

## Chapter 9

# Structural Change Towards Gender Equality: Learning from Bottom-up and Top-down Experiences of GEP Implementation in Universities

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### Abstract

Universities are large, complex and highly hierarchical organisations with deeply engrained gendered values, norms and practices. This chapter reflects on the experiences of two universities in initiating structural change towards gender equality as supported by the TARGET project. A common aspect thereby is the lack of a national policy in higher education and research providing specific support for implementing gender equality policies. The process of audit, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the first gender equality plan (GEP) in each of these universities was conceived as a first step in a long journey, providing a framework for engaging different institutional actors and fostering reflexive, evidence-based policy making. The analysis deals with reflexivity and resistance and seeks to draw lessons from bottom-up and top-down experiences of GEP implementation. It is the result of shared reflection between the GEP ‘implementers’ in the two universities and the team who provided support and acted as ‘critical friends’.

*Keywords:* University; gender equality plan; top-down; bottom-up; community of practice; reflexivity

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**Overcoming the Challenge of Structural Change in Research Organisations:  
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## Introduction

In this chapter, we look at the experiences of initiating structural change towards gender equality in two universities, the University of Belgrade (UB) in Serbia and the University Hassan II Casablanca (UH2C) in Morocco. Both are large, public universities, which play a leading role in education and research in their respective countries, covering all study fields and catering to more than 100,000 students in their Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes. Within the framework of TARGET, they were supported by NOTUS in the audit, design, implementation and monitoring of their first gender equality plans (GEP) with the objective of establishing the basis for a reflexive, evidence-based and long-term process of structural change. Building on this common approach, differences in the national and institutional contexts as well as opportunities and constraints encountered during the process paved the way for distinct top-down and bottom-up experiences of GEP implementation.

We would like to start by pointing out an apparent dissonance:

Despite many initiatives aimed at changing organizations into gender-balanced or gender-equitable workplaces, change is slow at best. Only from a historical perspective, when one looks back a few decades, does it become clear that changes toward equality have indeed occurred, at various levels (welfare states, organizations, and the attitudes of people). (Benschop & Verloo, 2011, p. 1)

In our view, this historical approach is much needed for assessing change in universities and, most importantly, for initiating a process that needs to combine both short-term and long-term goals. While it is widely acknowledged that gender inequalities persist and change is slow (EC, 2020; UNESCO-IESALC, 2021), we think it is important to adopt a broader perspective to value and frame the achievement of ‘small wins’ as the starting point for further action.

There is extensive evidence that legal frameworks, policies and initiatives adopted by governmental bodies, funding agencies and other organisations are instrumental for top management acceptance to tackle gender inequalities in universities. A supportive governance framework is considered the most important structural factor for initiating sustainable change because it can produce legally binding measures, positive incentives and also sanctions (EIGE, 2016; Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019; Zippel, Ferree, & Zimmermann, 2016). However, even in this favourable context, a top-down GEP implementation driven mainly by external pressure clearly risks being conceived as a formal requisite with no real impact. Without gender awareness and active commitment from leadership, a GEP lacks strategic importance and implementation may be circumvented – common problems include resistance at different levels and from different actors in the university, inadequate financial and human resources, lack of gender competence, absence of adequate data and lack of authority on the part of the staff responsible for its implementation (Bleijenbergh & Van Engen, 2015; EC, 2012; EIGE, 2016; Graham, Belliveau, & Hotchkiss, 2016; McClelland & Holland,

2014; Vinkenburg, 2017). Top management commitment is even more important in countries where the context is less favourable and universities lack external support, as is the case in Serbia and Morocco.

However, the success of GEP implementation requires not only commitment from top management but also the support and involvement of other stakeholders across the whole organisation early in the process – including human resources staff, middle management and teaching and research staff (EIGE, 2016; Lansu, Bleijenberg, & Benschop, 2019; Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019). This assumption lies at the core of the TARGET approach, which highlights the fact that universities follow a dual logic: while the ‘scientific’ logic, which characterises teaching and research, is the dominant one, universities are also organisations and therefore follow specific ‘institutional’ logics (Heintz, 2018). Stakeholders representing both logics have to be involved because gender and power dynamics work differently in each case. It is also important to stress that structural change in universities is complex because they are large institutions where both scientific and institutional logics are characterised by highly hierarchical formal and informal power relations (O’Connor, 2021). Research has found that less resistance to gender change is encountered in institutions where the power relations are more equal, and vice-versa (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014).

