

THE ROLE OF THE SUPPORT OF TOP MANAGEMENT IN GENDER EQUALITY OUTCOMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

EL ROL DEL APOYO DE LA ALTA DIRECCIÓN EN LOS RESULTADOS DE LA IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR Y LA INVESTIGACIÓN

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Abstract

In the past decade, there has been increasing attention globally to the institutionalisation of diversity management practices in research, development and innovation (RDI) organisations, as well as the necessity of addressing more effectively various forms of discrimination and inequalities, especially agendas of gender inequality. Although there is extensive research on the different forms, levels, and reasons for gender inequality in RDI organisations, relatively little research has examined how top management members perceive the importance of the former. Our research examines how gender equality outcomes might differ for higher education and research-performing organisations in Hungary when top management strategically supports gender equality. For this purpose, we use –among the indicators by which the European Union (EU) measures progress related to achieving Sustainable Developmental Goal #5 on Gender Equality– the gender employment gap, the gender pay gap, and positions held by women in senior management. We applied

a quantitative approach, using an online questionnaire to survey forty-eight higher education institutions and research centres. Our findings build on a comparison of two subsamples; the first in which top management attributes strategic importance to gender equality, and the second in which this strategic approach is lacking. The results show that the «strategic» subsample can primarily be differentiated from the «non-strategic» subsample due to the former's implementation of significantly more gender equality initiatives at the individual and cultural levels. Concerning initiatives on the structural and organisational level, no significant difference could be found. Furthermore, while a positive linear relationship was found between the number of gender equality practices and the number of positive gender equality outcomes, comparing gender equality outcomes in the two subsamples in more detail indicated fewer significant differences.

Keywords: gender equality; diversity management; Sustainable Development Goals; gender equality outcomes; top management; higher education; RDI; strategic approach to gender equality; SDG #5.

Resumen

En la última década, se ha prestado cada vez más atención en todo el mundo a la institucionalización de las prácticas de gestión de la diversidad en las organizaciones de investigación, desarrollo e innovación (I+D+i), así como a la necesidad de abordar más eficazmente las diversas formas de discriminación y desigualdad, especialmente las agendas de desigualdad de género. Aunque existen numerosas investigaciones sobre las distintas formas, niveles y razones de la desigualdad de género en las organizaciones de I+D+i, son relativamente pocas las que han examinado cómo perciben los miembros de la alta dirección la importancia de la primera. Esta investigación examina cómo podrían diferir los resultados en materia de igualdad de género en las organizaciones de enseñanza superior y de investigación de Hungría cuando la alta dirección apoya estratégicamente la igualdad de género. Para ello, se utilizó –entre otros indicadores con los que la Unión Europea (UE) mide los avances relacionados con la consecución del Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) 5 sobre Igualdad de Género– la brecha de empleo entre hombres y mujeres, la brecha salarial entre hombres y mujeres y los puestos ocupados por mujeres en la alta dirección. Se aplicó un enfoque cuantitativo, utilizando un cuestionario en línea para encuestar a cuarenta y ocho instituciones de enseñanza superior y centros de investigación. Los resultados se basan en una comparación de dos submuestras: la primera, en la que la alta dirección atribuye una importancia estratégica a la igualdad de género, y la segunda, en la que no existe este enfoque estratégico. Los resultados muestran que la submuestra «estratégica» puede diferenciarse principalmente de la submuestra «no estratégica» debido a que la primera aplica un número significativamente mayor de iniciativas de igualdad de género a nivel individual y cultural. En cuanto a las iniciativas a nivel estructural

y organizativo, no se encontraron diferencias significativas. Además, aunque hubo una relación lineal positiva entre el número de prácticas de igualdad de género y el número de resultados positivos en materia de igualdad de género, la comparación más detallada de los resultados en materia de igualdad de género en las dos submuestras indicó menos diferencias significativas.

Palabras clave: igualdad de género; gestión de la diversidad; Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible; resultados en materia de igualdad de género; alta dirección; educación superior; I+D+i; enfoque estratégico de la igualdad de género; ODS 5.

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) has long promoted gender equality and sustainable structural change through different means in the sphere of research, development and innovation (RDI). In pursuing gender equality (GE), the focus has tangibly shifted from the individual to the cultural and structural level, both in stakeholder and scholarly discourse and action. The role of diversity management (DM) practices and how various forms of discrimination and inequalities are managed in organisations have also attracted more attention recently (European Commission, 2021; European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, 2015; OECD, 2017; Timmers et al., 2010).

The importance of tackling the issue of GE at the organisational level has been strongly underlined, first by some Member States, then the EU itself. The Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth (ERA) encouraged research-performing and research-funding organisations (RPO and RFO, respectively) to implement institutional change relating to HR management, funding, decision-making and research programmes through Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). It included conducting impact assessment, introducing audit procedures and practices to identify gender bias, implementing innovative strategies to eliminate biases and targeting and monitoring progress via different indicators (European Commission, 2012; Rosa et al., 2020). In 2022, the EU prescribed that RPOs and RFOs need to develop GEPs. Otherwise, they are not eligible to apply for grants.

However, translating GE concepts enshrined in gender equality laws into policy goals and institutional practices is a challenging issue (De Vries &

Van Den Brink, 2016). Ní Laoire and colleagues (2021) argued that taking national, legislative and organisational contexts – such as governance structures, power relations and cultural norms, presents particular conditions –, as well as organisational climates into consideration is vital to achieving structural change regarding GE. A collaborative approach (communities of practice [CoP]) can also be valuable, such as sharing contextual and other information and experiences with other actors responsible for GEPs (Thomson et al., 2022). Furthermore, instead of applying different normative approaches, such as the question of fairness, efficiency, merit or the business case, GEPs should overcome the omnipresent gendered epistemic injustice in academia by being sensitive to gender power relations and reach an institutional consensus on the value of having gender justice as a guiding principle, informing the formal and informal life of the university» (Clavero & Galligan, 2021, p. 1128). Without such organisational and cultural changes, academic organisations seem to resist making specific changes that would promote gender equality (Husu, 2020; Powell et al., 2018). Academic research tends to focus on describing the gender inequality status quo instead of exploring how specific initiatives and good practices can enhance GE outcomes. Namely, there is a gap between policy and practice (Ní Laoire et al., 2021), as well as between scholarship and knowledge-based advocacy activities (Benschop & Verloo, 2011).

