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The need for Gender Equality Plans and Gender Budgeting in Albanian Higher Education – Insights from the University of Tirana in the context of sustainable institutional change

Równouprawnienie kobiet i mężczyzn oraz budżetowanie z uwzględnieniem płci w albańskim szkolnictwie wyższym a zmiany instytucjonalne na przykładzie Uniwersytetu w Tiranie

Keywords:
gender equality plans,
gender budgeting, gender
context analysis; sustainable
institutional change in higher
education

Abstract: Promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls are pivotal objectives for sustainable development, demanding coordinated efforts from nations and institutions worldwide, including the higher education sector. The systemic disadvantage faced by women within Albania's higher education system underscores the crucial role of gender equality plans and gender budgeting as strategic instruments for fostering sustainable institutional change. This research identifies various aspects of gender inequality in Albania's higher education sector through secondary research using government statistics and published datasets. Additionally, through a case study approach and survey data, it conducts a comprehensive analysis of the gender context at the University of Tirana, recommending the development of gender budgeting and gender equality plans within the institution.

The research aims to pinpoint gender-related issues and propose gender equality plans to address them. Drawing insights from the University of Tirana case, the authors advocate for the adoption of these gender equality plans by other higher education institutions in Albania. This initiative seeks to progressively tackle gender inequalities and integrate sustainable practices into the planning processes of these institutions. Gender budgeting and gender plans should form integral components of the decision-making process in universities. By fostering policies and regulations that support gender equality throughout the institution, they can better respond to the diverse needs of all students, professors, and academic staff.

Słowa kluczowe:
równość płci, zmiany
instytucjonalne
w szkolnictwie wyższym,
równouprawnienie
w szkolnictwie wyższym

Streszczenie: Promowanie równości płci oraz wzmacnianie pozycji kobiet i dziewcząt to kluczowe cele zrównoważonego rozwoju, wymagające skoordynowanych wysiłków ze strony narodów i instytucji na całym świecie, w tym sektora szkolnictwa wyższego. Niekorzystna sytuacja, jaką napotykały kobiety w albańskim systemie szkolnictwa wyższego, wskazuje na kluczowe działania na rzecz równości płci jako strategicznych instrumentów wspierania trwałych zmian instytucjonalnych. Przedstawione w artykule badania miały na celu dokonanie identyfikacji różnych aspektów nierówności płci w sektorze szkolnictwa wyższego w Albanii. Przeprowadzone badania oparto na analizie danych statystycznych, studiach przypadków oraz badań ankietowych.

JEL:
H83, I23, J16

Introduction

The higher education sector is a key instrument for social change and universities in Albania must be at the forefront of promoting gender equality, diversity, and inclusion for their students and for their academic and administrative staff. The 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the 2030 Agenda aims to achieve gender equality by ending discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against women and girls, and ensuring their full participation and equal opportunities for leadership in political and economic decision-making [UN, 2015]. More specifically, gender equality in research and innovation is one of the key priorities of the European Research Area and is part of the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy for 2020–2025 [EC, 2020]. Despite the general commitment for gender equality and of the several reforms that have happened in the recent years, the higher education institutions around the world still show gender inequalities in the form of the glass ceiling phenomenon and in referring to the disciplines of research and teaching and choice of education fields [EC, 2019].

One of the recommendations of the European Commission for higher education institutions is to identify gender inequalities within their institution by conducting context analysis of procedures and practices and design gender equality plans that aim and to implement effective measures to correct inequalities through gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming [EC, 2012].

Universities should promote gender equality and inclusion through gender mainstreaming, gender equality plans and gender budgeting.

One of the most effective tools to achieve equality between women and men in higher education institutions is by focusing on how public resources are collected and spent. 'Gender budgeting is an approach to budgeting that can improve it when fiscal policies and administrative procedures are structured to address gender inequality. When properly done, one can say that gender budgeting is good budgeting [Stotsky, 2016, p. 12].

Gender budgeting is a 'gender-based assessment of budgets incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures to promote gender equality' [CE, 2005, p. 10]. Since gender perspectives are normally not considered in budgeting, budgets are often perceived as being gender neutral. However, research shows that lack of attention to gender issues leads to gender-blind budgets and thus to suboptimal decision-making in universities and other research institutions.