Some studies on structural change in universities adopt a long-term perspective to highlight the role played by women and science networks, feminist movements and gender scholars to raise gender awareness, build gender competence and counteract gender bias by different means. Barry, Berg and Chandler (2011) point out that gender equality activities in Swedish higher education are influenced by the vitality of feminist movements, including institutionalised centres for gender studies, engaged in long-standing direct and indirect forms of contestation towards the status quo. The comparative study of six Nordic universities by Nielsen (2016) shows that this feature plays a pivotal role in explaining why some universities achieve a high degree of local commitment towards GEP implementation yet others do not. This can be seen, for example, at the Universities of Lund and Uppsala, where active bottom-up networks of female researchers have been contributing to sustaining the relevance and visibility of gender equality for decades. In the case of Germany, Roloff (2007) indicates that Dortmund University’s success in implementing a top-down gender equality strategy was related to the presence of women in representative bodies and at different levels of the university, which in turn is a product of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. In Italy, in contrast, despite the fact that a central committee at the national level (CUG, Joint Committee for Equal Opportunity) establishes mandatory aspects through laws and sanctions, some universities are changing only slowly due to a lack of skills and experience to apply this mandate, signalling the importance of bottom-up initiatives to build gender competence in institutions (Bencivenga, 2019).

An important insight from research on the implementation of gender equality work is the need to adopt a more complex and process-oriented analysis to better understand why and when top-down or bottom-up initiatives become more important. When a process of structural change is initiated, there may be a high level of conflict and ambiguity in terms of framing the problem and the solutions. In such

situations, implementation requires both top-down and bottom-up approaches, and the strength of bottom-up coalitions and support will be important (Callerstig, 2014). The National Science Foundation's ADVANCE programme in the United States and the EU-funded structural change projects have been catalysts for supporting initiatives led by change agents (gender scholars and practitioners), paving the way for building a strong set of alliances, strengthening top management commitment and increasing the support and involvement of researchers and staff. In this vein, Cacace et al. (2015) demonstrate that actions which bridged bottom-up and top-down approaches were of significant impact in the STAGES project, while the comparative study by Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt (2019) reveals the potential for a twin-track approach in which bottom-up and top-down approaches are combined.

However, literature also acknowledges that bottom-up initiatives are time-consuming and can even come at the cost of reproducing gender inequalities. In a study of gender equality initiatives in different institutions and countries, Palmén and Kalpazidou Schmidt (2019) show that the willingness, interest and ability (due to time restraints and other responsibilities) of staff members, particularly researchers, to participate is considered in many cases a decisive factor. Yet they also stress that involvement from researchers (often disproportionately female) can be extremely time consuming – detracting from research activities, while being neither recognised nor rewarded as a merit. This problem is also highlighted by Caffrey et al. (2016) in a critical review of the Athena SWAN implementation in five university departments. They found that while the programme was effective for creating social space to address gender inequality and highlight problematic practices, it also reproduced gender inequalities in its enactment because female staff undertook disproportionate amounts of the implementation work. In the same vein, Bencivenga (2019) captures how the workload of undertaking gender equality work has no positive impact on women's careers and feels like a problem. In a review of EU-funded structural change projects, Ferguson (2021) refers to the need to broaden and transform academic culture, highlighting that gender equality work is academic care work and should be visualised, valued, acknowledged and rewarded – and that change agents need support in terms of time, resources and recognition within their academic careers.