The role of top management and senior leaders in making structural changes for GE is crucial and has already been highlighted (Bencivenga & Drew, 2021; Clavero & Galligan, 2021). The GE outcomes of diversity management (DM) practices significantly depend on how top management fosters change in organisations. Gender expertise is rare, and instead of tackling the symptoms, the gender competence of top management is needed to address the causes and consequences of inequality in organisations (Lipinsky & Wroblewski, 2021). According to the Strategy Web, a classic model of diversity management (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998), seven key organisational processes can ensure the implementation of effective diversity initiatives in organisations. The first is that diversity must be part of the organisational vision, and the second is that the commitment of top management must be clear to organisational members.

These requirements are followed by auditing and assessing needs, clarity of objectives, effective communication, coordination activity, and evaluation. More recently, the League of European Research Universities (LERU) concluded that gender biases contribute to the phenomenon of the leaky pipeline and suggested how RPOs, RFOs and universities can achieve sustainable change by eliminating gender bias during recruitment, selection, retention and advancement, and the allocation of research funding (Gvozdanović & Maes, 2018). The report, similarly to several others, highlighted the importance of «showing leadership, vision, and strategy» as an intervention point since the lack of such a role for leaders tends to lead to gender-biased decisions, less visibility and impact, and lower productivity (Gvozdanović & Maes, 2018). For example, the maximal support of top management figures should be assured for proposals aimed at developing and implementing GEPs (Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe, respectively) that are submitted to the EU.

In Hungary, the government had already mandated that organisations employing more than fifty employees should develop and implement equality plans before the EU required GEPs for RPOs and RFOs in its Member States. However, empirical research (Tardos & Paksi, 2021) reveals that the majority of the equality plans remain rather formal documents hosted on organisations' websites in Hungary and are insufficient for helping meet Sustainable Development Goal #5 linked to Gender Equality (SDG#5). There is also a strong need for the commitment of top management to framing gender equality as a strategic priority. Currently, measuring gender equality outcomes or undertaking impact assessments of diversity management (DM) practices are rare in these organisations. Only a few studies (Carvalho et al., 2013; Lipinsky & Wroblewski, 2021) have assessed the effect of senior management treating gender equality as a strategic priority.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine how gender equality outcomes are linked to the strategic support for GE of top management in RDI organisations in Hungary. Our quantitative research is guided by the following research question: «How do gender equality practices and outcomes differ for higher education institutions and RPOs when top management strategically supports the goals of gender equality compared to in those organisations where top management does not?» We hypothesise that if top management takes a strategic approach to gender equality, this will increase

the number of gender equality initiatives at the RDI institution and improve the workplace diversity index and the gender equality outcomes related to the SDG#5 indicators. The following chapter on methodology is followed by a presentation of results. A discussion of the results and a conclusion chapter close the paper.

2. METHODS

We aimed to involve all higher education institutions in Hungary and all research centres affiliated with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (now Hungarian Research Network). The total number of institutions targeted included sixty-five higher education organisations and fifteen research centres, thus amounting to a total population of eighty institutions. Data were collected in autumn 2017 through an online questionnaire. Forty-eight institutions filled out the questionnaire, of which thirty-eight were higher education institutions and ten research centres. Thus, the overall response rate was 60%. The research centres' response rate was somewhat higher than that of higher education institutions (66% versus 58%). All research centres are funded by the state, while more than one-third of higher education institutions represented in the sample (37%) are private or non-profit.

We developed the online questionnaire as part of a research project entitled «*Career Models and Career Advancement in Research and Development. Different Patterns and Inequalities in Labour Market Opportunities, Personal Network Building and Work-Life Balance*», funded by the Hungarian National Research, Development, and Innovation Fund. The questionnaire aimed to assess gender equality and diversity management practices in Hungarian higher education and research and comprised ninety-eight closed questions, dominantly using a dichotomous scale. In designing the questionnaire, we relied on the works of Timmers and colleagues, the Gender Equality Strategy Guide developed by the Australian Government, and the Workplace Diversity Index and diversity management benchmarking studies developed by Tardos (Australian Government Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019; Tardos, 2011, 2014, 2017; Timmers et al., 2010).

We created two subsamples from the sample of forty-eight RDI institutions based on whether top management accredited strategic importance

to gender equality. For this purpose, we used a YES/NO question included in the questionnaire: «*Does top management view the development of gender equality and equal opportunities for women in the organisation as a strategic priority?*» The first subsample consisted of fifteen institutions where top management attributes strategic importance to gender equality (according to respondents' assessments) and thirty-three organisations where top management does not. In most cases, respondents were the Equal Opportunity Officers of the institutions. We refer to the two subsamples as Strategic Approach (i.e., strategic approach of top management to gender equality) and Non-strategic Approach (of top management to gender equality) in later sections of the paper. The Strategic Approach subsample included less than one-third of all cases (31%), while the Non-strategic Approach subsample represented more than two-thirds (69%).

Higher education institutions make up the vast majority of the Strategic Approach subsample (87%), while most were of smaller size, employing fewer than 250 employees (67%), belonging to the state sector (60%), and located in Budapest (60%). The content of the Non-strategic Approach subsample was more varied: the majority of institutions were higher education institutions (76%), and except for two organisations, all research centres were included in this sample. Moreover, concerning size and number of employees, medium-sized organisations with between 250 and 1000 employees accounted for a larger share (36%) of the Non-strategic Approach subsample. Furthermore, state-sector-related organisations were more numerous in this second subsample (70%), and institutions located in towns outside the capital were better represented (45%). See Table 1.

