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Can Equality Plans Contribute to the Sustainable Development Goal Linked to Gender Equality in Higher Education and Research Performing Organisations?

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Abstract

This paper aims to evaluate the content of Equality Plans (EPs) and assess whether institutions with EPs perform better on gender equality. A mixed-method approach was adopted by performing a content analysis of 45 EPs and conducting a survey using an online questionnaire on a sample of 48 public and private Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) institutions in Hungary. According to our findings, EPs in their present

form are not sufficiently good tools to contribute to the deployment of the Sustainable Development Goal linked to Gender Equality (SDG #5). EPs, to be more powerful in their impacts, need to be embedded in complex organisational processes and infrastructures, including the commitment of top management to frame gender equality as a strategic priority. The novelty of the present research project is that it investigates the outcomes of EPs for RDI sector employers in Hungary.

Keywords: Equality Plans, gender equality, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), workplace equality and diversity, higher education, Research, Development, & Innovation (RDI) sector

JEL Classification codes: I23, J78

Introduction

In the last two decades implementing Equality/Equal Opportunities/Diversity and Inclusion Plans (hereafter Equality Plans) have become more and more widespread across both private and public organisations (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Edwin, 2001; Kaley et al., 2006; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Williams, 2013). Moreover, as a consequence of internationalisation, globalisation, and growing pressures for excellence, higher education institutions and research performing organisations (RPOs) had to tackle the challenges of growing student and faculty diversity, while addressing dimensions of diversity and inclusion driven by the moral obligation and forces of social justice, and the obligation to comply with legislation of non-discrimination and equal treatment, for protected characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicities, etc. Thus, organisations in the Research, Development, and Innovation sector (RDI) started putting an increasing emphasis on issues of equality and diversity (Edwards, 2015; Milem et al., 2005; Otten, 2003), and within their efforts of managing equality and diversity, setting up and implementing Equality Plans, too (Tandé, 2017). Furthermore, the European Commission has made important commitments to enhance gender equality in the European Research Area with the concrete objectives to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and career progression of female researchers, to address gender imbalances in decision-making processes, and finally to integrate the gender dimension in research and innovation content (European Commission, 2012, 2019). This effort of the European Union is clearly linked to embracing the United Nation's global initiative on implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), of which Gender Equality is SDG5 out of the 17 SDGs. Introducing Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in higher education and research performing organisations has become a driving force for the diversity efforts in the European RDI sector in the past decade. However, research is relatively scarce on how equality and diversity

interventions succeed to attain desired outcomes in the RDI sector (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Timmers et al., 2010; Winchester & Browning, 2015). Moreover, a research gap clearly exists on how the content and the quality of equality or diversity plans in the RDI sector influence the outcomes for potential structural change in higher education and research performing organisations for becoming more diverse and inclusive, and thus moving towards the fulfilment of SDG5 on gender equality, too.

This paper aims to examine and evaluate the content of Equality Plans available in higher education institutions and research performing organisations in Hungary and assess whether institutions with Equality Plans perform better on gender equality. The novelty of the research carried out is that it investigates the value of equality, equal opportunity and diversity, and the potential for future structural change for the RDI employers, namely higher education institutions and research centres, through the assessment of their legally compulsory Equality Plans (EPs), using the method of content analysis combined with a survey on gender equality. We aim to answer the research questions: 1. What do Equality Plans reveal about workplace equality and diversity policies in both public and private higher education institutions and public research performing organisations? 2. Can equality plans contribute to the deployment of the Sustainable Development Goal linked to Gender Equality (SDG #5) in higher education and research performing organisations? We postulate that Equality Plans aim for legal compliance and not institutional social change related to protected groups, thus in most cases they cannot be considered a driving force for workplace equality and diversity in the Hungarian RDI sector. Relatedly, we hypothesise that RDI organisations with Equality Plans will not deliver better performance on gender equality compared to those without such plans in the Hungarian RDI sector.