Research objectives

The aim of this research is to provide an overview of the gender context in higher education institutions in Albania and, an in-depth analysis of the gender context of the University of Tirana, to explore the need for gender equality plans and gender budgeting as sustainable practices that will systematically and gradually address these inequalities through a process of structural changes. In this research, the authors will carry out secondary and primary research with the following objectives:

- To provide an overview of the gender context in the higher education sector in Albania.
- To present the case of Tirana University and discuss how gender inequalities can be addressed through the development of gender equality plans and gender budgeting.
- To explore possible advantages for the implementation of gender equality plans and gender budgeting processes for other higher education institutions to address gender inequality issues.

Methodology

This research uses a case study approach as an empirical inquiry, which investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context [Yin, 2009]. In case study research like this one, combined methods of data collection are used, as it involves an in-depth study of a phenomenon, therefore we have used both secondary and primary data.

The secondary data in this research include the review of external resources, such as government statistics and published datasets which have been analyzed in the search for certain gender gaps, patterns and indicators that would help decision-makers of the higher education sector in Albania to make appropriate, relevant, and informed decisions. This data includes information about the number of students enrolled in tertiary education by gender and field of education, the number of doctoral graduates by gender, the proportion (%) of men and women in a typical academic career, students and academic staff and the proportion (%) of women among academic staff, by grade and total not only for Albanian Universities in general, but also for Tirana University in specific focus. The authors have reclassified this data according to ISCED¹ requirements applying internationally agreed definitions to facilitate evaluation and comparisons of education systems across countries.

Furthermore, the case study approach involves the use of primary data collected through a survey conducted with 160 participants from UT². The questionnaire was distributed to all academic and administrative staff of UT from the main server using their official e-mail addresses.

The survey has been developed in Qualtrics, which provides a user-friendly environment for respondents. At the beginning of the survey, all participants were informed about the anonymization of their data. Participants were given the option of not responding to each question. The survey included several blocks of questions:

- Demographic questions: age, gender, marital status, number of children, age of youngest child, childcare service, share of household income, employment status of partner.
- Professional life questions: role at institution, research field, type and duration of work contract, preferences for smart working, promotion, wage, job satisfaction, relationship with boss.
- Work-life balance questions: (some questions have been selected from the Eurofound 3rd Living, Working and COVID-19 e-survey) tradeoff work and family

¹ ISCED is the reference international classification for organizing education programs and related qualifications by levels and fields. ISCED 2011 (levels of education) has been implemented in all EU data collections since 2014. ISCED-F 2013 (fields of education and training) has been implemented since 2016.

² This survey was conducted in the framework of the „LeTSGEPs project which received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation program under Grant Agreement n° 873072.

time, commuting time to work, housework/childcare time use, paternity leave, life satisfaction.

- Social value and gender policy-oriented questions: traditional gender role questions (taken from the Social Value Survey), discrimination (race, age, sexual), feelings about easier/harder for women to obtain better careers (several contexts) than men, ranking of possible actions to implement in GEP.
- Leisure time questions: activities practiced, vacation, memories, time spent watching television/videos.

Limitations

Using the case study methodology for this research has its own limitations. Firstly, it can be difficult and not always scientifically correct to generalize findings from the UT case to the entire higher education system in Albania as other institutions may have different characteristics that may impact the situation and the progress on gender equality issues. Secondly, the researchers' personal perspective may influence the conclusions and affect their research approach.

Another limitation of this study is that the findings of the research are mainly based on secondary data which are only analyzed for a certain period. To enhance future studies, it would be beneficial to compare these findings over a longer duration and across various research institutions in Albania.

The questionnaire used for was sent to all academic and non-academic staff via official email. The participation was voluntary, and the final sample was not balanced between men and women. However, this questionnaire was a complementary tool to find more about the different perceptions on gender equality in our university. In future studies, researchers may choose to have a more balanced participation in this type of questionnaire.

Literature review

Gender Equality, Gender Budgeting and Gender Equality Plans in Higher Education

Gender Equality refers to a situation when men and women have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, cultural, and political development. Equality between men and women is seen both as a precondition for and an indicator of sustainable people centered development. Gender equality starts with equal valuing of girls and boys [Osagi, 2001].

The Council of Europe defines gender budgeting as a 'gender-based assessment of budgets incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality' [CE, 2005].

The purpose of gender budgeting is threefold:

1. To promote accountability and transparency in fiscal planning.
2. To increase gender responsive participation in the budget process, for example by undertaking steps to involve women and men equally in budget preparation.
3. To advance gender equality and women's rights.

To put in place an effective implementation of gender budgeting, some common elements should be present:

- Analysis of budgets and policies from a gender perspective.
- Linking gender budgeting to overall gender equality objectives.
- Restructuring budgets and amending policies.
- Integrating gender perspectives throughout the budget cycle.
- Monitoring and evaluation of achievements.
- Transparency of the budget process.
- Participation in the budget process.