This chapter is based on a shared reflection between NOTUS and the teams that led GEP implementation at UB and UH2C. It seeks to analyse the different top-down and bottom-up experiences of GEP implementation and identify some lessons learned. While no literature on such structural change in Serbia and Morocco is as yet available, the chapter builds on the insights gained in this process, the audit, interim evaluation and final monitoring reports produced within the TARGET project (TARGET, 2018, 2020, 2021) as well as seven interviews conducted by NOTUS. The selected interviewees were all representative of the main actors involved in gender equality issues and GEP implementation in both universities.

## **National Contexts**

Gender equality approaches in Serbia and Morocco are shaped by different historical legacies, cultural traditions and political and socioeconomic conditions.

The United Nations Gender Inequality Index provides a rough insight into existing differences in the gender equality status quo: while Serbia is ranked among the upper countries (35th), Morocco ranks very low, even in comparison with other countries in the same region (121st)<sup>1</sup>.

In Serbia, the socialist heritage left a sound basis for gender equality. The Constitution of 2006 guarantees the equality of women and men and obliges the State to develop an equal opportunities policy. Since then, important laws have been issued, namely the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, the Law on Equality Between the Sexes and the Law on the Protector of Citizens. The Budget System Law passed in December 2015 also envisions gender responsive budgeting at all levels. With regard to gender violence, the Criminal Code and the Law on Preventing Domestic Violence were adopted in June 2017 and urgent protective measures introduced. The new Law on Gender Equality that was withdrawn after the first draft in 2015 was finally adopted in April 2021 together with the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-based Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence for the period from 2021–2025.<sup>2</sup> Concerning higher education and research, Serbia published its Strategy on Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2016–2020 – Research for Innovation in 2016. While not fully aligned with the European Research Area priorities, the document does cover topics related to some of the priority areas and includes a gender-equality-related goal:

Gender and minority equality will be improved at all levels of decision-making and gender budgeting will be implemented in accordance with the Gender Budgeting Guidelines at the national level in the Republic of Serbia.

However, there are no measures in place to enforce these aims, and universities are not required to implement a GEP.

Overall, Serbia has a comprehensive policy framework for gender equality, and evident progress has been made in recent years. However, there is a tendency to emphasise these achievements, while problems related to the implementation of existing laws and measures remain in the shadows – along with the impact of economic and social deprivation on gender inequalities, which mainly impact the most socially vulnerable groups, including Roma and rural women. Furthermore, the national discourse on gender equality tends to focus on ‘numbers’, stressing the high presence of women in government positions and other areas in comparison to other European countries. The delay in adopting the new Law on Gender Equality (from 2015 to 2021) shows the extent of the difficulties in further advancing the gender equality agenda. Serbia is facing the emergence of nationalist and

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<sup>1</sup>The data refer to 2019 and are available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>. Accessed on 17 November 2021.

<sup>2</sup>[@open@p>https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/171564/government-adopts-bill-on-gender-equality.php](https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/171564/government-adopts-bill-on-gender-equality.php). Accessed on 17 November 2021.

far-right movements, which treat gender equality policies as an external imposition by foreign powers – overlooking the fact that both gender equality policies and feminist movements were strong in socialist times. Furthermore, Serbian society is experiencing a certain ‘re-traditionalisation’ in terms of gender values and attitudes. Some research shows that only 23% of citizens think that women should be involved in politics and 53% think that small children suffer if a mother works (IPSOS, 2014). Paradoxically, the relatively high presence of women in academia hinders the adoption of more ambitious gender equality policies in a context where the persistence of gendered inequalities tends to be contested and the political discourse emphasises women’s representation (Ćeriman, Fiket, & Rácz, 2018). Gender studies centres linked to feminist movements have played a relevant role in contesting this status quo.

Morocco has made great advancements in establishing the legal foundations for equality between women and men, namely since the adoption of affirmative positive measures for the legislative elections of 2002 (Bettachy et al., 2019). Article 19 of the new Constitution of 2011 enshrines for the first time the principle of equality between men and women in the protection of all human rights. It provides that the State shall endeavour to achieve equality between men and women and sets up a body to promote equality and fight against all forms of discrimination. The Constitution consolidates the achievements of previous legislative reforms that have contributed to greater equality between men and women and to eliminating discrimination against women. These include the revision of the Commercial Code in 1995, the adoption of the new Law on Civil Status in 2002, the new Code of Criminal Procedure in 2003, the continuing reform of the Penal Code since 2003, the changes in the Labour Code in 2003, the reform of the Family Code in 2004 and the reform of the Nationality Code in 2007. The adoption of Law 103-13 to fight against violence against women in 2016 is another step in this process.

