https://www.act-on-gender.eu

ACT Synthesis Event
September 30th 2021

Report

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Introduction

The ACT Synthesis Event took place on September 30th 2021. The ACT project has organized two International Synergy conferences: the first at the start of the project (25.2.2019) and the second towards the end of the project (11.2.2021). Taking advantage of the project extension (+6 month due to the Covid-19 pandemic), Consortium- and Community of Practise (CoP) members took stock of the project achievements and spell out further recommendations based on the ACT experience and insights.

In order to prepare the event and its outcomes, CoPs produced four policy briefs to be discussed with invited speakers during the corresponding roundtables of the Synthesis event. In addition, the results section of the ACT website was re-organized to highlight the main achievements of the project and facilitate their uptake.

Overall, 59 people from over 20 countries participated in the Synthesis event, which was held online.

The URL for the event is: https://www.act-on-gender.eu/act-events/act-synthesis-event-september-30th

Agenda

Roundtable and Policy Brief 1: Gender Budgeting to challenge gender biases in decision-making of RPOs.

Presented by Finnborg Salome Steinþórsdóttir, University of Iceland, followed by a discussion led by Laufey Axelsdóttir, University of Iceland and GenBUDGET facilitator with:

- Peter Bjelskou, Gender Equality Consultant, University of Southern Denmark
- Scott Taylor, Business School Director of Admissions, Reader in Leadership & Organization Studies, University of Birmingham
- Joan Ballantine, Professor of Accounting, Ulster University
- Tindara Addabbo, Professor in Economic Policy, Rector Equal Opportunity Delegate, University of Modena & Reggio Emilia
- Þorgerður J. Einarsdóttir, Professor at the University of Iceland

Roundtable and Policy Brief 2: Assessing gender equality state-of-play in research and higher education.

Presented by Paulina Sekuła, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, GEinCEE facilitator, followed by a discussion led by Marta Warat, Jagiellonian University, with:

- Justyna Kramarczyk, PolSCA - Polish Science Contact Agency
- Gabriela Langhammerová, Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, National Contact Centre for Gender & Science
- Petroula Mavrikiou, Associate Professor of Statistics, Frederick University - GEinCEE CoP member

Roundtable and Policy Brief 3: Reflections on approaches to scale-up and sustain CoPs.

Presented by Kathrin Rabsch, Technical University Berlin, followed by a discussion led by Claartje Vinkenburg, Portia, with:

- Karolina Kublickiene, Associated Professor in Obstetrics and Gynecology at Karolinska Institutet
- Rochelle Fritch, Scientific Programme Manager, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Science Foundation Ireland, FORGEN Facilitator
- Gloria Bonder, Director of the Department of Gender, Society and Policies of FLACSO, Argentina, LAC CoP Facilitator

Roundtable and Policy Brief 4: How to support Communities of Practice for driving institutional change towards gender equality.

Presented by Jovana Mihajlović, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts and Alt+G Facilitator, followed by a discussion led by Sonja Reiland, Centre for Genomic Regulation and LifeSciCoP Facilitator, with:

- Lisa Kamlade, GENERA Network, Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron (DESY), GENERA facilitator
- Paulina Sekuła, Jagiellonian University, GEinCEE facilitator
- Areti Damala, Associate Researcher, Ecole normale supérieure and Strategies facilitator

Summary of Roundtables

Roundtable 1: Gender Budgeting to challenge gender biases in decision-making of RPOs.

Policy brief:

Overview of the GenBUDGET CoP: The CoP consists of 21 representatives from 14 research organisations. Its focus is on Gender Budgeting as a structural transformation strategy that can be used to challenge gender bias in decision-making of Research Performing Organisations (RPO). The Policy Brief also addresses, why gender budgeting is being used: Gender Budgeting is being defined as an integration of the gender perspective in all aspects and stages of the budgetary process to promote gender equality. Gender biases and gender inequalities are often produced and reproduced in supposedly gender-neutral programmes, policies, and resource allocations. Gender Budgeting is a strategy to challenge these inequalities and to ensure to promote gender equality in research organisations. To initiate Gender Budgeting, CoP members took on Targeted Implementation Projects (TIPS). Within these TIPs, they started assessing the gender impact of financial managerial mechanisms, formulating measures to enhance Gender Equality (GE), taking actions and implementing Gender Budgeting. However, this last stage has not been reached yet.

- Decision-making processes and practices are "gendering" processes. They produce and maintain gender power relations and shape academic working experiences within the research organisations. Even when there are equality policies and procedures in the organisation.