Table 1. Approach of top management to gender equality by type of RDI institution, number of employees, sector and location

	STRATEGIC Approach subsample		NON-STRATEGIC Approach subsample		Full sample	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Type of RDI institution						
Higher education	13	87	25	76	38	79.2
Research centres	2	13	8	24	10	20.8
Number of employees						
1-249	10	67	17	52	27	56.3
250-1,000	3	20	12	36	15	31.2
Above 1,000	2	13	4	12	6	12.5
Sector						
State sector	9	60	23	70	32	66.7
Non-state sector (private and non-profit)	6	40	10	30	16	33.3
Location						
Capital city of Hungary: Budapest	9	60	18	55	27	56.2
Other towns in Hungary	6	40	15	45	21	43.8

3. RESULTS

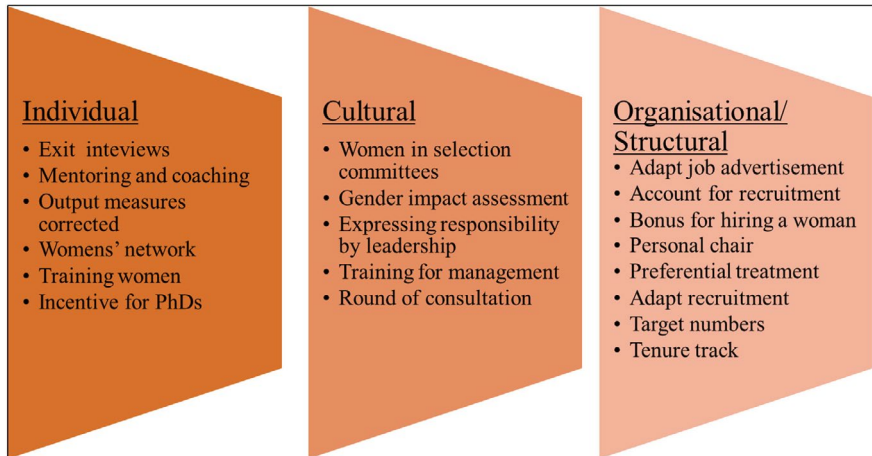
In the following section, we first compare the two subsamples of RDI organisations based on their differentiation according to the frequency of implementation of gender equality practices, focusing on individual, cultural, and organisational/structural level practices. Second, we examine whether members of the two-subsamples differ significantly in their general diversity management practices using the Workplace Diversity Index developed by Tardos (2011). Third, we aggregate indicators for assessing gender equality outcomes by which we can investigate whether the two subsamples differ significantly in terms of how they perform on employment, equal pay, leadership, and the

overall assessment of gender equality. It thus becomes possible to identify whether and in what ways top management's strategic support for gender equality makes a difference in relation to SDG5-related indicators.

Gender equality practices

In our categorisation of gender equality practices, we adopted a similar approach to Timmers and colleagues, who developed a classification of three categories of gender equality practices adopted by higher education institutions: 1) practices focusing on the individual level that support women to overcome barriers to equal opportunities, 2) practices targeting changes in the culture of the organisation, and finally 3) practices that aim to achieve structural change at the organisational level (Timmers et al., 2010). See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Classification of gender equality policy measures according to individual, cultural, and structural categories



Source: based on Timmers et al. (2010)

The number of gender equality practices we assessed in our survey was greater than in Timmers et al.'s research (2010), being seventy items, of which twenty-six practices were related to the individual category, twenty-three to the cultural level, and twenty-one to organisational-level initiatives. A

comprehensive list of gender equality practices can be found in Appendix 1, with frequencies for both subsamples.

First, we examined gender equality practices related to the *individual level*. Within this group, we formed subgroups of practices aimed at reducing the negative impact of childbearing on careers, supporting work-life balance, supporting careers in academia, supporting the intake of female students and researchers, and supporting financial well-being. The five most frequent individual-level practices across the whole sample were re-employment after maternity/paternity leave (75%), supporting further studies (60%) and international mobility (46%), non-compulsory overtime (38%), and supporting domestic mobility (38%). In most cases, the frequency of individual practices was higher in the first (Strategic Approach) subsample, containing institutions whose top management embraced the strategic nature of gender equality. However, it should be highlighted that statistically significant differences could be observed amongst the Strategic Approach and Non-strategic Approach subsamples, with higher scores for the former, with regard to offering leave of absence for emergency/family situations (53% versus 24%), being in cooperation/direct contact with educational institutions (47% versus 18%), providing courses on managing stress (27% versus 6%), and creating a family room at the workplace (child-friendly office) (27% versus 6%). Furthermore, it became apparent that some practices that are widespread in other countries are practically non-existent in the Hungarian higher education system. These include leadership training for women, mentoring for women (as a part of leadership training), offering coaching opportunities on a voluntary basis, and forming resource groups such as women's or parents' networks.

Regarding gender equality practices targeting the transformation of *the organisation's cultural characteristics*, we created four subgroups. The first subgroup of practices indicated whether and to what extent the organisational culture embraced gender equality. These included how supportive male employees were of women's equality plans/programmes or gender equality in general, whether women leaders were accepted in the organisation to a similar extent as men, and whether it was true to state that no one could be disadvantaged because of their gender in the organisation. The second subgroup of practices comprised gender impact assessment and awareness

raising about gender equality in the organisation, including initiatives for publishing policies and outcomes inside and outside the organisation and launching awareness-raising campaigns. The third sub-category of practices was related to the top and middle management's approach to gender equality, and the fourth subgroup assessed training provided for stakeholders about gender equality.

On the cultural level, it was typically found that male employees were 'rather supportive' of women's equality plans/programmes or gender equality in general (96%), and women leaders were accepted in the organisation to a similar extent as men (75%), that in line with company culture, no one was disadvantaged because of their gender (67%), and senior managers were involved in the development of gender equality and equal opportunities for women (63%). Similarly, to the individual-level practices, with practices related to the cultural level, the occurrence of gender-equality-conducive cultural practices was more pronounced in the Strategic Approach subsample. In this subsample, organisations demonstrated significantly better performance on a number of indicators compared to the Non-strategic Approach subsample organisations: in terms of company culture, no one was disadvantaged because of their gender (93% versus 53%), senior managers were involved in promoting gender equality and equal opportunities for women (100% versus 46%), positive attitude of middle management towards the practical implementation of gender equality and gender-related measures (67% versus 18%), fighting against negative gender stereotypes (40% versus 9%), and finally gender equality and equality between women and men is promoted as a positive value in the organisation (47% versus 6%). It is important to note here that there was a strong correlation between the variables of top management regarding gender equality as a strategic priority and top management's active participation in the development of gender equality initiatives. However, it is important to highlight that training on gender equality, whether for HR staff, middle or top management, was a weakness in both subsamples.

