

ISSUE

02

May 2022

ATHENA Newsletter



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101006416

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The first year of the project has come to an end and it was characterised mainly by intense gender audits in research performing and funding organisations. Hours of data collection, both from quantitative and qualitative perspectives

have brought fruitful support for mutual discussion, awareness-raising, and preparation of gender equality plans. Overall, six project partners prepared their gender equality report, a comprehensive view of the state of gender equality in the institution, but also within the certain national and cultural contexts.

All the partners balance the Gender Equality Plans preparation and implementation between different social, institutional, cultural but also individual challenges. For example, although the legislative procedures to promote equality and anti-discrimination are in place, the reality of implementation has

been often questioned. One of the identified barriers is gender backlash which occurs in many countries. Facing other difficulties, such as budget cuts lowers the strategic importance of the gender equality issue.

At first, similar proportions of women and men in the consortium's institutions are recognized, but deeper insight is needed to prevent ourselves from quick optimism. Horizontal as well as vertical segregations remain an important challenge within the institutions. That may bring our attention to possible gender bias and barriers, which are slowing down the careers of women.

Therefore, gender equality should never be interpreted only through numbers of gender balance, although it provides us with important insight. We demonstrate it with words from one of the participants from the Slovak focus group:

“Do women see the SAS as a workplace where their professional and scientific ambitions can be fulfilled? What are the conditions for them when they have a family, when they drop out - do they have the conditions? That to me is the practice of gender equality, not just the numbers of men-women (...) Gender policy has to be something that is actively done, regardless of gender balance in the numbers.”

(Male administrative staff, Slovak Academy of Sciences)

From the qualitative point of view, one of the most articulated topics is the work-life balance. Women are still expected to take the primary role in caregiving and the household, putting them into a difficult situation. When balancing between family and work life, it may be especially challenging to follow the existing promotion criteria for women, e.g. mandatory state internship soon after the doctoral studies.

Gender equality in the project consortium will be often promoted in environments that are showing low gender awareness and poor knowledge of the complexities of gender equality. Reluctance to gender equality is often articulated through meritocracy and a myth of hard work, even though the important role of informal connections and processes may be happening. These invisible

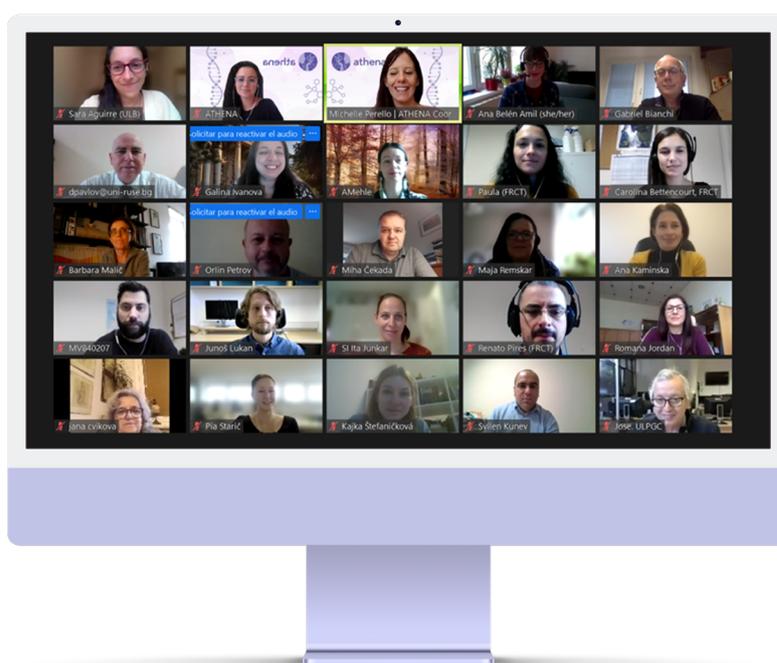
forces are rooted within an organizational culture as well as gender bias and stereotypes on the individual level. Missing solidarity maybe even visible in the feminized departments, as the following quote demonstrates:

“It goes without saying that, if you are a woman, women will not necessarily support you! This is the lesson of my life.”

(Quote from an interview, University of Bucharest)

Although many recommendations have been identified thanks to the audits, we assume that the planned trainings and awareness-raising activities will play a crucial role to promote gender equality within the institutions. Last, but not least, young researchers may see the issue of gender equality as highly important, which is a crucial basis for future implementation as well as for sustainability.

Training programme on institutional change and gender equality plans (GEPs) for the project Gender Equality Plan Implementation (GEPI) Committees already implemented in the ATHENA institutions!