Theoretical background and the Hungarian context

To achieve sustainable structural change through gender Equality Plans in higher education institutions, Clavero and Galligan stress the importance of approaching gender inequality as a problem of justice and gendered power relations and necessitate paying more attention to the role of organisational culture in the endurance of gender inequalities (Clavero & Galligan, 2021). Bencivenga and Drew (2021) emphasise the crucial role of senior leaders in making structural change for gender equality possible in higher education institutions, and they also conclude that national and EU initiatives could be better harmonised and streamlined to promote gender equality in the future (Bencivenga & Drew, 2021). Additionally, Kalpazidou Schmidt and Ovseiko (2020) argue that complexity should be used as a frame of reference for design, implementation, and impact assessment of diversity and gender equality

interventions, because evaluating the impact of such complex interventions is problematic when uniquely based on attribution and linear causality, thus not taking into consideration the complex nature of gender norms and the various types of intervening factors. Building on the ten hindering and facilitating factors for gender Equality Plan implementation in RDI institutions identified by Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt (2019), Thomson et al. (2022) argue for developing collaborations and communities of practice (CoP) for individual agents working on gender equality initiatives to improve their effectiveness.

Impact assessment and monitoring the outcomes of diversity and equality initiatives is generally an underdeveloped practice within organisations in Hungary and other countries (Tardos & Paksi, 2018). However, it is an essential building block in most of the frameworks used in Diversity Management (DM), whether in general DM models or more specialised models focusing on gender equality. One of the classic models of Diversity Management, the Strategy Web, has been set up by Kandola and Fullerton (1998). The authors argue that for diversity initiatives to be effective in organisations, seven key organisational processes have to be followed: 1. diversity needs to be part of the organisational vision, 2. top management commitment has to be clear for organisational members, 3. auditing and assessment of needs, 4. clarity of objectives, 5. effective communication, 6. co-ordination activity, and finally 7. evaluation. Similarly, the process of evaluating and monitoring is the final phase of the GEAR Tool designed by the European Institute for Gender Equality. The Toolkit for Gender Equality in Academia and Research, the so-called GEAR Tool, stresses four indispensable steps in implementing gender Equality Plans, namely 1. analysis, 2. planning, 3. implementation, and 4. monitoring.

Brookes et al. (2018) propose a four-item framework for implementing diversity plans in higher education institutions as part of ‘institutional transformation projects’: Accountability, Infrastructure, Incentives, and Resources (AIIR). They stress that diversity plan implementation has to be based on accountability systems across the institutions at differing levels, coupled with the allocation of budget and explicit priority in policies, and horizontal committees and agents of change as the project’s infrastructure. Additionally, incentives have to be set up for leaders to drive change and resource allocation and financial investments have to be made to drive the diversity efforts (Brooks et al., 2018).

To contextualise Equality Plans in Hungary, it was part of the legislative harmonisation process with the requirements towards the new Member States of the European Union that Hungary introduced the Act on Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities¹ as of January 2004. The new act was not only

¹ Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities.

progressive because it identified 19 protected characteristics for which breaching the imperative of equal treatment could lead to legal sanctions for employers, but also it has initiated a new compulsory practice for public sector organisations employing more than 50 employees, namely, to prepare and implement Equality Plans.

In a representative survey conducted one year after the introduction of the Equal Treatment Act, it was revealed that the majority of public sector institutions complied with the new legal requirements and 82% of them possessed an Equality Plan (Fővárosi Közhatalnok Foglalkoztatási Szolgálat Kht., 2005). Additionally, some organisations mentioned having an alternative to the document, including sections on non-discrimination and equality, such as a Code of Ethics, a Diversity Strategy, an Equal Opportunity Policy document or a Collective Agreement. In 2005, 13% of the surveyed organisations did not have any equality-related document in Hungary.

Another research project, funded by the Hungarian Equal Treatment Authority in 2013 (Niederfiringer & Soltész, 2013), assessed the impact of Equality Plans. According to the survey, the most important motivation for designing the Equality Plan was legal compliance in the public sector (83%); secondly, the intention to access the European Union's financial funding on calls, finally, for foreign-owned firms complying with the expectations of the headquarters was also a driving force to implement Equality Plans. Content-wise, most typically, Equality Plans focused on the needs of people with disabilities, employees with young children, and older employees aged 40–45+ years old. Concerning the impact assessment of Equality Plans, Niederfiringer and Soltész (2013) indicated that the existence of Equality Plans did not reduce the rate of perceived discrimination within the workplace. On the contrary, in organisations where the manager declared an Equality Plan, employees tended to perceive a higher percentage of discrimination cases. Thus, the knowledge about the existence of an equality document supported the process of reducing the latency of discrimination cases. On the other hand, when employees did not have any information about the existence of the Equality Plan, they also tended to perceive higher rates of discrimination. Moreover, no relationship was found between the employment of disadvantaged group members and the existence of an Equality Plan in the organisation. Inclusive attitudes among leaders did not correlate with the existence or non-existence of an Equality Plan in the organisations. Finally, employee satisfaction and the accurate knowledge about the presence of the Equality Plan only yielded positive results in the for-profit sector, while results were mixed in the public and non-profit sectors. Although the Niederfiringer and Soltész research is the most comprehensive in Hungary so far, the impact assessment of the Equality Plans did not assess the content and details of the implementation of the plans.