For the third category of gender equality practices, those focusing on the *organisational and structural level*, we identified initiatives related to recruitment, objectives for women in leadership positions, organisational measures for reducing gender inequality, and implementing flexible work practices. Interestingly, organisational-level practices were less prevalent

than the two other categories of practices discussed above, even though the former is crucial to achieving sustainable change within organisations. Among the most frequent structural initiatives we found were eliminating gender restrictions in job advertisements and job descriptions (50%), organisations with an above-average proportion of part-time workers (56%), organisations with an above-average proportion of employees with flexible working hours (35%) and gender equality reflected in job advertisements (25%) Whilst the previously better GE performance of organizations with a Strategic Approach was also mostly applicable with regard to this category of practices, it was less systematic. Related to recruitment, having gender equality reflected in job advertisements (47% versus 15%), and for management positions, both sexes are expected to be represented on shortlists (27% versus 6%), statistically significant differences were found among the two subsamples, demonstrating the better GE performance of the Strategic Approach subsample. Additionally, the specific needs of female employees (work-life, family roles, healthcare, etc.) in the workplace were examined more frequently in the former subsample (40% versus 3%), as well as having an above-average proportion of employees who combine several atypical forms of work at the same time (40% versus 12%). An overarching weakness across both subsamples was a failure to define objectives related to having women in leadership positions.

To aggregate results, we examined the average number of initiatives for supporting gender equality and women in general, taking into consideration the total number of initiatives on the individual, cultural, and organisational levels. A significant difference was observed between those organisations where top management considered gender equality to be of strategic importance and those that did not. The total number of such initiatives at RDI institutions in the Strategic Approach subsample was twenty, and in the Non-strategic Approach subsample, twelve (of a maximum of 70 potential initiatives). Moreover, based on the full list of indicators, it was established that the Strategic Approach subsample primarily differs from the Non-strategic Approach subsample in terms of implementing a significantly higher number of initiatives on the individual and cultural levels. Concerning initiatives on the structural and organisational level, no significant difference could be found. Another significant difference between the two subsamples was that

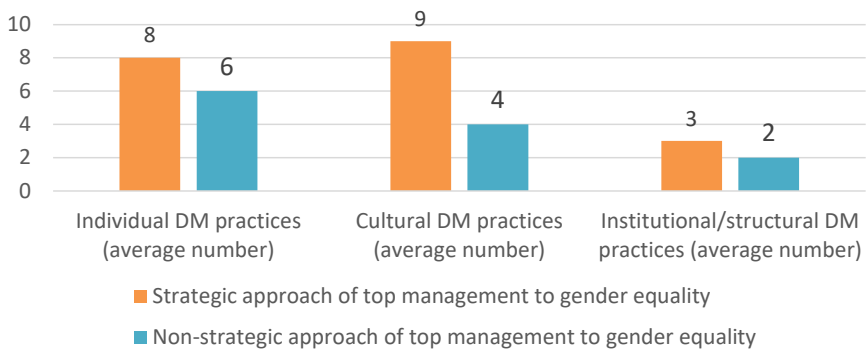
while organizations in the Strategic Approach subsample implemented most initiatives related to the cultural level, organizations with a Non-strategic Approach to gender equality typically focused on individual-level practices. (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table 2. Average number of gender equality initiatives of RDI organizations in the Strategic Approach Vs. Non-strategic Approach subsamples (%)

Average number of gender equality initiatives	STRATEGIC Approach subsample		NON-STRATEGIC Approach subsample		<i>t</i> (46)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Individual level	8.20	4.678	5.82	3.225	2.052	.046	.638
Cultural level	8.73	3.654	4.42	2.385	4.886	.000	1.522
Organisational/ Structural level	3.20	3.005	1.82	2.128	1.827	0.74	.568
Total (all levels)	20.13	9.456	12.06	5.798	3.644	.001	1.134

Source: authors' research

Figure 2. Average number of gender equality initiatives of RDI organizations in the Strategic Approach Vs. Non-strategic Approach subsamples



Workplace Diversity Index

To better contextualise gender equality practices in RDI organisations, it is worthwhile to examine how gender equality practices are embedded in the broader context of diversity management. For this purpose, we adopted the Workplace Diversity Index developed by Tardos (2011). The Workplace Diversity Index is composed of five main parts, and organisations' performance concerning the general aspects of diversity can be identified on a 100-point scale. For our two subsamples, the average score on the Workplace Diversity Index was 38 and 34, respectively. Interestingly, neither the overall index nor any of the sub-categories differed for the two subsamples in a statistically significant manner. However, in the Strategic Approach subsample, the institutionalisation of diversity management in the form of having an equality/equal opportunity plan, equal opportunity policy and strategy, using more HR tools and having somewhat more plans for developing diversity and equal opportunities in the organisation could be observed. Nevertheless, when comparing the previously mentioned individual, cultural and organisational gender equality practices, we could not identify major discrepancies between the level of development of gender equality practices or the more general diversity management practices. In both cases, the adoption of these practices was moderate (Table 3).

Table 3. Average score on the Workplace Diversity Index of organizations in the Strategic Approach Vs. Non-strategic Approach subsamples

Average score on the Workplace Diversity Index	STRATEGIC Approach subsample	NON-STRATEGIC Approach subsample	p
Diversity of workforce (score for number of minority groups)	14	14	.830
Institutionalisation of Diversity Management (score for number of DM processes)	7	6	.352
Human Resource tools used for diversity and inclusion (score for number of HR tools used)	8	6	.160
Initiatives to increase equal opportunities (score for number of initiatives)	8	8	.640
Plans to develop Diversity Management	1	0	.726
Workplace Diversity Index	38	34	.324
	N= 15	N=33	

Source: Authors' construction

Gender equality outcomes

The following section will compare the two subgroups of institutions in relation to the indicators by which the European Union (EU) measures progress related to Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) on Gender Equality (European Commission, 2021). Of the eight indicators related to SDG5 on Gender Equality used by the EU,¹ three are applicable in the workplace context: the gender employment gap, the gender pay gap, and finally, positions

1. Physical and sexual violence to women, the gender gap for early leavers from education and training, gender gap for tertiary educational attainment, the gender pay gap in unadjusted form, gender employment gap, gender gap for inactive population due

held by women in senior management. Additionally, we examine an indicator of the overall evaluation priority awarded to gender equality in the institution.

Related to the gender employment gap, we find mixed results. While the average proportion of women among those employed (54% versus 50%) and in RDI jobs (47% versus 39%) is higher at institutions in the Strategic Approach group, in the year preceding the data collection, institutions classified as having a Non-strategic Approach had more newly recruited female employees (58% versus 53%). However, it is important to highlight that no statistically significant difference could be identified between the two types of institutions concerning the patterns of employing women. (Table 4).