GEP is a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organization through the sustainable transformation of organizational processes, cultures and structures that produce and sustain gender imbalances and inequalities [EC, 2021].

In the context of research and higher education institutions, the EC considers a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) as a set of actions aiming at:

- Evaluation of the context / audits of procedures and practices to identify gender bias. According to C. Ní Laoire, C. Linehan, U.E. Archibong, I. Picardi, and M. Uden [2021], context has a fundamental role in influencing the dynamics of the policy-practice interface in the field of gender equality in universities. They argue that the meaning, implementation, and effects of gender equality policies in higher education are significantly shaped by the environment in which they occur.
- Identifying and implementing innovative strategies to correct any bias. To achieve transparency in the interpretation of gender issues within the financial statements, it is necessary to develop a tracking system and reclassify the budget regarding assets and liabilities (if the reclassification of the balance sheet is preferred) as well as revenues and expenses within the statement of profit and loss, in accordance with various objectives that may represent [Addabbo, Badalassi, 2021]:
 - a. a gender priority scale that distinguishes between budget categories that are directly related to gender issues, those that are indirectly related to gender issues, environmental categories, and neutral categories.
 - b. capability analysis that is consistent with the one that was previously created to categorize stakeholders and create the gender context analysis.

- Setting targets and monitoring progress via indicators [ECC, 2012, p. 392]. Monitoring and evaluation provide a systematic assessment of progress toward the GEP's goals and objectives. They contribute to determining whether proposed measures are successfully executed and provide the expected results. Regular monitoring and assessment provide an evidence-based approach for tracking progress and finding gaps or areas that require adjustment or development [Kalpazidou Schmidt, Cacace, 2018]. This information allows the GEP and GB to be adjusted so that it remains current and effective in addressing gender inequality and fostering gender equality.

Due to the highly competitive nature and prerequisites of EU calls, research and higher education institutions applying for EU funding are compelled to design and implement GEPs, which contribute to achieve the objectives set by the European Commission [EIGE, 2016].

The universities should use GEPs as a systematic and strategic instrument that establishes priorities and specific measures that will be implemented to improve gender equality within the institution.

S. Marcassa [2022] found that women in academia experience more stress at work than males, even if gender differences are not always statistically significant. Burnout rates are substantially greater among academic than non-academic personnel, regardless of gender. They may have been aggravated by the Covid crisis, but they are consistent with prior studies on burnout syndrome.

The study's findings also demonstrate that, while women perceive more gender inequality than men in task and resource allocation, males experience equal gender treatment in their departments and offices. These gender disparities in perception are seen in the responses of both academics and non-academics [Marcassa, 2022].

Carvalho et al. state that while the implementation of the GEP can be considered a successful tool for increasing the number of women in management and decision-making roles and positions in academia, the authors are concerned that this change may only be incidental or solely due to the project's duration at the university. Thus, even when the project is "completed," gender awareness initiatives must be continued and monitored [Carvalho et al., 2020]. A. Wroblewski and A. Leitner [2022] argue that monitoring promotes transparency, allowing for reflection on an underlying gender bias in organizational procedures that are commonly perceived to be gender neutral and merit-based. Monitoring also serves as a solid beginning point for a gender equality conversation within the organization and beyond. Those who participate in the gender equality discourse achieve gender competence and demonstrate their commitment to gender equality. Thus, reflection based on monitoring outcomes should be viewed as part of an organizational learning process that develops an organization's innovation capacity and prepares it to face future challenges [Wroblewski, Leitner, 2022].

Several reports of the European Commission (EC) and research papers assert that gender inequality in higher education remains a universal issue that should be looked at with priority and there are still barriers to the advancement of women and minorities. These barriers reflect “discrimination, a deep line of demarcation between those who prosper and those left behind”

According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission [FGCC, 1995].

The concept of glass ceiling refers to “artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities.” The glass ceiling is the “unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements”. This official description suggests that the definition of a glass ceiling must recognize that it reflects a job inequality that is unexplained by a person’s past “qualifications or achievements”; it reflects labor market discrimination, not just labor market inequality.

According to Staab and Waylen [2020], critical gender actors had both to make new rules and work within the existing norms, taking advantage of any loopholes or soft spots, to achieve positive gender change given certain formal and informal limits, within the institutions [Staab, Waylen, 2020, pp. 50–74].