Methods

Firstly, we aim to analyse the Equality Plans of all higher education institutions in Hungary and all Research Centres affiliated with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (now the Eötvös Loránd Research Network). The total number of institutions targeted included 65 higher education organisations and 15 research centres, thus amounting to 80 institutions. We conducted the data collection process in autumn 2018. Out of the 80 institutions, we could get access to the Equality Plans of 45 institutions within the RDI sector, leading to a response rate of 56%. The Research Centres' response rate was somewhat higher than that of higher education institutions (66% versus 54%). Overall, from the 80 institutions, 19% did not have an Equality Plan, while 25% of the institutions did not answer our inquiry in any way despite several rounds of emails and telephone calls.

We used the method of content analysis to assess the characteristics of the Equality Plans. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative content analysis was applied using a deductive category application approach based on the theoretical literature of diversity management and implementing diversity and Equality Plans (Cross et al., 2018; Mayring, 2000). Data linked to the identified categories in the Equality Plans were coded in the SPSS software.

Secondly, we conducted a survey with an online questionnaire among the same group of RDI institutions in 2017. Overall, 48 institutions filled out the questionnaire, out of which 10 were Research Centres, and 38 were higher education institutions. Furthermore, from the 48 institutions 31 possessed an Equality Plan and 17 did not have any official equality document. Overall, our mixed-method approach made it possible to triangulate our results and make findings more robust.

Results

Assessment of the Equality Plans

Length, duration, and type of the Equality Plans

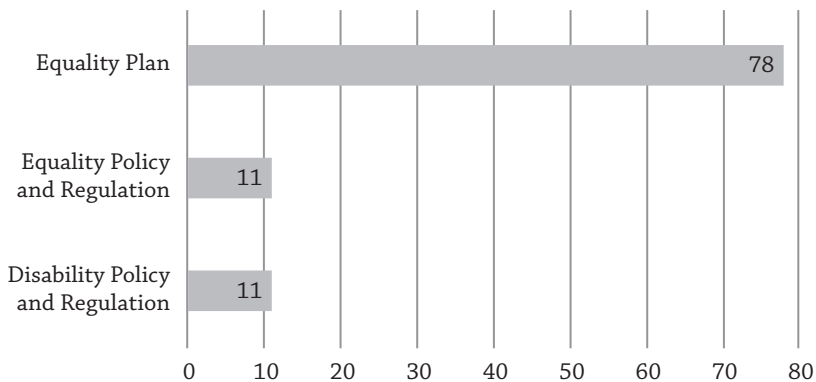
The length of the Equality Plans can indicate the level of detail and the range of equality measures and initiatives included in the document. The shortest Equality Plan document consisted of not more than one page, while the longest amounted to 44 pages. Most typically, the Equality Plans had not more than six pages; however, the average was ten pages.

There is no single best way to define the duration of the Equality Plans. Both shorter and longer durations can have advantages as well as disadvantages. The Equality Plans are typically designed for two years and close to a quarter have an even longer duration. However, almost one-third of the documents do not have any timeframe at all, signalling the problem of whether the equality documents are practical plans or policy documents.

Another issue to consider is if those Equality Plans that included an official starting and ending date were outdated or not at the time of data collection. The Equality Plans with an outdated timeframe can be an indicator of not being ‘live documents’, that is, being monitored and updated at the end of the implementation period. From the 71% of the Equality Plans including a timeframe, only 40% were officially in action at the time of data collection. Nearly one-third of them were outdated, and as mentioned earlier, a similar ratio did not have any timeframe at all.

The equality documents accessed in the sample can be categorised into basically three main types: 1. Equality Plans per se, 2. Equality Policy and Regulations, and 3. Disability Policy and Regulations. The first two types focus on the employees of the RDI institutions. At the same time, the Disability Policy and Regulations documents targeted stakeholders are students with disabilities. Therefore, these cannot be considered proper Equality Plans or Policy documents, despite being presented as such (Figure 1). Additionally, it was an emerging trend among higher education institutions to change their Equality Plans to Equality Policy and Regulations documents.