Regarding the second category of indicators associated with the gender wage gap, a significant difference could be observed in relation to the priority awarded to wage equality among men and women. Although only slightly more than one in every tenth organisation declared that gender pay parity was a priority area, there were significantly more institutions where the top management's approach to gender equality was deemed to be strategic (33% versus 6%). Institutions generally assessed the gender wage gap to be a peripheral phenomenon (approximately 2-3%); however, in relation to the different managerial levels (lower, middle, and top management), the Strategic Approach subsample organisations were less liable to have a gender wage gap, except for at the top management level where the occurrence of the gender pay gap was similar in both subsamples (13% and 15%).

Concerning the third gender equality outcome indicator of women's representation in leadership positions, statistically significant differences between the two subsamples could only be identified with one indicator: the average proportion of women in lower-level operational management jobs. However, organisations in the Strategic Approach subsample scored higher for the three other indicators than institutions in the Non-strategic Approach subsample. Thus, the average proportion of women in middle and top management jobs and the percentage of institutions where the share of

to caring responsibilities, seats held by women in national parliaments, and finally positions held by women in senior management.

women in senior leadership had increased in the past five years was higher among those institutions in the Strategic Approach subsample.

Finally, we compared the organizations in the two subsamples in relation to their overall evaluation of gender equality as a relatively or very strong organisational priority. It is worth mentioning that none of the organisations rated the importance of gender equality as «very strong». We found that organisations in the two subsamples differed significantly in this respect. It was much more common for members of the Strategic Approach subsample to regard equality for women and gender equality as a business and cultural expectation and organizational norm (Table 4).

Table 4. SDG #5 indicators for monitoring progress in gender equality according to the Strategic Approach Vs. Non-strategic Approach subsamples (%)

SDG #5 indicators for monitoring progress in gender equality	STRATEGIC Approach subsample	NON-STRATEGIC Approach subsample	p
EMPLOYMENT			
Average proportion of women among those employed	54	50	.429
Average proportion of women among those hired in the previous year before data collection	53	58	.520
Average proportion of women in RDI jobs	47	39	.269
The proportion of women has increased in the last five years	27	15	.631
GENDER PAY GAP			
Occurrence of a gender wage gap across the entire institution (%)	0	15	.198
Occurrence of a gender wage gap with entry-level positions (%)	0	12	.346
Occurrence of a gender wage gap at the middle management level (%)	0	12	.422
Occurrence of a gender wage gap at the top management level (%)	13	15	.408

Gender pay parity is a very strong priority in the organisation (%)	33*	6	.013
LEADERSHIP			
Average proportion of women in lower-level operational management jobs	45*	27	.027
Average proportion of women in middle management jobs	37	33	.542
Average proportion of women in senior management jobs	31	24	.370
Proportion of institutions where the share of women in senior leadership has increased in the past five years	33	12	.157
OVERALL EVALUATION OF GENDER EQUALITY			
Gender equality is a rather or very strong priority in the organisation	73**	12	.001
Equality for women and gender equality is a business and cultural expectation and organizational norm	47	9	.091

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Source: Authors' construction

Results for the gender equality outcomes were mixed in terms of to what extent the higher number of gender equality practices in the Strategic Approach subsample translated into better gender equality outcomes in RDI organisations. In the analysis above, we show how no significant difference could be observed in the two subsamples regarding the employment indicators of women. However, regarding the gender pay gap, one difference manifested uniquely in terms of the (subjective) priority attributed to gender wage equality (but not the objective indicators of wage equality). Moreover, significant differences in women's representation in managerial positions could only be detected for lower-level management jobs. Hence, the broader question arises: What is the relationship between implementing more gender equality practices and performing better on gender equality outcome indicators? We calculated the correlation coefficients between the aggregated indicators and sub-categories of our two major indicators in relation to the

total number of gender equality practices and the total number of positive gender equality outcomes. See Table 5.

Concerning the correlation coefficients, individual-level gender equality practices are strongly correlated to other types of gender equality practices, but the outcome indicators are not correlated significantly with employment indicators nor with indicators for wage equality. Conversely, there is a significant but weak correlation between individual-level gender equality practices and women's representation in leadership. Moreover, the evaluation of the priority assigned to gender equality within the organisation is moderately correlated with the number of individual-level gender equality practices.

Cultural-level gender equality practices display a similar pattern to individual-level practices insofar as they do not correlate significantly with employment indicators for women nor with indicators of wage equality. On the other hand, there is a significant weak-to-moderate correlation between cultural practices and women's representation in leadership and overall gender equality outcomes. The strongest correlation could be found with the overall evaluation of the priority awarded to gender equality, similarly to with individual practices but at a higher level.

Organisational-level practices were rare in our sample; nevertheless, they also show a similar pattern to that identified for individual and cultural practices: whilst they are not correlated with employment and wage equality outcome indicators, they manifest a significant but weak correlation with leadership, overall evaluation, and the total number of positive outcomes for gender equality.

The aggregated indicator for the total number of gender equality practices also does not correlate with outcome indicators for employment or wage equality. However, a strong relationship can be found between the overall evaluation of gender equality (coefficient of .54) and a more moderate one for overall gender equality outcomes and the leadership representation of women.

With regard to the outcome indicators, the employment gender equality indicator only shows a significant relationship with leadership outcomes and the aggregated gender equality outcome indicator. Interestingly, the outcome indicator for the gender pay gap is only correlated with the aggregated gender equality outcome indicator, but not employment, leadership, or

the overall evaluation. Furthermore, the leadership-, overall evaluation of gender equality-, and the aggregated gender equality outcome indicators are significantly correlated with the different types of gender equality practices.

We find that individual, cultural and organisational gender equality practices are somewhat more strongly correlated with the overall evaluation of gender equality than the aggregated gender equality outcome, calling attention to the importance of the subjective perception of gender equality practices within organisations. On the other hand, of the three types of gender equality practices, cultural practices had the highest correlation coefficient (.47) in relation to the aggregated gender equality outcome indicator. Nevertheless, the positive linear relationship between the higher total number of gender equality practices and the higher total number of positive gender equality outcomes cannot be denied and is associated with a moderately strong relationship (.47) in the examined RDI institutions.

