Policy Brief
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GENDER ACTION

DISRUPTIVE MEASURES FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

This GENDERACTION Policy Brief presents policy recommendations on disruptive measures for gender equality which we consider necessary to initiate substantive changes in R&I, together with inspiring examples at policy, Research Funding Organisation and Research Performing Organisation levels.

Why we need disruptive measures

Decades of gender equality efforts in European R&I have produced some advancement and valuable changes in Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) as well as at the policy level, but **the speed of change is too slow**. To initiate substantive change for the coming years, **disruptive measures need to be applied both by the European Commission and the Member States through coordinated action**.

The concept of "disruption" has garnered attention in recent years in the STEM field, particularly regarding "disruptive technologies" and "disruptive innovation". We use this concept in the field of gender equality policies to refer to **measures that have the potential to produce significant and bold changes in the status quo in the short to medium term** and with possible impact on the improvement of the working conditions of underrepresented groups in R&I (LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities, people with disability, people with lower socio-economic status, etc.).

Substantive equality is one of the main principles of gender equality policies and a women's right. It means real or de facto equality in opposition to formal equality since mere non-discrimination statements

We argue here that to achieve substantive gender equality in R&I, disruptive measures are required.

in legislation do not lead to substantive equality. First, **the objective of substantive equality gives legitimacy to the need for differential treatment** of social groups that have been subjected to persistent historical discrimination, in this case in the R&I field. Second, **it follows that corrective measures should address existing imbalances**. The "same treatment" approach in the background of the individualistic value system dominant in the R&I precludes a discussion of imbalances in the starting positions as well as structural barriers and biases in the way merit is attributed.

Disruptive measures for Gender Equality in R&I

For the GENDERACTION community, **disruptive measures in the R&I field can take two forms** according to the objective of the measures and the institutional level at which they would be applied:
First, **temporary special measures** aiming at correcting gender imbalances such as women's underrepresentation among research staff but especially in decisionmaking and leadership positions. According to the CEDAW Committee of the UN[1], **temporary special measures are a means to make substantive equality a reality rather than an exception to non-discrimination norms**. These measures aim to correct women's underrepresentation - especially those belonging to vulnerable groups that suffer multiple forms of discrimination – in the different areas of the public domain as well as in the distribution of resources and power between women and men. **These measures are conceived as temporal** since they are expected to be suspended once the desired results have been achieved and sustained for a reasonable period of time. Such special measures would be aimed at reaching a specific, clearly defined objective (read numerical goals achieved within defined time frames). Far from being the exclusive domain of the Public Administrations, they can be voluntarily applied by companies, public and private institutions, and political parties. **It follows that the institutions of the R&I system that can apply temporary special measures include public authorities in R&I, universities, RPOs, RFOs, among others.** This type of disruptive measures can comprise a **double strategy**: 1) quotas for the participation of women or **preferential treatment** in recruitment, promotion and awards in different stages of these processes until the objective is reached; 2) **special programmes or services** for women only such as, inter alia, mentoring programmes with a specific funding line.

Two forms of disruptive measures:

- temporary special measures addressing gender imbalances
- ambitious measures addressing structures

Temporary special measures to increase women's participation in the underrepresented fields and decision-making positions **have proven to be effective** and need to also take into consideration multiple forms of discrimination in an **intersectional perspective**.

Second, **ambitious measures that address formal and informal structures** of

1 | The CEDAW Committee is in charge of the monitoring procedure around the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

research institutions in a way that power relations are changed substantially. Here, GENDERACTION proposes the implementation of measures towards gender-responsive organisations, such as centres of excellence of the future: **horizontal structures, collaborative leadership, staff participation in R&I policies, new politics of time to make the R&I system compatible with care work, among others**. This second modality of disruptive measures is based on **two assumptions**: a) significant changes in R&I institutions have the power to shape the research system overall and research careers in particular; and b) addressing hierarchical structures in R&I and the aggressively competitive model of a research career are also the concern of gender equality policies in the field.

This second modality of disruptive measures will bring a change in the dominant model of the R&I system, hence **they cannot be considered as being temporary**. Finally, because these disruptive measures entail a qualitative change of the system, they will present difficulties in the design and evaluation of measurable objectives.