Figure 1. Distribution of the three types of Equality documents (%)



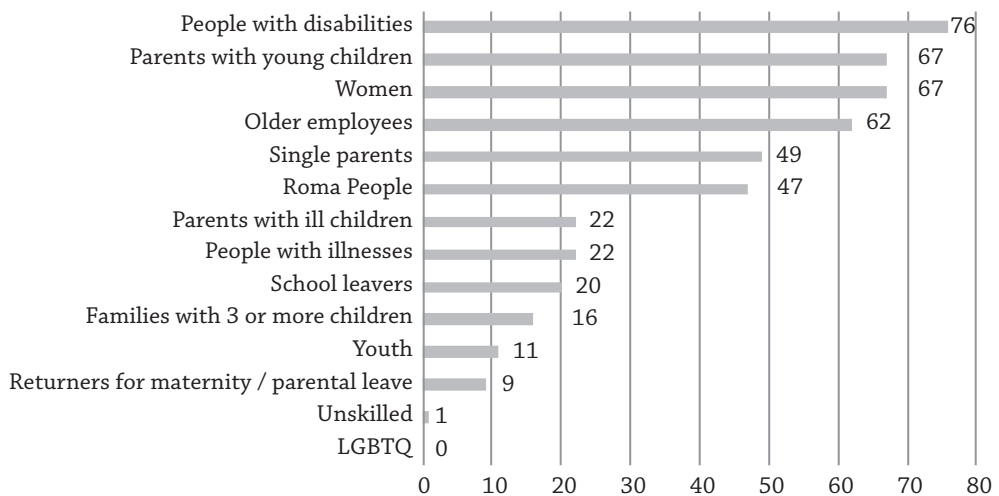
Source: own research.

Legal terms & regulations, state of play, and protected groups

One of the most common and standard characteristics of the examined Equality Plans was that they comprised legal terms, references to legal regulations, definitions of the concepts used, and basic principles of equality. This aspect of the plans very much hints to their reader that it is essentially a legal document.

Planned models of organisational change typically include an assessment of the organisation’s state of play, and a needs assessment before identifying concrete objectives, measures, and initiatives for change. Conducting such an assessment of the state of play in any organisation is fundamental to setting up realistic and relevant goals for change. Following the methodological recommendations for Equality Plans was a widely respected practice after introducing compulsory equality plans for the state sector organisations in 2004. Based on our results, the majority of Equality Plans (60%) had a section on the state of play, but most of these were composed of only elementary statistics related to the composition of the workforce. It was an infrequent practice to conduct an employee survey in which the perception of important issues and the needs assessment of employees could be evaluated. Moreover, only a quarter (24%) of the Equality Plans developed concrete goals and initiatives on the presented state of play included in the plan. This result indicates that in most cases, including a section on the state of play, is merely a formal piece of information not leading to any practical implications.

Figure 2. Frequency of various protected groups mentioned in the Equality Plans (%)



Source: own research.

A vast majority (84%) of the Equality Plans mention protected groups within the plan. This practice is also a heritage of the recommendations put forward after introducing compulsory Equality Plans for the state sector in 2004. The five recommended protected groups for organisations to consider were people with disabilities, parents with young children, women, older employees, and Roma People. Our results suggest that these recommendations were maintained for a more extended period, and the same protected groups are considered a priority for the organisations in the RDI sector today, too. Namely, the same groups are represented in the six most frequently mentioned protected groups of the Equality Plans with a frequency between 47% and 76% (Figure 2).

Practical implementation of the Equality Plan

Strategic goals, concrete objectives, and initiatives

It was an essential question whether adopting a strategic approach to the development of the Equality Plans can be detected or not. The business and diversity management approach in terms of defining an equality and diversity strategy or setting up strategic goals with SMART² objectives was practically non-existent, according to the results of our content analysis. However, formulating concrete objectives (67%) and listing several initiatives (76%) was a frequent practice included in the Equality Plans. The average number of initiatives listed in the Equality Plans equalled eleven initiatives. However, more than a quarter of the Equality Plans (27%) did not have any practical initiative mentioned, while in a few cases the number of initiatives exceeded twenty initiatives.

