implemented along with clear timelines and monitored through specific indicators.

• On one side, the European Commission shall continue to commit and expand its Framework Programmes to finance GEP-based projects.

• On the other side, at national level, governments and ministries shall apply external incentives, e.g., by instructions or missions, or financing to RPOs and RFOs for GEP development and enhancement. In particular, it should be envisaged to provide more external support for less experienced RPOs and RFOs committed to GEPs design and implementation.

Policy Recommendation 4:

Increase commitment by the EU institutions and the Member States to support gender balance at RPOs and RFOs at technical level, by providing guidelines & reference documents for the development and implementation process of GEPs (such as the ATHENA toolkit), thus creating and sharing a common basis of knowledge. The Gear Tool (Eige, 2016) and the recent Guidelines on Gender Equality Plans for Horizon Europe (European Commission, 2021) have achieved a high level of standardisation, also building on the numerous best practices from EU27 RPOs, Member States and Associated Countries that contributed to it. The following implementation process of continuous GEPs refinement and update needs further study and deserves specific guidelines to achieve a truly transformative change in research institutions and prevent the GEPs from being only a "one-time experience".

Policy Recommendation 5:

Provide, at national level, support & helpdesk services as an additional helpful initiative to complement guidelines and toolkits. For instance, national resource centres for gender equality in the research system (e.g., Ministry Units, National Committees) can be established, maintained and/or reinforced to promote gender equality in RPOs and RFOs. The RPOs and RFOs often need help to develop their GEPs, and such national resource centres can play a supporting role.

Policy Recommendation 6:

Strengthen sex/gender analysis methods and develop more detailed key performance indicators on the integration of the sex/gender analysis into research at EU and national level.

• Common European framework schemes shall guide national policy makers in defining and implementing such systems.

• At national level, efforts shall be made to identify a minimum set of gender equality indicators and associated data needed for their calculation in order to allow for the inter-institutional and intra-institutional comparison of gender equality performance over time. The definition of the minimum set of indicators should consider the different character of RPOs and RFOs and the context within which they operate.

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Policy Recommendation 7:

Increase gender training and broad awareness campaigns tailored to policy makers, RPO and RFO management and researchers & scientists at both EU and national levels.

Policy Recommendation 8:

Ensure the active participation of women's organisations and gender equality architecture in co-creation, decision-making and monitoring of gender balance actions and initiatives. Engagement of stakeholders from different Member States shall be encouraged to identify gaps and co-create joint solutions.

Policy Recommendation 9:

Promote international (multilateral and bilateral) synergies and best practice sharing beyond the EU, as well as cooperation between more experienced and less experienced organisations from different Member States.

Strengthen gender equality in current and future European and national financing programmes, particularly Horizon Europe.

The financing programming of the European Commission for 2021-2027 is a financial and strategic plan to support and implement EU policies while providing a guidance framework of reference for Member States. The current EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation for 2021-2027 - Horizon Europe - continues the efforts laid down in the previous funding period under Horizon 2020, which made gender mainstreaming visible and real in the EU scientific policy.

Horizon Europe, launched in 2021, sets gender balance as a crosscutting principle and aims to eliminate gender inequalities and intersecting socioeconomic inequalities throughout R&I systems. The ongoing Horizon Europe has the unique opportunity to take a leading position on gender mainstreaming and integrate salient recommendations pointed out by the

Helsinki Group and in the Evaluation Report on Gender Equality of its programme predecessor Horizon 2020.

Therefore, Horizon Europe and other competitive funding schemes managed by the EU and Member States should not lose this momentum to advance gender equality to make R&I investments shape a more inclusive future based on better science and innovation.

For this reason, from ATHENA experience, a number of recommendations in the context of European and national financing programmes have been put forward.

Recommendations

ATHENA policy tips for better inclusion and visibility of gender equality goals and the gender dimension in R&I content of EU and national financing schemes include:

Policy Recommendation 1:

Ensure gender dimension as a cross-cutting issue in the EU Framework Programmes and other relevant national funding actions.

Policy Recommendation 2:

Integrate gender equality as a specific area of intervention in relevant EU and national funding programmes. An example is Horizon Europe where it is relevant to maintain specific funding lines for gender issues in "Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area", Pillar II "Global Challenges and Industrial Competitiveness" and Pillar III "Innovative Europe" (e.g., European Institute of Technology), as key drivers for better EU science and higher innovation potential. Especially, it shall be continued to fund GEP establishment in research organisations with a focus to Widening countries and countries with lower gender equality indexes.

Policy Recommendation 3:

On a similar note, ensure that crucial gender issues addressing the Sustainable Development Goals and related to key societal challenges like climate change, digital transition, etc are explicitly tackled by relevant financing programmes managed by the European Commission and Member States.

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Policy Recommendation 4:

Reinforce gender balance and gender in research content in the rules of procedure for financing programmes. Likewise, review the formulation and application of the evaluation criteria of funded projects from a gender perspective.

Policy Recommendation 5:

Ensure that gender expertise is included in funded projects' expert groups and research teams, as well as evaluation panels of the different financing programmes.

Policy Recommendation 6:

Ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of gender related aspects of ongoing financing programmes for periodic adjustments as well as for improving future funding schemes.

3.3 Recommendations for RPOs and RFOs

To attain a real change, the RPO and RFO leadership must be committed to - and actively involved in - gender equality in its institutional practices. The organisations must not simply delegate the responsibility of addressing gender equality to a human resource officer or to a minor advisory committee. With such systemic changes, RPOs and RFOs should strive to influence the R&I system towards gender equality and diversity, both by developing policies and fostering cooperation, e.g., by improving the research culture, and by promoting gender equality and diversity in its research funding, including cooperation with other funders.