Table 5. Correlation coefficients according to type and number of gender equality practices and gender equality outcomes

Type and number of gender equality practices and outcomes	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Individual-level GE practices ^a	48	6.56	3.85	–								
Cultural-level GE practices ^a	48	5.77	3.4	.50**	–							
Organisational-level GE practices ^a	48	2.25	2.49	.55**	.41**	–						
Total number of gender equality practices	48	14.58	7.99	.87**	.80**	.75**	–					
Employment gender equality outcomes ^b	48	1.92	1.13	.22	.09	.12	.18	–				
Gender wage gap outcomes ^b	48	2.58	1.90	.06	.28	.17	.20	.00	–			
Leadership gender equality outcomes ^b	48	2.02	1.41	.31*	.32*	.32*	.39**	.43**	.15	–		
Overall subjective evaluation of gender equality	48	0.52	.71	.40**	.53**	.37*	.54**	.03	.13	.35*	–	
Overall gender equality outcomes ^b	48	8.06	3.56	.33*	.47**	.36*	.47**	.52**	.67**	.73**	.46**	–

^a Total number of practices

^b Total number of positive outcomes

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

4. DISCUSSION

In our research, we analysed how DM practices and GE differ in higher education and research institutes within the RDI sector based on whether top management attributes strategic importance to gender equality. First, we examined the frequency of implementing different gender equality practices within the organisations. Then, based on Timmers and colleagues (2010), we analysed these practices at individual, cultural, and organisational/structural levels, although we considerably extended the list of practices to include individual-level ones (e.g. childbearing and work-life balance).

At the individual level, practices for reducing the negative impact of childbearing on career (re-employment after maternity/paternity leave) and for supporting work-life balance (non-compulsory overtime, leave of absence for emergency/family situations) were often applied in organisations. At the same time, practices that need more organisational financial or human resources, such as reintegration training after maternity/paternity leave and babysitting services, were rare. Encouraging fathers' involvement is also extremely unusual, reflecting Hungarian society's traditional attitude toward care work (Gregor & Kováts, 2019). Regarding practices for supporting careers in academia, while Timmers et al. (2010) found that mentoring, coaching and training women were the most frequent activities in Dutch universities, in the present sample, these were scarcely used. Instead, organisations seemed to find it more important to support further studies and domestic and international mobility. This may be because mobility fosters professional cooperation and enhances productivity, although these activities could be supported by external funds that alleviate the responsibility of the organisation, and benefit both women and men.

Regarding the cultural level, organisations seem to fully embrace GE in theory; they support equality programmes, accept female leaders, and involve senior managers to achieve their goals. Organizations that express responsibility and commitment to GE have also been identified by other scholars (Bilimoria et al., 2008). Timmers and colleagues (2010), moreover, call attention to the fact that a strong cultural organisational GE perspective decreases the glass ceiling effect and increases the representation of female faculty in universities. However, in the Hungarian sample, we discovered that

institutions scored much lower on implementing such cultural GE practices, such as raising GE awareness and offering training or conducting impact assessments. This discrepancy between the organisational perception of GE and real DM practices may suggest – underlining the earlier findings of the authors (Tardos & Paksi, 2021) – that organisations are aware of the mainstream approach of GE in Europe, and to some extent, try to embrace these European goals, but are lagging regarding the implementation of activities. The fact that the examined organisations were almost completely ignorant about the potential of developing women’s and gender equality as part of corporate social responsibility activities also supports this view.

Interestingly, organisational/structural level practices were found to be much less common in organisations than those associated with the two categories discussed above. The most often mentioned practices were flexible working arrangements (part-time and flexible) and recruitment. Recruitment was also identified in Timmers and colleagues’ work (2010), but in the form of accountability for the whole hiring process, not only to refer to unbiased job advertisements and job descriptions, unlike in our sample. Organisations in our sample failed to audit recruitment processes in terms of GE. Part-time work was the most frequently used practice at the organisational level, although in Hungary, women’s part-time work is negligible (Gregor, 2017). More importantly, flexible working hours, and teleworking or home office were less frequently mentioned by the examined Hungarian organisations, although it is widely claimed that these flexible working arrangements – along with the ability to control working time and place – can decrease work-family conflict and enhance work-life balance (Hobson, 2011), particularly for young mothers (Peters et al., 2009). Flexibility also fosters mental health and well-being, often by allowing one to enjoy work (Kelly et al., 2010; Shockley & Allen, 2010). Finally, beyond the issue of flexibility, organisations hardly had objectives for increasing the number of women in leadership positions or measures for reducing the gender pay gap.

Second, we identified whether the two subsamples differ significantly in their general diversity management practices using the Workplace Diversity Index developed by Tardos (2011). It is telling that the «Strategic Approach» subsample scored almost as high as the national average (39/100) as identified in an earlier survey conducted in Hungary (Tardos, 2017). However,

in our research, none of the differences between the subsamples (Strategic Approach and Non-strategic Approach) were significant in this area. Nevertheless, it is worth considering that while there was a relatively high diversity of workforce in both subsamples, organisational practices were less developed in terms of the institutionalisation of diversity management and using human resource management tools to promote diversity and inclusion, especially in the non-Strategic subsample.

Third, we examined how top management's strategic promotion of gender equality affects employment, equal pay, and leadership outcomes. Longitudinal research has already called attention to the positive link between more DM practices and the employment of women within an organisation (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Timmers et al., 2010; Winchester & Browning, 2015), and on how diversity among decision-makers increases women's opportunity to enter top leadership positions (Cook & Glass, 2013). However, in our research, the representation of women in the organisations was similar in the Strategic Approach and Non-strategic Approach subsamples. The applied practices may not have been sufficient (regarding their frequency and embeddedness) to achieve organisational change. Nevertheless, women's significantly greater representation in lower-level operational management jobs reflects the gender-based allocation of tasks – a phenomenon that may not only occur in male-dominated departments (Settles et al., 2013). This also highlights the importance of GE awareness and competence in organisations for overcoming the status quo (Lipinsky & Wroblewski, 2021).