We categorised the initiatives listed in the Equality Plans into four groups: 1. those linked to HR processes, 2. protected groups, 3. institutions of equality, and finally 4. organisational culture. While approximately three-quarters of the Equality Plans had at least one initiative in the first three groups, only a tenth of the Plans mentioned any activities related to nurturing the organisational culture related to equality, diversity, and inclusion. This blindness to organisational culture is undoubtedly one of the significant weaknesses of the Equality Plans in the Hungarian RDI sector (Figure 3). On the other hand, the institutionalisation of equality can be considered a strength of the Equality Plans, considering the relatively small size of organisations involved. More than half (56%) of the institutions have nominated an equality officer or a disability coordinator, close to two-thirds of the organisations

² Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely.

(64%) have set up an equality committee, and more than three-quarters (78%) of the organisations have established a grievance procedure.

Figure 3. Frequency of initiatives by categories (%)

HR processes (71)	Protected groups (78)	Institutions of Equality (76)	Organisational culture (13)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment and selection • Quotas for women in top management • Training and development • Equal pay • Teleworking, part-time work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health prevention and training for the older • Part-time work for returners from maternity leave • Barrier-free environment • Extra holiday for parents • Family-friendly workplace measure • Scholarship for young Roma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality Policy • Equality Plan • Equality Committee • Equality (or disability) coordinator • Grievance procedure • State of play • Monitoring results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-friendly workplace • Good atmosphere • Awareness raising training for managers • Internal and external communication of the Equality Plan

Source: own research.

Considering how the practical initiatives are reinforced within the organisations, we can conclude that the controlling mechanisms are mostly missing during the implementation phase. Monitoring results is mentioned only in one-third of the cases, accountability for tasks is set in less than one-third of the cases (31%), communicating the Equality Plan is present in 29% of the cases, choosing initiatives that are a good match for the profile of the organisation characterises merely 20% of the cases. Moreover, only 13% of the Equality Plans identified deadlines and milestones for their actions. Using ‘continuous deadlines’ was a typical practice across the board.

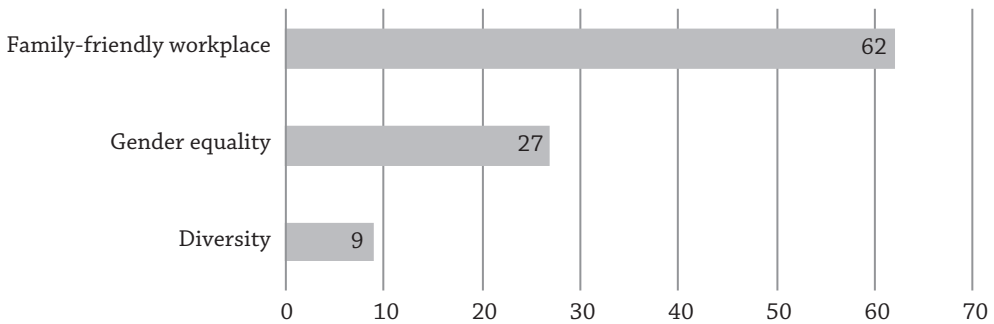
Approaches to equality

The business approach to equality and diversity was not prevalent in the Hungarian higher education institutions and research centres. On the one hand, those institutions that have a higher number of initiatives listed in their Equality Plans typically increase the number of welfare benefits for their employees: support for purchasing a flat for younger employees, an opportunity provided for visiting summer resorts, childcare facilities and a fitness room are available, extra health check-ups for older staff members, possibility of a health check-up during the working time, support for the transition into the retirement, extra days-off for fathers after

the birth of a child. On the other hand, the diversity management approach focusing on the business case of diversity was not frequently practised in the Hungarian RDI sector. Regarding the choice of terminology, not more than 9% of the Equality Plans contained the term ‘diversity’.

Workplace equality was most typically conceptualised as a ‘family-friendly workplace’. The most frequently used term was the ‘family-friendly workplace’ concept (62%). Related to the family-friendly workplace approach, it was a positive trend when the variety of different forms of families were explicitly mentioned, and family care was not uniquely conceptualised as the task of women. Moreover, it can be considered a good practice when actions related to women are not simply reduced to the carer role of women, but the broader concept of gender equality was addressed separately in family-friendly policies. As the occurrence of the two concepts indicates, gender equality was only addressed explicitly in a minority of cases (27%). Thus, we cannot postulate that gender equality is a dominant approach to conceptualising workplace equality in RDI institutions. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that previous research on the topic of family-friendly workplace and gender equality revealed that the family-friendly workplace approach does not necessarily suffice to improve gender equality in the distribution of decision-making positions between men and women (Tardos, 2014) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Frequency of the terms: ‘family-friendly workplace’, ‘gender equality’, and ‘diversity’ in the Equality Plans (%)



Source: own research.