The organisations should establish a permanent structure (department, task force or similar) to effectively monitor gender equality. The structure should report to, and be supported by, the highest level in the institution, and be given adequate resources.

Building on the ATHENA Toolkit for preparation of customised GEPs (available on the project website), it is recommended to consider the following thematic areas within the GEP:

In the ATHENA Toolkit, specific recommendations and external resources for each thematic area are provided as a step-by-step guidance to support

RPOs/RFOs in their GEP development process. ATHENA has also drafted a compendium of best practices on GEPs providing useful practical examples that are easy to exploit and adapt by R&I institutions engaged in GEP design.
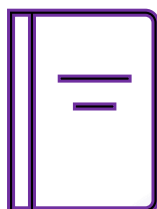
Read more on ATHENA Toolkit

ATHENA GEP best practices compendium

Furthermore, leveraging ATHENA experience, RFOs/RPOs shall also take into account to:

- Perform a comprehensive analysis of the state-of-the-art of the organisation in terms of gender equality and, based on that, set clear goals/targets/key indicators. Assign responsibility and accountability for different envisaged activities.
- Work actively with gender equality through the organisation, starting from the leadership level.
- Conduct awareness-raising activities, facilitate mutual learning, and encourage knowledge sharing with evaluation panels, decision-making bodies, and staff members.
- Provide training to staff, evaluation panels and decision-making bodies, with clear examples and case studies on how to address bias and how to promote gender equality and diversity.
- Follow up and analyse how the goals and targets are met and be prepared for improvements in new editions of the GEP. Systemic change in gender equality within RPOs and RFOs takes time and is a learning process that needs to be monitored, assessed, and fine-tuned in the long term.

Recommendations

Following the previous considerations and preliminary experience in GEP implementation and monitoring, ATHENA puts forward a number of complementary policy recommendations for RPOs and RFOs:

Policy Recommendation 1:

Engage the top management in the RPOs/RFOs GEP's process and apply the principles of transparency and inclusivity to attract the adequate working group membership, while also establishing multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral knowledge exchange for the design and follow-up of the GEP.

Policy Recommendation 2:

Designate a responsible person within the institution for each GEP action. In order to ease the process of implementation and monitoring, each action should clearly identify internally the person in charge of it.

Policy Recommendation 3:

Envisage actions with clear deadlines and key performance indicators to follow and assess the accomplishment of the process is useful to ensure the implementation and application of the new criteria.

Policy Recommendation 4:

Promote a participatory dimension. The participation of stakeholders in the design process of a GEP is crucial and should be activated since the first design phases. Also, during GEP's implementation it can be useful to retrieve feedback on the need of revisions or of new actions to be included in the new editions of the GEP.

Policy Recommendation 5:

Foresee within the GEP measures for the integration of gender budgeting within the wider reporting framework of the institutions. Gender budgeting financial and economic perspectives offer an important awareness on the institution's efficiency in pursuing gender equality and unveil the true political will to follow up on plans and strategies with properly funded initiatives.

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Policy Recommendation 6:

Devote resources to specific training sessions within RPOs and RFOs on gender equality, gender budgeting and gender equality plans. It is essential to have the RPO and RFO's staff motivated, interested and above all well trained on gender issues and on gender budgeting techniques. This recommendation arises from the ATHENA training sessions experience, which has had a positive impact on the degree of awareness on gender equality within the implementing partners organisations.

Policy Recommendation 7:

Envisage more support for less experienced RPOs and RFOs committed to GEPs design and implementation. In the ATHENA experience, having bilateral meetings and mutual learning events to share reflections and experiences between different institutions has been important to strengthen the process of GEPs design and approval. Project teams and GEPI Committees were supported and motivated thanks to the exchange with colleagues from other institutions.

Policy Recommendation 8:

Support GEP implementation by a tailored tool for the "day-by-day" management of the measures. ATHENA has recently designed and started to use a dashboard (GEPVISION) in which each action of the GEP is periodically monitored through indicators. Although at its early stage, this tool seems to be very helpful to give evidence and substance to the implementation process. Such tools can become an integrating part of the GEP and they can further support the transformative change that often stops or slows down significantly after the GEP's approval.

Policy Recommendation 9:

Do not be afraid to recognise points of weakness, defeats encountered or failures suffered in a GEP implementation process. This is essential to support the transformative change for gender equality. This "negative part" is not present in the first GEP's design since it only represents a "positive" starting point. During the following implementation process, pointing out the challenges and how obstacles and delays were faced is of basic importance to adequately support the GEPs' following editions.

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Policy Recommendation 10:

Plan new context analyses that enlarge the focus on new dimensions. During the implementation, new impact indicators or adjustments to the initial version of the GEP can be envisaged e.g., new needs can be revealed through a renewed context analysis that can expand to new dimensions as the working time allocation amongst different activities to measure the distribution of activities that bear a different impact on the career progress.

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Conclusions

The deliverable was the first version of the ATHENA policy brief informing about the progress of the project's GEP activities and sustainability actions and providing initial policy recommendations drawing upon the knowledge generated so far.

The policy brief contains policy recommendations for EU and national policy makers, as well as suggestions and practical advice for RPOs/RFOs in terms of methodology for the development of an inclusive GEP.

As already mentioned, this deliverable is the first out of the two policy briefs that ATHENA will develop. The second deliverable will take into account the results of the whole monitoring and evaluation phase, and it will be submitted by January 2025.

After the approval of each version of the briefings from the European Commission, the content of the briefings will be transferred to appealing templates for their dissemination. The policy briefings may be potentially translated into each project partner's national language, to increase the engagement of the national target audience.

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