Legal framework in Albania

The National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality (NSGE) of Albania 2016–2020 [MSWY, 2016], provided a vision, which had four strategic aims:

1. Economic empowerment of women and men,
2. Guaranteeing factual and equal participation of women in the politics and public decision-making,
3. Reduction of gender-based violence and domestic violence, and
4. Empowerment of the coordination and monitoring role of the National Gender Equality Mechanism, as well as awareness-raising of the society on gender equality advancing.

According to Law No.9970/2008 “On Gender Equality in Society” each Ministry and municipality must have a gender focal point. The Albanian Parliament has the Sub-Commission on Gender Equality and Prevention of Violence against Women, since 2017, as part of the Commission on Labor, Social Issues and Health. There is also the Alliance of Women Members of the Parliament, which was formed in 2013 to promote gender equality and include a gender perspective in the legislation.

Based on the advancements and the challenges of the gender equality work in Albania, the latest NSGE of Albania 2021–2030 [MSWY, 2021], consists of four main strategic goals, which focus on specific objectives that reflect the need to change or add new dimensions that will adequately address gender equality issues.

- Fulfillment of economic and social rights of women and men in the society and the empowerment of women, and girls in all their diversity, aiming at an improvement and sustainability of the green economy and their equal participation in the digitalization process.
- Ensuring the equal participation, representation, and leadership rights of women and men in all their diversity in political and public decision-making at the local level.
- Reduction of all forms of harmful practices, gender-based violence and domestic violence.
- Application of gender mainstreaming as the main tool of achieving gender equality and gender justice in society.

Education Statistics

Education statistics present data on participation of girls and boys, as well as academic staff from pre-school education to higher education, in both formal and informal, according to the levels foreseen by the official education system in the country. The legal basis guarantees universal access to education from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the duty of which is to ensure equal opportunities. Educational participation by gender in the education cycles indicates the existence of gender differences at various education levels. Educational participation by education levels from the analysis conducted on educational participation by levels (GER) shows that participation in the upper secondary education is higher for boys than girls, 96.8% and 90.1%, whereas the ratio for higher education is rather reverse, as the participation scores higher for girls 71.9% than boys 46.7%. The ratio of boys attending pre-university education is higher compared to girls, whereas 60.4% of students in higher education are girls. This is reflected in the gender equality index (on GER), amounting to 1.54 for higher education.

Gender Contexts in Higher Education in Albania

In Table 1, representing the proportion (%) of men and women in a typical academic career, students, and academic staff in the higher education institutions in Albania, we may note that moving from the early stages of the career to the later ones, the percentage of female representation decreases.

Figure 1 below displays the trend of academic careers by gender. Looking at the composition by gender along the academic career path starting from the position of student, passing through the research doctorate to becoming a researcher (C), associate professor (B) and full professor (A), the effect of the so-called leaky pipeline is easily recognized. In fact, women represent 61.7% of the population. In the later stages

of the career the presence of women is reduced progressively, falling to 59.8% among the associate professors and to 40.7% among the full professors.

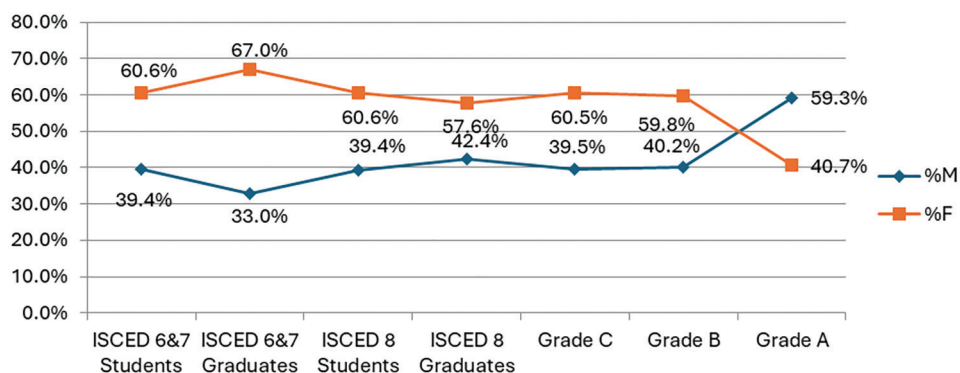
Table 1. Proportion (%) of men and women in a typical academic career

	Data for all higher educational institutions of Albania		
	M	F	F/TOT (%)
ISCED 6&7 Students	52,447	80,533	60.6
ISCED 6&7 Graduates	11,268	22,920	67.0
ISCED 8 Students	734	1,131	60.6
ISCED 8 Graduates	97	132	57.6
Grade C	554	849	60.5
Grade B	780	1,162	59.8
Grade A	889	610	40.7
Total	66,769	107,337	61.7

Note: Data for all higher educational institutions of Albania.