Policy implications:

- Visibility increased through TIPs and lowering of "legitimacy" of inequalities → needed conditions to enable organisational transformation
- When wanting to tackle gender bias in decision-making research organisations need to act to correct gender biased policies, programmes and resource allocations so that we can promote GE and the empowerment of women.

Sustainability:

- It is vital that decision-makers in research organisations take the lead and put effort in changing established processes and outcomes.
- TIP approach makes it more manageable by dividing the overall undertaking into smaller efforts
- Research Performing Organisations need to apply the strategy systematically by implementing a gender budgeting action plan or specific measures towards Gender Equality Plan.
  → That can increase the potential of gender budgeting to become sustainable.

For the discussion, two questions have been prepared for the panel: 1. How do we move forward and take action as a community with the knowledge created? 2. How can we enable decision-makers to take action?

It has to be noted here, that all of the discussants took some time to appreciate the work that has been done in the GenBUDGET CoP in the last years.

Question 1: The discussants provided examples on best practices, e.g. the importance of professional associations as key to implement the work that has been done in this area. Furthermore, it has been established, that it is important to keep the conversation going. This could happen through publications, formal committees and government's structures or informal chats in the corridors. Discussions need to happen on departmental and faculty and institutional level and it is vital to present the respective research on all sorts of departmental, faculty and institutional level as well as to challenge senior management to address inequalities. Advocating for GE is important, because if we do not do it, no one else will. Additionally, it has been noted that it is important to work hard to convince men that gender inequality damages everyone, which is one of the key methods to move forward and to take action. In regard to the CoP, it is important to think about further funding streams to support the work going forward, as the CoP is only at the start of its journey.

Question 2: To answer the second question, the discussants highlighted the importance of being in close contact with the heads of departments and local communities in terms of what is important and relevant in their context. In doing so, it is easier to demonstrate the immediate relevance to everyone. Furthermore, the importance of the inclusion of and support by leadership is a precondition for any undertaking. The momentum to advance towards greater gender equality due to the eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe funding is a great opportunity. GE processes should be anchored at as many levels as possible (local, departmental, institutional, governmental). Not to be neglected is the comparison with other institutions, which allows putting pressure on the decision-making level. Also, in terms of the process, it is important to acknowledge that there will be ups and downs and that not everything will be possible at the same time, which is why it is important to appreciate small wins that will add up to something bigger. Do not give up!

<u>Q&A</u>

"Elaborate further if there has been an assessment in the GenBUDGET CoP to see where different CoP partners are in terms of national legislation regarding gender budgeting and which country could serve as good practice?"

Mapping legal framework has not been done systematically but it has been addressed in GenBUDGET work and support. In order to change policies, we need to know what the policies are.

> *"Small wins are crucially important. However, how would you argue against senior leadership who say the differences (in budgeting or other indicator) are so small to be negligible?"*

Due to the resistance many gender equality initiatives are facing, giving up is very easy, which is why the "small wins"-approach is so important. It is important to convince leadership, that it can be achieved and that it is manageable, so that decision-makers do not feel overwhelmed and threatened. There is a tendency of senior management and even faculty management to approach everything in a very gender-neutral way. Rather than looking for issues they are assuming that policies, procedures and practices apply to everybody equally which is part of challenging management and to ask them to provide evidence that there are negligible differences and they probably will not be able to provide it.

Roundtable 2: Assessing gender equality state-of-play in research and higher education

- Overview GEinCEE CoP: Representatives from universities and research centres mostly from Central and Eastern Europe. It has 20 formal members and 2 collaborators.
- Objectives of CoP: Insight or diagnosis into the GE status quo at the member organisations as this has been lacking so far. Conducted several surveys using GEAM tool designed by ACT to assess GE and to monitor progress of implemented measures. Also, a tool for inter-organisational comparison and for benchmarking the efforts for more GE in the organisations. The survey was conducted between June 2020 and March 2021 among employees of 12 out of 20 member organisations. Overall, responses of ~2500 employees were collected across these CoP member organizations. Each organisation makes individual use of the results of the survey to design interventions. Running and presenting the results, triggered the discussion of GE topics in the organisations.