In the field of education, the main priority has been ensuring the right to equal access, especially in poor rural areas where girls are at a great disadvantage when it comes to compulsory schooling. Several measures have been adopted under the framework of the National Education and Training Charter and the Urgence Plan (2009–2012) (Kingdom of Morocco, 2008), the Governmental Plan for Equality 2012–2016 (Kingdom of Morocco, 2012); the Strategic Plan 2015–2030 drawn up by the Higher Education Council (Kingdom of Morocco, 2015) and the new Plan for Equality 2017–2021 (Kingdom of Morocco, 2018). They include establishing the school as a safe space for learning values and behaviours related to gender equality, fostering the promotion of women to management positions and building the institutional capacity to adopt gender equality as a principle of governance throughout the education system – addressing, among other aspects, curricula and teaching approaches, budget and management (Elammari, 2018). However, all these measures refer only to compulsory education; gender equality is completely absent in the objectives set for higher education – even if there is clear evidence of severe under-representation of women in the highest academic and decision-making positions (Bettachy et al., 2019; Nafaa & Bettachy, 2014).

In spite of legal developments and measures adopted to strengthen women's political, economic and social rights, the patriarchal culture is firmly rooted and dire gender inequalities persist in society, both in the public and the private spheres. Furthermore, among feminist, human's rights and democratic movements, there is also the perception that the pace of legal and policy change is slowing due to strong opposition from conservative sectors. This is why struggles around gender equality are currently of high importance both in politics and society in general – and this also concerns universities, where women's networks and trade unions have been the main advocates of gender equality for a long time.

## **Institutional Contexts**

While there are large differences in their national contexts, UB and UH2C share some institutional features. They are both large organisations with several faculties and institutes and a complex governance framework. UB consists of 31 faculties, 11 institutes and one library, and all these institutions represent separate legal entities according to the university's statute. This is particularly important since it accords (financial, above all other) autonomy to the faculties and institutes. The university does not have the mandate over the business matters of the faculties or institutes, which also limits the influence of its governing bodies in all decision-making processes. Decisions are often made through a complex procedure of negotiations. UH2C consists of 17 faculties located in 2 different cities, with 123 laboratories, 10 centres for doctoral studies, 10 research centres, 4 research poles, 2 research platforms and 1 observatory. In contrast to UB, these institutions are not separate legal entities. However, UH2C is the result of a 2014 merger of two different universities, a fact that has entailed great efforts to align institutional agendas and develop new governance and management systems and structures.

In terms of women's presence,<sup>3</sup> the audit developed within the TARGET project showed that women make up a majority of the student population in both universities at Bachelor and Master level. At UB, this trend is also maintained at PhD level, while the share of women among PhD students decreases to 40% at UH2C. In contrast, gender segregation by study field is less marked at UH2C than at UB, where technology and engineering remain male-dominated disciplines, while other fields – such as education or philology – are female dominated. Differences between the two universities are more salient when it comes to teaching and research staff and decision-making bodies, with gender imbalances far more pronounced at UH2C than at UB. At UH2C, women are under-represented among research and teaching staff (35%) and in particular among full professors (27%). At the level of decision-making bodies, the under-representation of women is even more acute. In 2018, there was no presence of women in the presidency (president, vice-president and general secretary) and only 1 of the 17 deans were women. Women accounted for 16% of the members of the university council

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<sup>3</sup>Audit data about students and research and teaching staff refer to the academic year 2016–2017.

and their share was below 20% in the academic and research commissions. Severe under-representation of women was also found in recruitment commissions at faculty level. At UB, the status quo is significantly more positive. Overall, there is gender balance among research and teaching staff, and the share of women among full professors lies at 40%. In 2018, the rector collegium was fairly balanced (one male rector, two male vice-rectors and two female vice-rectors), and the share of women in the UB council and senate was around 30%. When it comes to the committees for academic promotion, sharp differences between faculties emerge either in favour of men or of women, although the overall share of women is 37%. Inequalities are, however, more pronounced among faculty deans, who have strong management power since each faculty is a separate legal entity. Only 6 out of 31 deans in 2018 were women, and this trend has remained stable over the last decade.