Source: Instat.

Figure 1. Proportion (%) of men and women in a typical academic career



Note: Data for all higher educational institutions of Albania.

Source: research results.

Table 2 shows that women are mainly present in the lower roles of the hierarchical scale with a progressive reduction in percentage terms as the hierarchical scale increases. In fact, it goes from a percentage of 60.5% in grade C to 40.7% in grade A.

Table 3 displays the Glass Ceiling index. It is determined as the ratio between the share of women in teaching staff (grade A + grade B + grade C) and the share of women in the role of full professors (grade A). The value of this index can vary from zero to infin-

ity. An index value of 1 indicates that there is no difference between women and men in terms of the probability of reaching the maximum career level (full professor). An index value of less than 1 means that the share of women in the maximum achievable role is higher than their average presence among the teaching staff (grade A + grade B + grade C). An index value higher than unity instead shows the presence of the effect known as “glass ceiling effect”, which sees women less represented in the top positions (grade A) than their average presence area of teaching staff (grade A + grade B + grade C).

Table 2. Proportion (%) of women among academic staff

Index	Data for all higher educational institutions of Albania				
	M	F	TOT	M/TOT (%)	F/TOT (%)
Grade A	889	610	1,499	59.3	40.7
Grade B	780	1,162	1,942	40.2	59.8
Grade C	554	849	1,403	39.5	60.5
Total	2,223	2,621	4,844	45.9	54.1

Note: Data for all higher educational institutions of Albania.

Source: Instat.

In general, the higher the value assumed above the unit by the Glass Ceiling index, the stronger the effect of the glass ceiling and the more difficult it is for women to reach the top role in the academic career.

The Glass Ceiling index for all higher educational institutions of Albania is 1.33, that indicates the barriers to the career progression of female academic staff. The calculation of the glass ceiling index is done according to the methodology explained in She Figures Handbook 2018 [She Figures Handbook 2018, p. 127].

The above analysis provides data that there is evidence of gender inequality in research leading to insufficient representation of women in leadership positions.

Table 3. Glass Ceiling Index

GLASS CEILING INDEX:	1.33
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Note: Glass Ceiling index for all higher educational institutions of Albania.

Source: research results.

Many academic women believe that they have disproportionate responsibilities for service in their departments, as they tend to put in longer hours than their male counterparts for childcare, housework, and elder care [Bombuwela, De Alwis, 2013, p. 3]. There may be simple answers to explain these trends, such as women are more likely

to have their careers interrupted by parental leaves [Acker, Armenti, 2007, pp. 3–24], or are unable to stay long due to home and parenting responsibilities or are hired with less experience than men are.

Moreover, the discourse of academic meritocracy may also be masculine, reproduce masculine practices, as the typical career path in academia is structure according to a male perception of success, which involves being research active, stay at work more than designated time, and submit to the research assessment exercise. A work ethic grounded in long hours of conducting research, teaching, or writing papers were the norm in the “male” university [Van de Brink et al., 2010, pp. 1459–1483].

Table 4 shows a more in-depth analysis of gender by looking only at grade A, the position of full professor.

In percentage terms, the presence of female professors out of the total female academic staff is 23.3%, while the male one is about 40%. This confirms that, some social, cultural, economic or institutional barriers may have limited females’ careers.

Table 4. Proportion (%) of grade A staff among all academic staff

	Data for all higher educational institutions of Albania		
	M	F	TOT
A	889	610	1,499
Tot	2,223	2,621	4,844
% A/TOTAL	40.0	23.3	30.9

Note: Data for all higher educational institutions of Albania.

Source: Instat.

Findings and comments regarding the UT case

The largest public university in Albania is the University of Tirana (UT), which was founded in 1957. The university comprises eight main units: research centers, 38 administrative departments, and six faculties with two research institutes. The institution offers the following programs: 36 professional master’s programs, 36 first-cycle programs, 65 Master of Science programs, and 38 doctorate programs.

The Vision of the University of Tirana aims to remain a model of public higher education characterized by rigorous academic preparation and deep scientific research, an educational institution of first choice for students committed to transforming their lives and society.