Some of the participants that attended the live session of the online common module on 26th November 2021

Implementing gender mainstreaming towards gender equality at RPOs and RFOs is a continuous and long-term process that involves a wide set of tools, instruments, and strategies. Training on gender equality is only one of these instruments that should be implemented to achieve institutional transformation by building knowledge, raising consciousness, learning empowerment, and developing skills. Training and capacity-building activities should address also other aspects such as communication and stakeholder engagement, to ensure that the development and implementation of the Gender Equality Plan in one organization is an inclusive and sustainable process.

To respond to these needs, a comprehensive training program, named 'Institutional change and gender equality plans to unlock research potential of RPOs and RFOs in Europe' was developed by the Gender Equality Plans Implementation (GEPI) Committees of the ATHENA institutions.

The program was structured into three modules: Two online common modules for all the ATHENA institutions and a specifically tailored module for each partner institution. Before the development of the training, GEPI Committee members were asked to answer a specific questionnaire aimed at assessing their needs and expectations. Results finally allowed to set specific topics of the common

training, which addressed 'Gender equality: Introductory concepts and institutional change management and 'ATHENA approach for gender equality and Gender Equality Plans (GEPs)'. The two common models were delivered by the ATHENA project coordinator – Consulta Europa – in November last year. The training was delivered online and is available to anybody before registration on the [ATHENA e-platform](#).

A third module was developed by each organization tailored to the institution's needs. The table below lists the topics of each tailored module carried out by each ATHENA institution and its modality.

ATHENA Institution	Topic of Tailored Training	Modality
JSI	How to resist gender bias in an academic field	Online
UJK	1. Design, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Research Performing Organizations (RPOs) 2. Unconscious bias 3. Tools for an inclusive communication	Physically
UB	Transformative leadership for Gender Equality in the University	Online
ULPGC	Tackling work-life balance and gender-based and sexual harassment and violence in the university context	Online
UVSKSAV	Gender equality in everyday life of the institution	Online
URAK	Local gender equality legislation and anti-discrimination practices	Online
GOBCAN	Introduction to gender equality mainstreaming and gender equality plans	Online
FRCT	Tools for an inclusive Portuguese language	Online

Table 1. Specifically tailored modules for each ATHENA institution

It is worth mentioning that the content of the training program was adapted to each ATHENA type of member of the GEPI Committees: high and middle management, Human Resources professionals, researchers and professors, and administrative staff.

The ATHENA consortium has made available to the public all the modules of the training program. The recordings of the session as well as the related material are already shared on the [ATHENA e-platform](#). Interested people should note that to access the content, they should be

previously registered and logged as users of the e-platform.



Good practices of today for better practices tomorrow

The University of Bucharest has been the lead partner of the ATHENA consortium for the elaboration of the Compendium of Best Practices, as part of the project work package 4 - GEPS Development and implementation (Task 4.1).

It was quite a challenging mission to produce a material that brings something new, useful in the context of the mushrooming of European projects dedicated to the design and implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Research Performing and Funding organisations (RPOs/ RFOs). The long-term aim of the Compendium was to support partners institutions from the

ATHENA consortium (but not only) in the development of their GEPs.

For a clear profile of the document, a set of preliminary selection criteria has been decided in advance - e.g., the balance between examples of best practices from HEIs, RPOs and RFOs; representation, as possible, of each European country; main focus on institutions that developed GEPs as part of previous HORIZON sister projects and expressly on those GEPs already implemented as part of finalized HORIZON projects.

To avoid replication of information and formats already produced in other EU publications (e.g. the Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) tool or the Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans), the

team decided to bring together, whenever possible, several examples of institutions under one specific best practice in order to illustrate the replicability, as well as the various institutional settings in which an activity may be successfully implemented and to assess as common or creative the respective initiatives.

Eight HORIZON finalised sister projects (SAGE, GENERA, TARGET, LIBRA, EQUAL-IST, Baltic Gender, PLOTINA, GEECCO) and twelve ongoing projects have been thoroughly documented. In the end, out of the 198 institutions selected, covering the twenty HORIZON projects, the final scrutiny covered around 50 GEPs (only those described in English) from HEIs, RPOs and RFOs.

The Compendium gathered good practices across 8 areas of interest: Leadership for Gender Equality, Institutional Design for Gender Equality, Human Resources (Recruitment, Retention & Career Progression), Engendering Research, Engendering Teaching, Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Discrimination, Work-Life Balance and Care Responsibilities, Institutional Communication.