In both universities, the gender dimension in curricula is an issue that is completely absent in their strategies to strengthen the excellence of education and research. The establishment of centres of gender studies and research groups, as well as the accreditation of gender courses, has been driven by gender scholars and remains rather fragmented. At UB, the Centre for Gender and Politics was established in 2006 as part of the Faculty of Political Sciences. It was the first of its kind at the university and has played a pivotal role in producing and sharing knowledge on gender issues in both Serbia and the wider region. The Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory is also actively engaged in gender-related research. On the course level, UB in 2018 had one comprehensive Master of Gender Studies programme offered at the Faculty of Political Sciences, and some gender-related courses were present in the curricula of five faculties at all levels (Bachelor, Master and PhD), mainly as elective courses. Compulsory courses feature on the curriculum in the fields of ethnology and anthropology (Bachelor and Master), political sciences (Bachelor) and medicine (Bachelor). UH2C, in turn, is one of the three universities in Morocco with accredited gender research groups (Faculties of Arts, Humanities, Law, Economics and Social Sciences). There are two gender-related Master programmes and two PhD programmes but no gender courses at Bachelor level.

It is also relevant to stress that the UB Centre for Gender and Politics has been actively involved in advancing gender equality within the Faculty of Political Sciences, addressing issues related with recruitment and promotion procedures, working conditions and sexual harassment. One of the interviewees, the dean of this faculty from 2008 to 2015, stated that beyond new rules and measures, the Centre 'made the atmosphere of the faculty more sensitive to gender issues', fostering actual change in values and attitudes. In contrast, the priority at UH2C was placed on strengthening research structures and courses, with the university also playing a very active role at the national level. In 2015, the UH2C gender research groups organised Morocco's first National Congress on Gender in Higher Education (General States of Research and Education on Gender) in collaboration with UNESCO. The congress issued a Joint Statement to foster gender in research and curricula, which was signed by the president of UH2C and several deans (Gillot & Nadifi, 2018). Women's networks have, however, been more active players when it comes to gender inequalities in careers and decision-making.

## **From Audit to GEP: Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches**

The initial stage of TARGET was a catalyst to build institutional commitment towards gender equality through the audit, design and approval process of the first GEP in both universities. Here, the national and institutional contexts as well as differences between the teams leading the processes paved the way for distinct top-down and bottom-up approaches.

At UB, the initial preparatory phase consisted of forming a small community of practice (CoP) that would serve as an immediate support group for the audit. Besides the TARGET team, consisting of a vice-rector (who was subsequently promoted to rector during the TARGET project), a professor of gender studies and co-founder of the Centre for Gender and Politics as well as a gender research assistant, who would later become UB's gender programme officer, this group consisted of individuals employed in the different university bodies identified as essential in the data collection process, namely employees at the UB computing centre and administrative officers in the rectorate. Together with the top-level management (rector, vice-rectors and the heads of the different sectors at the university), this group was informed about the TARGET project's main aims and goals as well as the upcoming gender audit that would require their support and help in gathering data. This small CoP proved to be very effective, and a comprehensive audit was carried out at the beginning of 2018, collecting for the first time sex-disaggregated data at all levels, including all decision-making bodies, as well as an initial sketch of the status quo concerning gender in curricula. The results were discussed in a workshop attended by around 30 people, including the top management of faculties and professors involved in gender issues.