The design of the first GEP for UT was based on a thorough gender context analysis. The main gender gaps identified at an institutional level were:

- The mission and vision of the institution are not gender sensitive.
- There is a lack of institutional policies and structures to promote GEP.
- There has been no attempt so far to develop the GEP and Gender Responsive Budget.
- There are very few data available to monitor the situation with gender lenses.
- Gender aspects are not included in a systematic way in research work.
- Very few published papers focus on gender equality analysis and/or take into consideration the gender impact.

Analysis of the UT statistical indicators according to ISCED

Table 5 displays the number of the students enrolled in tertiary education by sex and field of study at the University of Tirana. The analysis of the student component by gender shows that the number of women is higher than that of men in almost all fields of study in UT. Specifically, the examination of students enrolled by fields of study shows the widespread phenomenon known internationally as horizontal segregation, where women at the University of Tirana represent from 57% (Information and Communication Technologies) to 89% (Education) of the total students in the respective field of studies.

Table 5. Students enrolled in tertiary education by sex and field of education

HEI	University of Tirana			
	M	F	TOT	TOT (%)
Education	294	2,271	2,565	89
Arts and humanities	1,214	5,544	6,758	82
Social sciences, journalism, and information	789	4,156	4,945	84
Business, administration, and law	1,772	5,419	7,191	75
Natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics	755	2,676	3,431	78
Information and Communication Technologies	1,640	2,214	3,854	57
Services	8	12	20	60
Total	6,660	22,800	29,460	77

Data from University of Tirana.

Source: research results.

Table 6 shows the analysis of doctoral graduates by gender. We can observe that there are more female doctoral graduates in all fields of studies.

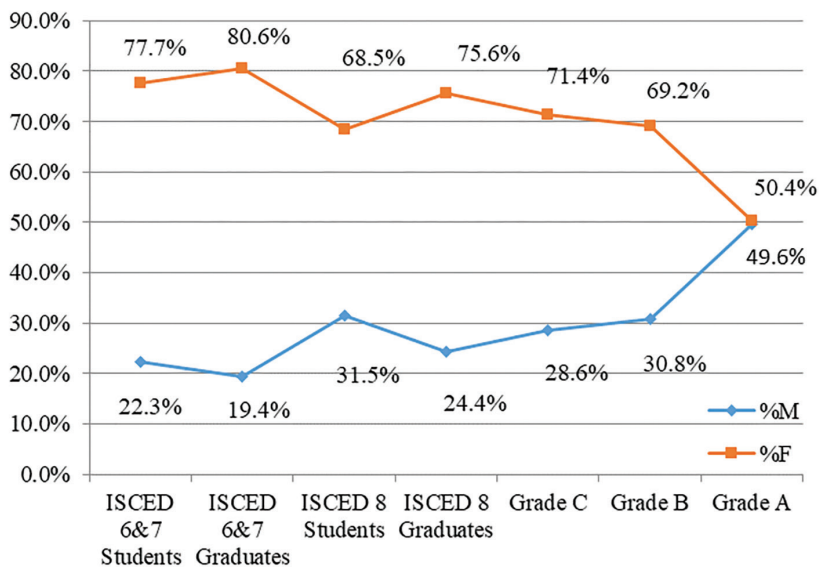
Table 6. Women among doctoral graduates by field of education

HEI	University of Tirana				
Women among doctoral graduates by field of education	M	F	F (%)	TOT	F/TOT (%)
Education	-	-	0	-	0
Arts and humanities	8	15	23	23	65
Social sciences, journalism, and information	6	7	11	13	54
Business, administration, and law	1	20	31	21	95
Natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics	6	22	34	28	79
Information and Communication Technologies		1	2	1	100
Total	21	65	100	86	76

Source: Data from University of Tirana.

The percentage of female doctoral graduates is from 54% in the field of social sciences, journalism, and information to almost 100% in the field of Information and Communication Technologies.

Figure 2. Proportion (%) of men and women in a typical academic career



Note: Data for UT.

Source: research results.

Figure 2 displays the trend of academic careers by gender. Looking at the composition by gender along the academic career path starting from the position of student,

passing through the research doctorate to becoming a researcher (C), associate professor (B) and full professor (A), the effect of the so-called leaky pipeline is easily recognized. In fact, women represent 77.9% of the students and academic staff of UT. In the later stages of the career the presence of women is reduced progressively, falling to 69.2% among the associate professors and to 50.4% among the full professors. Probably, the transition from Associate Professor to the position of Full Professor is the most critical phase for women, in which they should meet many research and publication requirements (establishment of an independent life with choices connected to the construction of one's family is normally highlighted).