Based on the documentation and research work for this Compendium, certain aspects have been noticed:

Improving gender-sensitive data gathering mechanisms is essential in the design and implementation of the GEPs. Mentioned as a general requirement in all GEPs analysed, methodological details about how concretely such data can be improved are often missing. An efficient approach could be to consider this endeavour of

gendering data as a transversal practice within all areas of initiatives proposed, as it influences decisions and strategies in all domains.

Budgeting for GEPs, another key ingredient but also an obstacle for a successful GEP, was not included as a separate key action area due to the loose references within the documented GEPs. Many documents describe a lot of interesting creative activities and actions but few of them foresee explicitly a clear budget strategy for the whole GEP construction, implementation and monitoring. Beyond financial provisions for hiring dedicated staff, a solid GEP should be proposed together with a coherent stable identified budget for the whole areas of action decided.

Attention should be paid to the dangers of the "copy-paste" strategy, as important differences

among GEPs need to be considered in the evaluation process of good practices. For example, the national contexts concerning gender equality policies influence the degree of institutional autonomy, allowing less or more internal initiatives on the part of institutions. Also, the level of experience in the implementation of GEPs (first generation or 2nd, 3rd, etc.) should be considered, as different institutions are in different stages of the GEP implementation process. A very good practice in one place, if simply copy-paste, could be ineffective in other institutional and national contexts.

Last but not least, although the actual EU interest moved from Gender Equality Plans to Gender Inclusive Plans, the intersectional approach to gender equality in education and research is rarely observable.

ATHENA institutions are currently on the stage of drafting their tailored Gender Equality Plans

The main objective of the ATHENA project is to support its partner institutions in the development and implementation of their Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). For that purpose, ATHENA puts in place a support mechanism throughout its project activities to provide project partners with a solid

basis, knowledge, skills and tools to develop their tailored and adapted institutional plans. Around one year after the start of the project activities, ATHENA institutions are currently at this stage, i.e. developing and drafting their GEPs, which are expected to be approved in June 2022. Afterwards, they will

enter the implementation and monitoring phase.



The ATHENA GEPs are being drafted following common diversity and gender standards. These common standards are based on the main project outcomes obtained so far (i.e., the results from the gender equality audit and assessment of procedures and practices at the organisational and national level; the capacity building activities to the Gender Equality Plan Implementation (GEPI) Committee members; and the analysis of best practices among GEPs implemented by European research organizations) as well as on the content-related recommendations and process-related requirements set by the Horizon Europe programme, which requires research organization, among others, to put in place gender equality plans to be eligible for funding. The common standards set by ATHENA, which cover all the thematic content areas suggested by the EC, relate to the followings:

- Ensure work-life balance in the working conditions of both men and women within the institution.
 - Implement mechanisms/ measures to maintain equal access to leadership positions and ensure transparency in this area.
 - Maintain a high standard of transparency of vacancy announcements when recruiting new employees, to ensure the appropriate language of announcements that will encourage both men and women to apply.
 - Mitigate the disparities and accelerate women’s professional careers through access to mentoring programs and training, ensuring access to funding or support aimed at greater participation of women and men in research and grant acquisition.
 - Support the integration of the gender perspective into the research content or teaching activities.
 - Implement mechanisms for effective identification and response to discriminatory actions and/or sexual harassment.
- The ATHENA institutions may complete the common standards with other specific standards and targets based on their needs. To get further information on the GEPs of the partner institutions and their implementation, the ATHENA consortium invites you to stay tuned to the next newsletter releases so you can be up to date.



ATHENA partners are developing a set of monitoring and evaluation indicators for their GEPs

Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce (UJK) in cooperation with the National Research Council (CNR) started working on the development of the Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system in November 2021. The purpose of this system is to create a framework of indicators that will allow an impartial evaluation of the progress made in reducing gender bias.

Bilateral meetings were conducted by UJK and CNR with each of the partners working on the GEP as these sessions are seen as the first step to integrating and guiding ATHENA partners into the monitoring and evaluation system. The main purpose of these meetings was to introduce the concept of the M&E system to be understandable and acceptable to each partner Institution and

support the preparation for the implementation of the GEPs.

These meetings provided discussions concerning the initial situation related to the creation of the GEPs, guidance on how to develop and implement an M&E framework for gender equality measurement, examples of M&E indicators for each of the eight GEPs, and advice on how to design and implement M&E system and processes. As the M&E system is an inseparable element of every GEP, it was essential to meet with each of the partners and discuss the concept and progress of work on each GEP and present the assumptions of such a system so that they were included in the Plans.