Survey results on gender equality

In our sample of 48 RDI institutions completing the online questionnaire, 31 confirmed to have an Equality Plan while 17 organisations did not possess such a document. The following section will compare the two sub-groups of institutions related to those indicators by which the European Union (EU) measures progress

related to SDG5 on Gender Equality (European Commission, 2021). From the eight indicators used related to SDG5 on Gender Equality by the EU,³ three are relevant in the workplace context: the gender employment gap, the gender pay gap, and finally, positions held by women in senior management.

Related to the gender employment gap, we have mixed results. While the average proportion of women among those employed is significantly higher at institutions that possess an Equality Plan (55%), women's employment in RDI jobs is not significantly higher in institutions with an Equality Plan than those without it. Moreover, when examining the average proportion of women among those hired in the year preceding the data collection, no significant difference could be identified between the two types of institutions (Table 1).

Regarding the second category of indicators examining the gender wage gap, none of the scrutinised areas displayed clear differentiation within the two sub-groups. Overall, institutions dominantly estimated the gender wage gap to be a peripheral phenomenon. However, not more than one-tenth of the organisations implemented a gender wage gap audit in the past. Furthermore, only slightly more than one in every tenth organisation declared gender pay parity a very strong priority.

Women's representation at the top was another area where observed differences were not significant between the two groups of institutions. However, the average proportion of women in senior leadership positions and the percentage of institutions where the share of women in senior leadership increased in the past five years was higher among those institutions that possessed an Equality Plan. None of the institutions in our sample aimed to implement specific initiatives to increase the share of women in leadership.

Additionally, we examined the average number of initiatives supporting gender equality and women in general, taking into consideration the total number of initiatives on the individual, cultural, and organisational level, and observed no significant difference between those organisations that had an Equality Plan and those that did not. In the first case 16, in the second case 13 was the total number of initiatives existing at RDI institutions, and only a minority of the organisations were planning to increase their number. Moreover, it became clear that in the two subgroups, top management considered gender equality to be of strategic importance in only less than one-third of the cases (Table 1).

³ Physical and sexual violence to women, gender gap for early leavers from education and training, gender gap for tertiary educational attainment, gender pay gap in unadjusted form, gender employment gap, gender gap for inactive population due to caring responsibilities, seats held by women in national parliaments, and finally positions held by women in senior management.

Table 1. Indicators to monitor progress on SDG5, gender equality, according to the existence of Equality Plans in the RDI institutions

	Equality Plan exists in the institution	No Equality Plan exists in the institution	p value
Employment			
Average proportion of women among those employed	55	45	0.047^b
Average proportion of women among those hired in the previous year before the data collection	54	61	0.358 ^b
Average proportion of women in RDI jobs	43	37	0.426 ^b
Gender pay gap			
Estimation of the average percentage of the gender wage gap within the entire institution (%)	5	3	0.708 ^b (N=28)
Gender pay parity is a very strong priority in the organisation (%)	16	12	0.142 ^a
Audit of gender pay gap in the institution (%)	10	12	0.951 ^a
Positions held by women in senior management			
Average proportion of women in senior leadership positions	27	23	0.602 ^b
Proportion of institutions where the share of women in senior leadership increased in the past five years	26	6	0.305 ^a
Proportion of institutions where they have initiatives to increase the share of women in leadership	0	0	
Additional indicators on gender equality			
Average number of initiatives supporting gender equality and women (total number of initiatives at the individual, cultural and organisational level)	16	13	0.263 ^b
Top management considers gender equality to be of strategic importance (Yes, %)	32	29	0.553 ^a
Proportion of institutions where they plan to increase the number of measures taken for gender equality	29	18	0.306 ^a
	N=31	N=17	

^a Statistical difference by chi-square test; p<0.05 are significant (presented in bold).

^b Statistical difference by ANOVA table; p<0.05 are significant (presented in bold).

Source: own research.