Table 7 shows a more in-depth analysis of gender by looking only at grade A, the position of full professor. In percentage terms, the presence of female professors out of the total female academic staff is 13.3%, while the male one is about 25.4%. This confirms that some social, cultural, economic, or institutional barriers may have limited females' careers.

Table 7. Proportion (%) of grade A staff among all academic staff, by sex

HEI	Data for UT		
INDEX:	Proportion (%) of grade A staff among all academic staff, by sex		
	M	F	TOT
GRADE A/TOTAL (%)	25.4	13.6	17.7

Note: Data for UT.

Source: research results.

The above analysis provides evidence that there is evidence of gender inequality in research leading to insufficient representation of women in leadership positions.

Analysis of the survey results

The number of respondents (160) corresponds to a sample size, which allows reaching a target of a 10% error margin (95% confidence interval).

The female participation in the survey was 76.4% while 22% male. Table 4 shows the respondents regarding age patterns where 44.4% belong to the age group 21–34 and 29.4% to the age group 35–44 and the field of research.

From the answers, 60 to 80 percent of the respondents declare that they have not been victims of discrimination (or known of such cases).

To evaluate whether men and women perceive that the tasks and resources are equally allocated in their departments, several tasks and resources were assessed. In general, both men and women that responded to the survey believe that it is easier for women

to obtain desirable and demanding tasks, access offices or equipment, obtain a wage bonus, and career development opportunities. Men find it more likely than women do. Compared to men, a higher percentage of women find that accessing career development opportunities is easier for men.

Table 8. The respondents regarding age patterns and the field of research

Age group	21–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
	44.4%	29.4%	28 (17.5%)	10 (6.2%)	2 (1.2%)
Fields	Arts and Humanities	Economics, Business, Finance and Management	Law, Political Science	Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, statistics	Sociology
	24 (15.1%)	85 (53.5%)	4 (2.5%)	17 (10.7%)	6 (3.8%)

Note: Data for UT.

Source: research results.

Compared to men, a higher percentage of women find that declining unwanted non-mandatory teaching hours, obtaining a permanent contract, receiving adequate prevention of occupational hazards, and participating in the space of representation are easier for men. Both men and women perceive that the recruitment process is more accessible to men.

Based on the survey results we were able to show some indicators of “professional burnout”. The percentages are very similar for men and women. We see that about 40 percent of the respondents worry about work when they are not working at least half of the time; about 80 percent of them are too tired to take care of housework at the end of the day. About 60 percent of respondents perceive that their job prevents them from devoting the time they want to their personal life. About 40 percent of the respondents feel the need to work during holidays to meet work demands.

Focus of the First gender Equality Plan of UT

Based on the above analysis of the current situation of the University of Tirana, the first GEP document was designed and later implemented.

The main goal of GEP was to increase awareness and to implement measures for gender equality at the University of Tirana. This main goal was complemented by the following specific objectives:

- Dedicated resources commitment of human resources and gender expertise to implement it.
- Data collection and monitoring: gender disaggregated, data on personnel and students for certain indicators and annual reporting based on these indicators.

- Awareness raising/training on gender equality and unconscious gender biases for staff and decision-makers.

Some of the crucial pillars of a sustainable GEP are “dedicated human resources” and “gender expertise”.

In response to these requirements, the first measure proposed for the GEP was the appointment of a Gender Focal Point at Rectorate level.

The GFP will assist the process of gender mainstreaming in the UT and will be responsible for ensuring and monitoring that policies, workplace procedures and practices respect gender equality. GFPs may be directly involved in implementing certain gender-specific activities on awareness such as training on gender issues, workshops, and advocacy campaigns.

The data collection and monitoring gender disaggregated data on personnel and students for certain indicators and annual reporting is another goal of GEP. From the data collected, initially it is evident that some data are missing, not only for UT but at national level as well. We expect that in the coming years UT will be able to collect all data required according to the EU standards, referring to the international classification ISCED and divided by gender and age.

The awareness raising process was associated with training sessions on gender budgeting and gender equality. Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content was the focus of this first GEP. Another session would be the organization of annual workshops/conferences that have a special session on gender issues and publication of papers referred to in current Journals of Faculties/Departments of UT that should be visible in the UT website. Training sessions or seminars on the inclusion of gender dimension in research and teaching content will motivate Departments and academic staff to include in their courses on gender issues or to introduce elective courses at UT level.