Currently, partners are developing their own set of indicators, based on the tool developed by JKU, with the support of this team. Thus, cooperation causes that, on the one hand, "tailor-made" indicators are created for each GEP and, on the other hand, leaders of this task are working on a set of "universal" indicators, which may be useful in any research performing and funding organisations (RPOs/RFOs) implementing GEPs.

Simultaneously, JKU is preparing the M&E guidelines, in which it will be presented key guidance on strategies for monitoring GEPs implementation and evaluating progress made in gender-aware structural changes in ATHENA RPOs and RFOs. The guidelines aim to ensure a coherent approach among all ATHENA partners for impartially monitoring and evaluating the progress made in reducing bias in their organizations.

The ATHENA M&E system aims to build an evidence base on what works to bring institutional change in Research for gender equality; track GEP progress and effectiveness as M&E can help to identify whether a programme is on track to achieve its intended results or whether adjustments are needed; assess the success of an intervention and identify whether interventions work, for whom and why; help identify the most effective and efficient interventions; identify and manage risks that could affect the plans and target groups.

ATHENA e-platform for action is already active



Our ATHENA e-platform for Action is already active! The e-platform, accessible at www.gender-equality.eu, hosts all the project material and results that can be useful to any actor working for gender equality. Specifically, the e-platform includes resources and 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 ('Trainings' section).
- Supporting the visibility of women researchers and communicating their achievements ('Women researchers' section).
- Providing a toolkit to assist project institutions with examples, guidance and inspiration useful for tailoring their institutional GEPs ('ATHENA Toolkit' section).
- 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' section).

The 'Trainings' section already includes the recordings and material of the trainings that have been

developed and carried out so far under the project framework. This section will be continuously updated with further ATHENA trainings that will be carried out by the partner research institutions.

As for the section 'Women researchers', this section includes a compendium/database of women researchers in Europe to contribute to make them visible and communicate their achievements. The database is open, and any user of the e-platform may contribute by submitting a request that is available within this section. Once the veracity of the data provided is proven, the profile of the women researcher will be published. The women researchers may be identified in terms of geographical location as the e-platform includes a mapping of the data provided.

The 'ATHENA Toolkit' is aimed at supporting research institutions that are in the process of developing their GEPs by offering them an array of tools and resources that assist them with examples, guidance and inspiration useful for tailoring their institutional plans. The tools and resources of the Toolkit already compile 74 resources, of which 20 are reports and 54 dynamic resources like videos, webinars, trainings, etc. The resources are organized according to the five content-related thematic areas recommended by the EC (i.e., Work-life balance and organizational

culture; gender balance in leadership and decision-making; Gender equality in recruitment and career progression; Integrating the gender dimension into research and teaching content; and measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment).

Finally, the 'Community' section includes an interactive forum for discussion on the issues of gender equality in research and science. Particularly, the forum provides an opportunity for the ATHENA RPOs and RFOs that will implement their GEPs and other EU research organizations to discuss the specific challenges related to their transformative cultural change and specific issues on the development and implementation of their GEPs at the same time as sharing promising initiatives for promoting gender equality and diversity.

This section also includes a Questions and Answers (Q&A) forum where the project coordinator of ATHENA will answer the questions of partner organisations and other interested stakeholders.

The ATHENA consortium encourages the reader to visit the e-platform and contribute to acting towards gender equality in research and innovation.

Participation in activities with EU Sister Projects

Joint Campaign “DREAM IT, BE IT”

ATHENA collaborated with EU sister projects on a joint social media campaign titled “DREAM IT, BE IT” on the 11th and 12th of February 2022 to commemorate the “International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2022,” in which female researchers were invited to share their experiences in Research & Innovation (R&I).

CALIPER, GEARING ROLES, Gender-SMART, SUPERA, LeTSGEPs, RESET, SPEAR, CASPER, ACT, GenPORT, MINDtheGEPs, ATHENA, GRANTeD, EQUAL4EUROPE, and Gender STI joined forces and posted inspiring stories to encourage other women, particularly young girls, to pursue a career in R&I.

The campaign consisted of answering three inspiring questions on an editable response

International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2022

On the International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2022, the EU Sister projects: CALIPER, GEARING ROLES, Gender-SMART, SUPERA, LeTSGEPs, RESET, SPEAR, CASPER, ACT, GenPORT, MINDtheGEPs, ATHENA, GRANTeD, EQUAL4EUROPE, Gender STI are joining forces and sharing positive stories to encourage other women and especially young girls, to become engaged with Research & Innovation.