Organizations with a strategic approach primarily differed in terms of implementing significantly more initiatives at the individual and cultural level, while concerning initiatives on the structural/organisational level, no significant difference could be found. In sum, organisations need to strengthen several dimensions of their GE strategy, such as assessment and monitoring, as earlier findings have also suggested (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998). It has become clear that the subjective perception of the level of equality in organisations depends on the frequency of GE practices on the cultural level, not on the organisational one. This result may be linked to the low number of GE practices at an organisational/structural level, as well as to earlier findings that called attention to targeting organisational culture in order to achieve structural change (Clavero & Galligan, 2021). It is

worth considering that while the EU aims to foster structural and sustainable changes regarding GE, in Hungary, there is a huge gap between policy and practice (Ní Laoire et al., 2021). Actors do not fully engage with or perceive the importance of the structural dimension of GE, which is strongly responsible for the overall phenomenon of organisational resistance (Husu, 2020; Powell et al., 2018). This conclusion sustains the aim of our study, namely, calling attention to the importance of top management's engagement with promoting GE.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper describes an examination of the strategic role of top management in relation to achieving gender equality outcomes related to the SDG#5 indicator for higher education institutions and research-performing organisations. First, we present the findings of an online survey on gender equality conducted among forty-eight RDI institutions in Hungary. We aimed to answer the research question: «How do gender equality practices and outcomes differ for higher education institutions and RPOs when top management strategically supports the goals of gender equality compared to in those organisations where top management does not?» We hypothesised a correlation between top management adopting a strategic approach to gender equality and a (greater) number of gender equality initiatives at the RDI institution, the Workplace Diversity Index, and gender equality outcomes related to the SDG#5 indicator.

We have demonstrated that having a strategic approach to gender equality is positively related to gender equality measures and outcomes, although this is not a linear relationship. Therefore, the hypothesis can only partially be accepted. Significant differences were identified between the strategic and non-strategic subsamples for the total number of GE practices (in particular, those at the individual and cultural levels). As differences on the Workplace Diversity Index were not significant, we conclude that gender equality practices are not necessarily embedded in more general diversity management policy, and top management's strategic commitment to gender equality does not automatically mean a commitment to the wider agenda of diversity and inclusion. The most intriguing results of our research were

related to the relationship between gender equality practices and gender equality outcomes. We argue that top management's strategic approach to GE («*showing leadership, vision, and strategy*») is necessary but insufficient to fully contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal linked to Gender Equality (SDG #5) in higher education and research-performing organisations. Overcoming organisational resistance, building the gender competence of management, focusing on GE practices not only on the individual and cultural but also on the structural level, defining accountability for outcomes, and monitoring progress with GE are all indispensable organisational processes for moving beyond the status quo and improving the outcome indicators for GE.

The novelty of the present paper is that it investigates the relationship between GE practices and outcomes for RDI sector employers in Hungary from the perspective of top management, illustrating their strategic commitment to GE.

A limitation of the research is that we could not explicitly identify how GE practices contributed to better GE outcomes; instead, we focused on where and how our two subsamples differed. Furthermore, our study was implemented in a single country, Hungary, using a relatively small sample size, especially for the Strategic subsample. Moreover, it is important to mention that our survey was deployed preceding new regulations introduced by the European Commission and the Horizon Europe research funding scheme to promote Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in higher education institutions and research-performing organisations. Thus, further research could assess how the introduction of such Gender Equality Plans is impacting gender equality outcomes and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal linked to Gender Equality (SDG #5) in RDI institutions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

GENDER EQUALITY PRACTICES FOCUSING ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

	STRATEGIC Approach subsample (%)	NON-STRATEGIC Approach subsample (%)	Full sample (%)
PRACTICES FOR REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF CHILDBEARING ON CAREER			
Re-employment after maternity/paternity leave	80	73	75
Participation in company training during maternity/paternity leave	0	6	4
Re-orientation training after maternity/paternity leave	0	3	2
PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING WORK-LIFE BALANCE			
Non-compulsory overtime	53	30	38
Leave of absence for emergency/family situations	53	24	33***
Working-time allowance for overtime	33	27	30
Workplace family room (child-friendly office)	27	6	13***
Fathers' involvement in parenting is encouraged	20	6	10
Organisation of babysitting services	13	3	6
Encouraging fathers to participate in paternity leave	0	0	0
PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING CAREERS IN ACADEMIA			
Supporting further studies	73	55	60
Supporting international mobility	47	45	46
Supporting domestic mobility	53	30	38
Stress management training courses	27	6	13***
Leadership training for women	13	3	6
Mentoring for women (as a part of leadership training)	7	0	2
Coaching opportunities on voluntary basis	7	0	2
Women's network (resource group)	0	0	0
Parent network (resource group)	0	0	0

PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING THE INTAKE OF FEMALE STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS			
Cooperation, direct contact with educational institutions	47	18	27***
Open day for students/young professionals	33	15	21
Fresh graduates programme	27	9	15
Scholarship opportunities for college/university students	13	15	15
Programme targeting schoolgirls to make traditionally 'male' careers more attractive	20	6	10
PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING FINANCIAL WELL-BEING			
Partial/full coverage of childcare costs	7	0	2
Partnering with service providers (e.g., elderly and/or sick care)	0	0	0

*** Chi-Square test significant

Source: Authors' construction based on the works of Australian Government Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019; Tardos, 2011, 2014, 2017; Timmers et al., 2010

GENDER EQUALITY PRACTICES FOCUSING ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL

	STRATEGIC Approach subsample (%)	NON-STRATEGIC Approach subsample (%)	RDI organisations total (%)
ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE EMBRACING GENDER EQUALITY			
How supportive are male employees of women's equality plans/programmes or gender equality in general? (Rather supportive)	100	94	96
Are women leaders accepted in the organisation to a similar extent as men? (Yes)	87	70	75
There is a company culture where no one is disadvantaged because of their gender	93	55	67***
They fight against negative gender stereotypes	40	9	19***
Gender equality and equality between women and men is promoted as a positive value in the organisation	47	6	19***
Is it typical for the organisation to promote diversity of leadership styles? (Yes)	40	33	35
This organisation consciously fights against barriers to gender equality	33	0	10***

