

Why gender equality matters to universities and to researchers

Why is the topic relevant

There is a widely recognised need to step up systematic efforts on gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the EU. The world of research is no exception to this: 1/ not enough women enter or remain in a research profession and very few are in leadership positions, 2/ not enough universities and other research performers manage to successfully achieve structural and cultural change within their institutions, and 3/ gender and sex analysis is not well integrated into the research process itself.

These challenges have been in evidence for years now, but real progress across all of Europe is not occurring. The European Commission has been at the forefront to push for change, in particular since gender equality was declared one of five top priorities for the European Research Area in 2012. The EC has made important changes in its research funding programmes to promote gender equality in EU-funded research projects. The EC initiatives are a good model, encouraging researchers and universities to make changes within their research and in their institutions and for other funders to adopt innovative approaches to gender-equal research policies and funding.

Content of the presentation

The presentation will discuss what LERU and its member universities have done within the network and in interaction with the EU to promote gender equality (surveying the state-of-affairs on gender equality in the universities, exchanging good practice, etc.) This work is evidenced by two papers published by LERU on gender equality.

In a [2012 paper](#) LERU proposed, based on an analysis of existing policies and practices at LERU universities, a set of guidelines for developing gender equality action plans at universities, stating that they should include:

- a) measurable or quantifiable goals to be reached within specific time limits and leading to improvements along the entire career spectrum,
- b) a clear plan for their implementation throughout the university and integration in operational practice,
- c) a transparent assessment and monitoring system, whose outcomes have consequences for future strategic planning, and,
- d) processes by which communication, awareness raising and training activities will contribute to their effective uptake.

University gender action plans should be co-designed, decided and monitored by key stakeholders in the university and in particular by the units within the university responsible for their implementation, e.g. divisions, faculties and departments, because such units have a decisive role to play in making plans successful.

They should be backed up by funding which makes longer-term planning and therefore long lasting structural change possible.

In addition, in a recently published [paper](#), LERU analyses the role of point three above - gendered research and innovation (GRI), as an important but under-recognised issue. GRI focuses on integrating sex and gender analysis into the funding, content and implementation process of research and innovation. It is rapidly becoming better embedded in certain research areas, for example, in biomedical research. In general however, GRI is still unfamiliar, not practiced, or not well integrated into the design of the research, yielding the results of a large body of research less applicable to women than to men.

LERU universities have started to address these issues, but there is much work to be done. We would like to see:

- concerted and systematic efforts to raise awareness of and provide training on GRI to members of all research stakeholder communities.
- links to and integration with other gender equality initiatives at all levels: through inclusion of GRI in government policies and strategies, funders' programmes, universities' gender equality strategies or action plans, research activities and researchers' projects.

The LERU paper on GRI formulates a number of recommendations for the various stakeholders to act upon, emphasizing the importance of support, promotion and resources for GRI, which will contribute to responsible research and innovation and, crucially, will improve global citizens' lives in many ways.

Originality

The presentation will include the latest views on gender equality, informed by policies and practices at the 21 LERU universities in ten European countries (see next section). In addition to discussing specific funding issues from the perspective of universities towards H2020, MSCA and Cofund, I will include points on the need to raise awareness and provide training to researchers (from doctoral to senior ones), research managers and others within the university on gender equality and particularly on how to avoid unconscious bias, and on the need for qualified experts to assess gender issues in research project proposals.

Information about the author

Katrien Maes is the chief policy officer of the League of European Research Universities. LERU is an association of twenty-one European universities renowned for, and devoted to, world class research coupled with high quality teaching. LERU promotes the role and values of research universities in the knowledge society across Europe and beyond. Its purpose is to advocate these values, influence policy in Europe and to promote good practice through members' exchange of experience. Katrien has been with LERU since 2004 and is responsible for policy development across all areas of LERU's research and higher education related activities, from research funding, management and assessment, to research careers, doctoral training, professional development, gender issues and more. She is an expert in EU research policies and programmes such as ERA and Horizon 2020.

The LERU universities are the University of Amsterdam, Universitat de Barcelona, University of Cambridge, University of Edinburgh, University of Freiburg, Université de Genève, Universität Heidelberg, University of Helsinki, Universiteit Leiden, KU Leuven, Imperial College London, University College London, Lund University, University of Milan, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, University of Oxford, Pierre & Marie Curie University, Université Paris-Sud, University of Strasbourg, Utrecht University, and the University of Zurich.