Policy Brief: The brief contains the objectives, which include the advancement in the understanding of GE issues in Research and Innovation (R&I) and to motivate other institutions to examine the GE status quo as well as to create and implement tailored Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). The policy brief addresses science policy makers, research funders, leaders of Higher Education Institutions and Research Performing Organisations, scientific organisations and individual academics and researchers. The Policy Brief also contains a GEAM Fact Sheet with identified problems:

- Unfair and non-transparent division of tasks
- Unequal support in career advancement
- Academic overload: long and excessive working hours over nights and weekends
- Care responsibilities correlate with intense work-family conflict
- Gendered use of flexible work arrangements
- Vertical gender segregation
- Harassment o mobbing experienced by up to 1/5 of respondents
- Little organisational commitment to GE, e.g. lack of data

Recommendations:

- Identified areas of intervention e.g. career progression
- Recommend solutions e.g. transparent employment process and career progression
- Recommend actions e.g. Reviewing internal employment and advancement

1. Question to Justyna Kramarczyk: *"Based on your experience of working in the Polish Science Contact Agency, could you please identify the main problems regarding gender inequality faced by the institutions you work with and how these problems are diagnosed?"*

Problems: When informing the institutions they work with (around 70) about the GEP requirement they realized that there is a low level of awareness in terms of GE. Among senior management, there is denial that there is a problem in terms of GE. They also found out that there is a shortage of data, usually they only have basic information e.g. on the distribution of gender on the different levels but not more. Therefore, it was impossible to create a solution adjusted to the needs of researchers. There is a clear need for more data to go further and to identify the needs of researchers. Furthermore, it is important to support them in gathering the data, which is why initiatives like ACT/ GEAM tool are so important.

2. Question to Gabriela Langhammeróva: *"Reflections on the main challenges you face and the tools that are being used to help institutions on their way to gender equality."*

Low awareness and low sensitivity towards GE-topics and strong resistances in the institutions. Institutions are underfunded; there is no funding which would cover GE-topics and lack of staff. Lack of support from the leadership. Tools being used: Teaching module for people from the institutions and the public as well, with receiving a certificate in the end. Workshops and trainings in the institutions and promotion of using GEAM tool.

3. Question to Petroula Mavrikiou: "*Experiences with using the GEAM tool, how has the data been used and has it been helpful in the work towards a GEP?*"

The first challenge was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to become part of the CoP, because the top management has to acknowledge that there is a problem and that GE is important. GEAM has been conducted in October 2020 until the beginning of December. 142 people participated in the survey (mostly women). GEAM tool was very useful and brought visibility to GE-issues to the staff and topics that are unconscious and that everyone thinks it is ok but the GEAM tool signalled that these topics are not to be neglected. Being part of the CoP increased the pressure on the University to implement GEPs and will help the university to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Top-management has become more engaged and are more convinced that there is the need for implementing GEPs.

<u>Q&A</u>

"Does the data exist and there is no access or does the data needed not exist at all?"

There is data but without public access. If data can be found it is fragmented, not all the issues are covered. There is data but with many barriers.

"How was the reaction from the employees? Some employees do not want to share that kind of information, so how was the survey perceived?"

People were afraid that their identity would be revealed, so they have to be ensured that this will not happen and that the report will only contain aggregated data.

Roundtable 3: Reflections on approaches to scale-up and sustain CoPs

The third Policy Brief addresses different aspects such as scaling-up activities undertaken in the ACT project, their sustainability and reflections on the impacts of these activities.

- What does scaling-up mean? Within ACT, scaling-up has been identified as the sharing and scaling-up of activities, experiences and knowledge development on the three ERA priorities decision-making, gender dimension and careers. It takes place between CoPs and from or to CoPs to ERA level players and includes the advancement of CoPs from local to regional, national and transnational levels (scaling-up in size and geographical reach).
- What has been done to support scaling-up? Within ACT, three coordination groups has been established, one per each ERA priority to support and facilitate scaling-up. Furthermore, opportunities for exchange have been organised such as two e-discussions and the Matching Events. These platforms for exchange showed that there is great interest in GE topics in general but also the ACT CoPs and their activities as well as the CoP approach itself.

Lessons learned and suggestions: Three suggestions for scaling-up:

1. Providing platforms for exchange: Having the opportunity to share insights, discuss and collaborate with others is very fruitful. These platforms offer the possibility to expand and promote the CoPs and their activities, which leads to higher visibility and reach.
2. Defining target groups: When aiming at scaling-up a CoP it is important to clarify beforehand where the scaling-up should lead. Only when the target audience is identified, targeted matching and scaling-up is possible.
3. Besides promoting CoPs and their activities, it is also helpful to promote the underlying CoP approach that might inspire others to use it for their own GE activities.