What disruptive measures are NOT

For clarification purposes and according to the criteria adopted above, it may be useful to give some examples of what GENDERACTION **does not consider to be disruptive**:

- Adopting **documents** on gender equality (declarations, ethical codes, gender equality plans, protocols on sexual harassment…)
- Developing **gender equality structures** (gender equality commissions, gender equality units…) in research institutions
- Organising **trainings and events** on gender equality as well as publications to make women scientists visible
- **Work-life balance measures** such as flexible hours and care facilities
- **Sex/gender analysis in research content** as an evaluation criterion in research calls

We do not intend to claim that these measures are not part of structural changes or that they are not crucial to advancing gender equality. While they do not have the disruptive potential of producing tangible changes in the short term, all these measures and others tailored to each organisation are the basis for professional gender equality policies and thus provide sustainability to the effects expected through disruptive measures.

Examples to get inspiration

Temporary special measures are not new. **There is a long tradition of positive action measures in the education field to promote women and minority group representation in many countries.** Different institutions have pioneered taking decisive action to promote gender equality in R&I by showing that it is possible to go beyond the more ubiquitous measures:

At Governmental level:

- The **Swedish Government** has required universities to set **quantitative goals for the share of women among newly recruited full professors**. Concretely, a percentage for a 3-year period (2017-2019) is given to each university. For instance, Luleå Technical University has a goal of 33% women among professors recruited in the period, which is a much higher percentage than the share of women among all professors employed at present.
- The **Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research** promotes more **gender-appropriate research-mission statements, career**

models and selection procedures at public universities that will take into account the life-phase and biographical circumstances (reconciliation of work/study with care responsibilities, work in the economy or in civil society organisations).

- The **Czech Higher Education, Research and Science Section of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports** has introduced a directive on gender balance in advisory boards and evaluation committees. The **target of 40%** of both sexes will be monitored on an annual basis.
- The **Israeli Ministry of Science and Technology**[2] promotes **scholarships for women** in science and technology in honor of Shulamit Aloni and for women in Engineering Masters Programmes with specific funding to facilitate women's research career in the STEM fields. Moreover, the **Council for Higher Education** offers a limited number of scholarships for women to pursue a postdoctorate outside of Israel, which is usually considered a minimum criterion for a tenure-track position in Israeli universities.

By Research Funding Organisations:

- The **Swiss National Science Foundation** has developed different **career funding instruments targeting women researchers** such as PRIMA Programme and the Gender Equality Grant. Indeed, other disruptive measures are planned for the next period (2021-2024) including a women-only funding instrument at the PhD-level in MINT-disciplines and a minimal quota for women in the National Research Council.

By Research Performing Organisations:

- The **Eindhoven University of Technology**[3] has recently launched a special **recruitment programme exclusively for women for a given period**.
- The **Masaryk University** has included a **bonification of projects** with researchers returning from parental leave who will have a key role in the project as part of an internal competition to fund interdisciplinary projects through the University Grant Agency.
- Since 2014, the **CERN** offers a professional opportunity for keen scientific or engineering talent with a common experience: a **temporary absence** from the field for personal reasons such as family, caring responsibilities, or health issues **for at least 2 years**[4].
- Since 2015, the **Austrian university bodies and boards** are required to have at least **50% of female members**. The quota is monitored annually, as universities have to include an indicator concerning the implementation of the women's quota in their intellectual capital report.
- At **Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya**, a **gender coefficient** has been included in the evaluation of female candidatures for promotion to full professor category (their evaluation is marked up).

The aim of the examples listed above is to provide **practical examples of measures** that have the potential of being disruptive in the field of Gender Equality in R&I. However, a careful and professional evaluation of the outcomes and impact needs to be provided in the coming years.

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2 | See our report on National roadmaps and mechanisms in ERA priority 4.

3 | See their website: https://www.tue.nl/en/news/news-overview/17-06-2019-tue-vacancies-for-academic-staff-exclusively-for-women-for-the-time-being/.

4 | See their website: https://diversity-and-inclusion.web.cern.ch/2015/05/post-career-break-fellowship.

References

CEDAW Committee (2004) *General recommendation No. 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on temporary special measures.*

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