Discussion

The content analysis of the Equality Plans revealed several pieces of evidence demonstrating that a majority of the Equality Plans were not effectively directing attention towards institutional social change on improving organisational processes linked to equality and diversity. On the one hand, almost one-quarter of the documents analysed were policy documents and not plans per se. Around one-third of the documents were outdated, and another 29% had no time frame. On the other hand, comparing our results with the so-called Strategy Web Model (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998), it became clear that an equality strategy and vision was primarily absent in the Equality Plans of RDI institutions, top managerial commitment could not be traced in the documents and nurturing the organisational culture to become more inclusive was relatively rare in opposition with recommendations made by Claveros and Galligan (2021). While a section on the state of play existed in the majority of the Equality Plan documents, these could hardly be considered an ‘audit and assessment of needs’ as they mostly lacked the inputs of the employees or a more sophisticated organisational survey. Furthermore, in less than one-quarter of cases the concrete goals and initiatives included in the Equality Plan could be linked to the state of play itself. Therefore, in a majority of the examined cases, the initiatives indicated in the plan were not tailored to the needs of the organisation. Although two-thirds of the Equality Plans comprised some concrete objectives, they were not SMART objectives. Similarly, only a minority of the Equality Plans indicated any methods for communicating the Equality Plan within the organisation. Related to the co-ordination of tasks, accountability was included in less than one-third of the cases, whereas deadlines and milestones were mostly missing as well. The final step of the Strategy Web model, the evaluation of the plan’s implementation, was explicitly mentioned in one-third of the cases, thus monitoring the impact of the Equality Plan before the provision of the following plan was mainly skipped by RDI institutions.

The survey results reinforced the findings based on the content analysis of Equality Plans. Considering output indicators of gender equality used by the European Union to measure progress towards the fulfilment of SDG5 on Gender Equality, the two groups of organisations, those with and those without an Equality Plan did not significantly differ on the indicators related to the employment and wage gender gap, neither on the representation of women at the top.

Conclusion

This paper examined the content of Equality Plans available in higher education institutions and research performing organisations and presented the findings of an online survey on gender equality among RDI institutions in Hungary. We aimed to answer the research questions: 1. What do Equality Plans reveal about workplace equality and diversity policies in both public and private higher education institutions and public research performing organisations? 2. Can Equality Plans contribute to the deployment of the Sustainable Development Goal linked to Gender Equality (SDG #5) in higher education and research performing organisations?

Through the content analysis of 45 Equality Plans, we demonstrated that Equality Plans aim for legal compliance and not institutional social change related to protected groups, thus in most cases cannot be considered a driving force for workplace equality and diversity in the Hungarian RDI sector. Consequently, Equality Plans fulfil mainly an external legitimation and legal compliance function in accordance with our original assumptions.

Furthermore, we demonstrated that workplace equality is conceptualised in a relatively narrow manner in the Hungarian RDI institutions, mainly as the 'family-friendly workplace'. Neither the business-oriented 'diversity management' approach nor the 'gender equality' focus was significant. Our organisational survey results highlighted that RDI institutions with an Equality Plan did not perform significantly better on indicators of gender quality compared to their counterparts without such a document. Therefore, we argue that Equality Plans on their own and in their present form are not sufficiently good tools to contribute to the deployment of the Sustainable Development Goal linked to Gender Equality (SDG #5) in higher education and research performing organisations. Equality Plans, to be more powerful in their impacts on gender equality, need to be embedded in complex organisational processes and infrastructures, including the commitment of top management to frame gender equality as a strategic priority. The novelty of the present research project was that it investigated an underdeveloped area of Diversity Management, the impact assessment, and outcomes of Equality Plans for the RDI sector employers in Hungary thus contributing to the theory and practice of implementing gender equality in organisations.

A limitation of the research was that we could not explicitly identify the complexity how Equality Plans might impact the RDI sector and gender equality. Furthermore, our study was rolled out in only one specific country, Hungary, with a relatively small sample size, especially for the sub-sample where no Equality Plan existed in the institution. Nevertheless, we demonstrated that the methodology in developing Equality Plans

needs to be upgraded to achieve sustainable organisational change and improvement on reaching the Sustainable Development Goal for gender equality. Moreover, the new expectations of the European Commission and the Horizon Europe research funding scheme to introduce Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in higher education institutions and research performing organisations will most probably bring Equality Plans, and Gender Equality Plans more specifically, into the spotlight in Hungary's and other European countries' RDI sector, too. Future larger scale comparative studies could focus on investigating the relationship between the quality of Equality Plans, their organisational embeddedness, and gender equality outcomes.

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