In terms of scaling-up and sustainability, it became apparent that platforms for exchange can lead to new collaborations, higher visibility and reach, new CoP members and even new CoPs. These aspects lead to the establishment and positioning of the CoPs in the ERA and contribute to their sustainability. Beyond the CoPs, the events also inspired others to take actions. Therefore, scaling-up has contributed to sustainability by promoting CoPs and by that ensuring their standing in the community.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Positive experiences of scaling-up from the perspective of different CoPs:

LAC CoP:

Scaling-up through sharing tools and experiences throughout the CoP. Furthermore, the CoP is publishing a book on their experiences and by that strengthening their visibility and reach. This book will also be presented at regional and international conferences. The CoP aims at reaching higher levels and convincing them to incorporate their recommendations.

FORGEN CoP

Scaling-up activities focused on reaching out to international groups working in similar areas and worked on building the CoP nationally as well, so there is a research funding group in Ireland now, which is a nice national output. The CoP is also working with different groups throughout Europe, e.g. DORA and formed collaborations with the DORA funders group. Through these collaborations, an area that was lacking information, which is working with narrative CVs, has been identified. These collaborations culminated in a workshop between the two organisations with 130 participants as well as 50 different funding agencies from around the world, where some interesting issues have been tackled (focusing on mitigating bias in narrative CVs). The outcome of this is a very strong collaboration in the future during which funders want to work together to align processes, tools and training. In addition, they have done some other events as part of their scaling-up activities e.g. workshop for funders

on gender dimension. Outputs from these events will be published and used for future collaborations as Forgen is being sustained in the future.

Karolina Kublickiene on scaling-up in the context of gender dimension:

Three successful scenarios resulting from the work of ACT:

- Extension of the collaboration towards the implementation of the gender dimension involving partners from the project Gendernet+ ERANetCofound, which has been experienced in the Matching Events, where partners from Canada and the US participated and which resulted in an extensive network for interdisciplinary collaboration between academics from different universities.
- A new CoP has been established ([NOGAFEM](#)) after the ACT Matching Events, in Israel. From website: *NOGAFem is a non-governmental organization (R.A) established to create a community of practice of researchers, entrepreneurs, innovators, investors, academic scholars and thought leaders who lead sex and gendered innovation, research, services and regulatory processes to fast track and overcome historical knowledge and practice gaps in order to facilitate healthcare equity for all genders.*
- Examples like Forgen or GENERA where they are working towards promoting gender dimension show the importance of integrating the gender dimension.

Remaining challenges and future recommendations for scaling up?

Karolina Kublickiene: Lack of energy to communicate and discuss, feeling like a persona non grata when trying to convince others that GEPs and the gender dimension are needed.
Lessons learned: Next time, more proactive, using bottom-up approach, we have the opportunity with the new generation of students entering the Higher Education institutions, building stronger alliances with them/ their representatives because they will be evaluating the education that universities are delivering. Need to revise how universities are being evaluated and how the gender dimension is included in the curricula. As universities would like to be rated well, this could be an opportunity.

FORGEN: Challenges in CoP: Covid-19 especially in the communication with the funders, as the challenges related to pandemic took away the resources of the members, it has been harder for members to participate as much as they would have liked to. Hopefully, this is temporary and that people will have again more resources in the future.
Suggestions: Working with and establishing international contacts/ groups among funders. There are many different groups working on similar topics, FORGEN has brought many of these together, so trying to network through all of the expert groups throughout the globe, and bringing them together gives a lot more strength and power especially when talking about changing the policies at a larger scale.

LAC CoP: Two challenges: To get the members to share ideas and to reflect critical on the way they are planning and implementing their own GEPs or GE actions. In addition, how to improve it. Powerful discussions on how to plan and how to evaluate results and what are the goals not only in the own university but beyond. Other important point: Positive effect of CoP as an environment for reflection and criticism.

Roundtable 4: How to support Communities of Practice for driving institutional change towards gender equality

The fourth Policy Brief summarises reflections from the ACT Community of Practice facilitators.

Starting points: CoP approach is increasingly being recognized as a way to stimulate institutional change towards GE in HE and R&I. The approach is being supported by the EC through targeted projects and initiatives. ACT CoPs focused on institutional change toward GE and they become more and more important due to the GEP requirement.

This policy brief is relevant for policy makers and future practitioners who would like to be involved in CoPs.

What is the role of the CoP facilitator? The role is very specific and necessary for well function CoPs. Facilitators drive communication but also vision, leadership and governance within the CoP as a very democratic type of group.

Figure 1: Provided by Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc

Policy implications and recommendations:

- The facilitator's role needs to be financially compensated (very time consuming with a lot of responsibility)
- CoPs need (financial) resources to sustain, e.g. for organising events, training etc.
- CoPs should be supported in order to scale-up their achievements through targeted events with relevant stakeholders
- Facilitators should be trained and supported for their role
- CoPs could provide valuable input in developing concrete policies

<u>Discussion</u>

"In which context is an inter-institutional CoP the right answer to advancing institutional change towards GE?"