#DreamItBeIt

If you are a women researcher join us using our # and tell us

- What is your professional background?
- What did inspire you to pursue this career?
- Who was your role model?

#EUSisterProjects



All the projects are funded by European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No 873134, 824546, 787829, 873072, 101006560, 824544, 872113, 788204, 321485, 101006543, 101006416, 824574, 824536, 872499, 872427

template about the professional background, reasons to pursue a career in R&I, and role models and sharing them on social media. It was also encouraged to include photos in the posters, as well as to use the hashtags #DreamItBeIt and #EUSisterProjects and tag the EU sister projects.



The initiative aimed not only to commemorate the “International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2022”, but also to work together to achieve a more gender-equal R&I!

“Joining forces to achieve Gender Equality in Research and Innovation” initiative

On the occasion of International Women’s Day 2022, on March 8, the EU sister projects CASPER, GENDER ACTION, EQUAL4EUROPE, ATHENA, R&I PEERS, RESISTIRÉ, ACT, GRANTeD, TARGET, GEARING ROLES, SPEAR, LeTSGEPs, SUPERA, Gender STI, CALIPER, RESET, Gender-SMART, MINDtheGEPs and UniSAFE agreed to promote a joint initiative on Twitter

to highlight the strong commitment to working together for gender equality in European research, to create a welcoming and friendly environment for all, particularly the generation of young women, and to ensure that the research produces results that improve our lives and contribute to the reduction of gender inequality.

The initiative consisted of creating a single chain of tweets introducing the sister projects and their activities and/or relevant resources, which was started by a tweet from the European Research Executive Agency account.

The Twitter thread is available [here](#).

Events organised/attended by partners

ATHENA International Conference 'Looking towards gender equality in research and innovation'



The ATHENA International Conference 'Looking towards gender equality in research and innovation' took place on February 10 at the Elder Museum in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, as part of the ATHENA project, which is co-financed by the European Commission.

The conference was held both on-site and virtual with the presence of numerous international experts. The event featured the participation of

Sylvia Jaén, Deputy Minister of Equality and Diversity of the Government of the Canary Islands, Sara Ramírez, Minister of Equality, Diversity and Transparency of the Cabildo de Gran Canaria, and María del Carmen Reyes, Delegate Councilor for Equality of the City Council of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Among the interventions of this conference, it was discussed topics related to the challenges

of gender equality in research and innovation, examples of good practices on transformative measures of gender equality plans, as well as inspiring stories of women researchers and debates on factors that influence the participation of children in STEM education.

The international conference's agenda can be found [here](#) and the recording is available on [this page](#).

Gabriel Bianchi presented the ATHENA project during the online conference “Gender equality in European Research, Innovation and Higher Education”

Gabriel Bianchi, a member of the ATHENA project and Deputy Director at the Institute for Research in Social Communication of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, presented the ATHENA project during the online conference “Gender equality in European Research, Innovation and Higher Education”.

In the presentation, Gabriel Bianchi introduced his team’s experience on gender auditing during the first year of the ATHENA project implementation. It was highlighted the need for applying both quantitative and qualitative approaches in data collection to be able to study the high complexity of gender equality issues within



the institutions. Following the gender audit, it remains a challenge to adopt a careful and sensitive communication strategy of results, which cannot be effectively done without cooperation and participation within the organisations.

The conference was jointly organised by Czech Liaison Office For Research, Development and Innovation (CZELO), Lithuanian Research Development and Innovation Liaison Office (LINO), Polish Science Contact

Agency (PoISCA), and Slovak Liaison Office for Research and Development (SLORD). The objective of this event was to give an overview of the latest EU gender policy developments. Recent developments and illustrative cases from the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia were presented.

You can check the [event agenda](#) and the record of the webinar [here](#).

A speech delivered to student at the San Juan Bosco School

Consulta Europa and the Institute of Oceanography and Global Change of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC) delivered a speech to students of the San Juan Bosco School on March 16, 2022, as part of the activities taking place in March, the

month of women’s rights struggle, and within the framework of the ATHENA project.

During the activity, existing gender stereotypes in science were addressed and a participatory exercise was carried out to find possible solutions to reduce the gender gap. In an inspiring exercise, PhD student Verónica Caínzos from ULPGC shared her experience as a female researcher with students.

This cycle of activities continued as Consulta Europa and female ULPGC researchers visited other high and primary schools in Gran Canaria. The goal was to raise awareness about gender equality in education and research, as well as to highlight the presence of women in science while encouraging girls to pursue STEM careers.