In addition to implementing its own GEP, UT has shared the GEP methodology and the know-how and has developed close cooperation with other stakeholders and partners, such as RPOs engaged in Gender Equality projects at EU level, regional and country level. Developing GEPs, which are based on the common EU methodology and requirements, makes the case for a common approach for all actors at country-level and for focusing on implementing selected measures and activities meant to advance gender mainstreaming in our country. Careful gender analysis and close consultation with central government focal points on gender equality, civil society organizations, women's rights activists, and the youth, have provided a firm foundation for actions on the ground.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

The main purpose of this research was to evaluate the need for GEPs in the higher education sector in Albania based on the study of some emerging issues of gender equality in this sector and the specific case study of UT.

Based on this analysis, examining the gender composition along the academic career path from student to researcher (C), associate professor (B), and full professor (A), the effect of the “leaky pipeline” (or vertical segregation) is clear in the higher education in Albania. While women represent 61.7% of the population, in the later stages of the career, the presence of women reduced progressively, falling to 59.8% among the associate professors and 40.7% among the full professors.

Examination of the UT gender-based policies and regulations identified:

- There are missing institutional policies and structures to promote GEPs.
- There have been no actions/measures so far to develop GEPs.
- Few data are available to monitor the situation with gender lenses.
- The same trend resulted in UT, as in whole higher education sector, mention above, where women constitute 77.9% of the population overall, but as career stages progress, their representation declines: it drops to 69.2% among associate professors and further decreases to 50.4% among full professors.

Probably, the transition from Associate Professor to the position of Full Professor is the most critical phase for women, in which the establishment of an independent life with choices connected to the construction of one’s family is normally highlighted. This data also reveals that women are mainly present in the lower roles of the hierarchical scale with a progressive reduction in percentage terms as the hierarchical scale increases.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous investigations in other nations. According to Winchester and Browning’s [2015] study women are increasingly over-represented at undergraduate levels, with the disparity closing at postgraduate levels. They are overrepresented in entry-level positions in academia, with a male-dominated gender gap emerging at the senior professor level and widening as one progresses through an academic career. Women are not only underrepresented in the professoriate, but they are also underrepresented in migrations to the professoriate [Winchester, Browning, 2015]. According to Alshdiefat et al. [2024], work/life balance, heavy teaching and administration loads, family responsibilities, subordinates’ perception of women leaders, lack of opportunities, and social networking obstacles are significant barriers to women’s career advancement in higher education institutions.

The situation revealed by gender indicators is in line with gender equality gaps identified through a large survey conducted with UT staff and the results of a thor-

ough gender context analysis. Although there is an increased awareness about gender equality in general, there is still need for cultural and institutional change to support the formulation and the successful implementation of sustainable GEPs.

Recommendations

Based on evidence of gender inequalities in Albanian higher education institutions, the main recommendation is for these institutions to begin evaluating their gender situation through gender context analysis. According to Addabbo et al. [2020] a wide set of indicators (qualitative and quantitative) should be considered to evaluate the situation and monitor the progress. Comparisons with national averages and with other benchmarks (e.g., with universities of the same size or with similar research and educational objectives) would allow a better understanding of organizational performance in terms of gender equality.

Based on the findings of the case study of the University of Tirana, it is recommended that gender equality plans, and gender budgeting become frequent and consistent practices in higher education institutions. We recommend integrating gender equality plans into the institution's strategic planning process to sustainably address gender inequalities and promote a culture of equal opportunities and a healthy work-life balance. A lesson learned from the implementation of the first GEP for UT is that the development and implementation of this plan should be a comprehensive process involving all stakeholders. Raising stakeholders' awareness about the importance of gender equality plans is crucial for their implementation and consolidation as sustainable practices within the institution. The process of monitoring implementation, monitoring, and taking regulatory actions is also very important for the successful implementation of the plan.

The universities' strategies, regulations, policies, and the code of ethics should be developed with gender lenses. For this to happen there is need for continuous encouraging internal discussions with different stakeholders and decision-makers to raise awareness of the role of gender equality and gender budgeting in universities as an important step to institutional changes that are both sustainable and effective.

The Higher Education institutions in Albania should initiate and support the process of decision-making about GEPs and GB, which should be two integrated instruments. GEPs should define objectives, measures, and actions for the achievement of gender equality while gender budgeting should be a process that links gender equality plans with budget cycles and decision-making. Gender equality plans, gender budgeting, cultural adjustments, and institutional interventions, are critical for advancing gender parity and empowering women to reach their full potential carrier in higher education institutions.

Future developments of this research should focus on assessment of existing gender equality plans; identifying the barriers that prevent the successful implementation of gender equality plans, and comparing the implementation and success of gender equality plans across different universities, within a country, ect.

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