Sonja Reiland (LifeSciCoP): in which context is it recommendable to have a CoP as a methodology to advance institutional change? It is important to note that a CoP in ACT operated as a collaborating between institutions while change towards gender equality needs to happen within specific organizations. First, a CoP provides a context of collaboration, especially when CoP members have different backgrounds and do GE work on a voluntary basis. A CoP provides a common framework that allows people to collaborate and to make

them feel responsible to commit to the work they are planning to do. Common framework/ context could be an overarching alliance, a university alliance or European alliances. The next level is when there is no framework and people come together because they have the same interest in the same domain. Here the context needs to be created to create a trusted group, so people need to have shared experiences and a facilitator. The group needs to create their community and practice to experience shared actions, to experience trust (e.g. through face-to-face meetings).

Lisa Kamlade (GENERA CoP): GENERA had the advantage that they already established the GENERA network through a Horizon 2020 funded structural change project before the ACT project started, so they already had the chance to come together and to learn from each other. Members differed in their level of expertise, so everyone learned from the more experienced ones but also vice versa. Through ACT, the CoP grew, so they had to redefine their goals and frameworks and the commitment varied a lot over time and having a facilitator was a very big part of making the CoP work. Financial support is also really important to have someone to manage the CoP, which needs to be stressed constantly because without that person, the CoP could dissolve.

"Comparison of Strategies and GEinCEE CoP"

Paulina Sekuła (GEinCEE CoP):

- Central and Eastern Europe is a diverse region but it has some common characteristics. In the context of GE, these include scattered and isolated GE interventions but also lack or insufficient legal and policy incentives to bring institutional change in academia and research. In many countries of this region, there is unfavourable political and social environment towards these interventions.
- A CoP is a supporting intermediary structure, which can enhance conditions for GE change or interventions for example through providing high quality data, which can serve as evidence for the need of structural or institutional change. In the context of the scattered and isolated GE interventions, the CoP allows for effective practice and experience exchange and it allows for empowering and building a sense of agency especially for those who work alone at an institution. This means that they receive some extra-institutional embedding of their activities and can build awareness that they are not alone in these activities.
- The CoP triggered some concrete activities or at least some reflections within the stakeholders of the member organisations and is recognised as a safe space for sharing difficult situations and challenges but its effectiveness in managing resistance, especially top management, proved to be rather limited. CoP as an intermediary structure can enhance conditions for structural change and assisting structural change but cannot trigger the change itself.

Areti Damala (Strategies CoP): It is hard to say if the CoP approach is the wrong or the right approach. What can be said is that it was worthwhile and it was not only the CoP approach but also the co-creation tools that were given and the training that made the experience quite different from what they have already experienced. The Strategies CoP, with 14 members, had the peculiarity that they had already four networks as CoP members, which brought the experience to the inter-institutional level. However, the benefit of the CoP approach was clear to everyone, especially through the interaction with the other ACT CoPs and the support provided by ACT, which magnified the effect and impact. The CoP will be sustained through focusing on the topic of Early Career Researchers and the received funding through a COST action.

ACT Project Outcome page presented

The project outcome page on the ACT website has been reorganized:

The Project Outcomes tab now contains four sections: ACT Highlights, ACT videos, Deliverables and Event reports

1 [ACT Highlights](#)
      1.a CoP Facilitators Resources
      1.b Gender Equality Audit and Monitoring Tool
      1.c Policy Briefs
2 [ACT Videos](#)
3 [ACT Deliverables](#)
4 [ACT Event Reports](#)

Conclusions and final remarks by the ACT project coordinator

- Big thank you to the CoP facilitators and CoP members for all their work as part of the ACT project. Without the commitment especially during the pandemic, this would not have been possible at all. It worked all very well and this would not have been possible without the commitment of everybody included.

- One conclusion: CoPs are not the answer to everything and cannot resolve all the issues that are on the gender equality agenda but this, in itself, is an important outcome of the project. We know now where CoPs work, what they can do and what we can expect from them, which is something that was not clear, when we started. We know now, where CoPs are useful and in which combination with other instruments they should be used in order to achieve effective change.

- It also became clear, that a bottom-up approach is very effective. There was no predefined set of activities of the CoPs, but they decided themselves, what they want to work on, which enables motivation to work on topics. This motivation should not be taken for granted. Furthermore, funding for the CoPs is needed because it cannot be expected that people do the CoP work in their free time.