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This organisation consciously builds on the benefits of gender equality	27	3	10***
This organisation takes care not to promote their company and products with sexist messages	7	9	8
This organisation is willing to learn new ways of working to improve gender equality	20	3	8***
This organisation understands the development of gender equality as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities	0	3	2
GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND AWARENESS RAISING ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ORGANISATION			
Does the organisation publicise its gender equality and women's empowerment programme inside the organisation? (Yes)	47	24	31
Is the ratio of women to men at different levels of responsibility publicised within the organisation? (Yes)	47	21	29
Is the ratio of women to men at different levels of responsibility publicised outside the organisation? (Yes)	33	21	25
Do they publicise their gender and gender equality programme outside the organisation? (Yes)	33	9	17
Has the organisational culture been assessed in terms of how it may affect gender equality and equal opportunities for women? (Yes)	7	6	6
Campaigns to change employer and employee attitudes towards gender equality	0	0	0
MANAGEMENT APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY			
Are senior managers in your organisation involved in developing gender equality and equal opportunities for women? (Yes)	100	46	63***
What is the attitude of middle management in your organisation towards the practical implementation of gender equality and gender-related measures? (Supportive)	67	18	33***
Is there a discourse within the organisation, with senior management, on the career opportunities for female talents within the organisation? (Yes)	13	6	8

TRAINING ON GENDER EQUALITY			
Have HR staff ever received training on gender equality and equal opportunities for women? (Yes)	13	6	8
Have senior managers ever received training on gender equality and equal opportunities for women? (Yes)	13	0	4
Have middle managers ever received training on gender equality and equal opportunities for women? (Yes)	7	0	2

*** Chi-Square test significant

Source: Authors' construction based on the works of Australian Government Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019; Tardos, 2011, 2014, 2017; Timmers et al., 2010.

GENDER EQUALITY PRACTICES FOCUSING ON THE ORGANISATIONAL-STRUCTURAL LEVEL

	STRATEGIC Approach subsample (%)	NON-STRATEGIC Approach subsample (%)	RDI organisations total (%)
RECRUITMENT			
Eliminating gender restrictions in job advertisements and job descriptions	60	46	50
Gender equality is reflected in job advertisements	47	15	25***
In management positions, both sexes are expected to be represented on the shortlist	27	6	13***
Review of recruitment and selection methods to avoid gender discrimination	0	9	6
When recruitment is outsourced, choosing a provider that is known not to discriminate.	0	0	0
Using a recruitment method that specifically targets women	0	0	0
OBJECTIVES FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS			
Do you have a specific objective to increase the proportion of women in management? (Yes)	0	6	4
Do you have an organisational programme to increase the number of women in senior management in the future? (Yes)	0	0	0

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ORGANISATIONAL MEASURES TO REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITY			
The specific needs of female employees (work-life, family roles, health care, etc.) in the workplace have been examined. (Yes)	40	3	15***
Has your organisation already investigated whether there is a pay gap between women and men in the same positions? (Yes)	7	12	10
Have you introduced measures to reduce the pay gap between women and men in the last five years? (Yes)	13	0	4
Do you have a best practice in place for women in terms of equal opportunities and employment practices that you are proud of and that works well? (Yes)	7	0	2
Female ombudsman in the company	0	0	0
IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES			
Average percentage of flexible working hours contracts in the organisation	30	21	24
Average percentage of part-time employees in the organisation (%)	18	8	11
Average percentage of employees in the organisation working through telework or home office – Prevalence in the organisation (%)	9	5	6
Average percentage of employees in the organisation combining several atypical forms of work at the same time – Prevalence in the organisation (%)	14	5	8
Percentage of organisations with above average proportion of part-time workers	73	49	56
Percentage of organisations with above average proportion of employees with flexible working hours	40	33	35
Percentage of organisations with above average proportion of teleworkers, home office workers in the organisation	27	12	17
Percentage of organisations with above average proportion of employees combining several atypical forms of work at the same time	40	12	21***

*** Chi-Square test significant

Source: Authors' construction based on the works of Australian Government Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019; Tardos, 2011, 2014, 2017; Timmers et al., 2010.

APPENDIX 2

Detailed structure of the Workplace Diversity Index

WORKPLACE DIVERSITY INDEX	Maximum score
Diversity in the composition of the workforce	28
Of which:	
Are the following disadvantaged employees present in your organisation (Yes answers)	
1. Women	2
2. Parents of more than two children under 14	2
3. Single parents with children	2
4. School leavers	2
5. Employees aged 45 and over	2
6. People with disabilities (physical, mental)	2
7. People with a reduced work capacity	2
8. Carers of chronically ill relatives	2
9. Other sexual orientations, LGBT+ people	2
10. Roma people	2
11. Other ethnic minorities	2
12. Other nationalities, migrants	2
13. People living in a rural area	2
14. Other, namely	2
The institutionalisation of equal opportunities policy	28
Of which:	
Does your company have...? (Yes answers)	
1. Equal opportunity plan	2
2. Equal opportunities strategy	2
3. Equal opportunities officer, coordinator	2
4. Equal opportunities working group	2
5. Diversity policy	2
6. Anti-discrimination policy	2
7. Anti-discrimination training	2
8. Harassment policy/procedure	2
9. Monitoring of equal opportunities practices	2
10. Application for social, equal opportunities awards	2
11. Code of ethics, including guidelines for ensuring equal opportunities and equal treatment in the workplace	2
12. Employee satisfaction survey covering equal opportunities aspects	2
13. Relationship with NGOs supporting disadvantaged workers	2

The role of the support of top management in gender equality outcomes in higher education and research

14. Dealing with equal opportunities in the workplace for at least 1 year at organisational level	2
Using HR tools to support equality and diversity	26
Of which:	
Which of the following HR tools are used to promote equal opportunities/diversity?	
1. Teleworking	2
2. Part-time working	2
3. Flexible working hours	2
4. Job sharing	2
5. Job design	2
6. Job evaluation	2
7. (Re)orientation training	2
8. Mentoring	2
9. Coaching	2
10. Skills development programmes	2
11. Professional training	2
12. Career development	2
13. Performance appraisal system	2
Measures and provisions to improve equal opportunities/diversity	16
Of which:	
Does/do your company have... (Yes answers)	
1. Health screening	2
2. Sports facilities	2
3. Barrier-free facilities	2
4. Family programmes, benefits	2
5. Liaison with mothers on maternity leave	2
6. Provision of daycare, nursery at the workplace or places available in other childcare institutions	2
7. Summer camp for children	2
8. Room for breastfeeding and rest	2
Future development of equal opportunities/diversity policy	2
Of which:	
1. Plans to introduce anti-discrimination measures to improve equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups of workers	1
2. Additional human and financial resources are available to implement the planned measures	1
Total	100

Source: Tardos, 2011, 2017.