The audit served as the basis for identifying priority areas of action to go into the design of the GEP. This process was shaped by the appointment of the TARGET team coordinator (a former vice-rector) to rector of the university, only the second woman ever to head UB. Having full support and commitment from top management, the GEP was designed strategically as a 'low profile' plan, avoiding sensitive issues which might raise strong resistance (such as sexual harassment or gender-sensitive language). The main aim was to build consensus and anchor gender equality in the agenda of the university. In this vein, the GEP was mainly focused on activities that were deemed to be a priority for sustaining gender equality policies in the future and that could be carried out with the resources available in the rectorate. In addition to raising gender awareness, especially related to the representation of women in top management and decision-making bodies and structures, the GEP focused on two main objectives: creating a permanent gender equality officer at the university level and establishing systematic procedures and information systems to improve data collection and address data gaps, including gender in curricula. The GEP was signed by the rector in September 2018 and adopted by the senate in April 2019.

In contrast to this top-down strategy, the process at UH2C adopted a participatory and bottom-up character from the outset. A large TARGET team was set up and led by a physics professor, who was also president of the Women's and Science Association in Morocco, one of the most active women's networks in the field.

The team was composed of around 10 professors from different faculties and disciplines, all with a background of activism in women's rights and careers within the university. In parallel, contacts were made to involve representatives at the top of the university's hierarchy in the CoP, including the president, vice-presidents, deans, and vice-deans as well as directors and heads of laboratories and departments, in an attempt to involve different institutions and disciplines, including gender scholars. While some saw their involvement more as an administrative obligation in one of the university's projects, others showed great commitment and enthusiasm to engage in action.

The involvement of this CoP (steering committee) of around 20 people in different management positions was made highly visible through two institutional workshops organised in the first stage of the process, which attracted around 60–70 participants and about which corresponding information and materials were later widely disseminated. The first workshop discussed the outcomes of the gender audit (February 2018) and the second the design of gender equality policies (June 2018). The result of this process was a proposal to adopt an Equality Charter and an Action Plan. After long negotiations with the presidency, and thanks to the active support of several members of the university council, the Charter was included in UH2C's agenda and was finally adopted unanimously at the meeting of the council held in December 2018. This Charter formulates the general commitment on the part of UH2C to develop a culture of gender equality, fight all forms of discrimination and violence, and increase women's participation in decision-making. All authorities, institutions and stakeholders at the university have been invited to adhere to the Charter and implement a set of measures, including the adoption of a quota. Although the Charter itself was not binding, the official acknowledgement of gender inequalities and the call to action had a strong impact within the university. The Action Plan builds on the Charter and contains more specific activities to be carried out by the TARGET team, with a focus on raising awareness, fostering women's access to decision-making and improving the collection of sex-disaggregated data.

## **GEP Implementation: Interplay Between Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches**

The initial process of GEP design depicted quite a different picture in the two universities. A top-down strategy of GEP implementation at UB, with very clear, albeit limited objectives, versus a more ambitious bottom-up approach at UH2C, albeit marked by the vagueness of the actions to be taken. Yet in both cases, the actual implementation of the GEP blurred these differences to some extent. In this process, a more complex interplay between top-down and bottom-up approaches emerged, partly driven by unexpected opportunities and constraints which required flexibility and adaptation in the formulation of objectives and actions.

### ***UB: From Low- to High-Profile GEP***

The UB CoP proved to be very effective in addressing most of the data gaps identified in the audit. While sex-disaggregated data were already collected for

students and research staff, there was no data available for decision-making bodies. Regular and systematic collection of this data was considered essential to the successful planning, implementation and monitoring of any future measure to improve women's access to decision-making. Since the adoption of the GEP, data have been regularly updated every academic year – albeit with great effort on the part of the TARGET team as most faculties do not collect this data and only provide the names of people in decision-making positions. Since the faculties are separate legal entities, the rectorate cannot require them to devote more resources to this task. In a similar vein, the TARGET team strove to establish a database of all accredited gender-related courses and their characteristics for the first time, which was then regularly updated. Having comprehensive data on courses that focus on gender studies and gender equality was seen as an important step towards adopting more ambitious measures to foster gender mainstreaming in curricula in the future.

More difficulties were encountered for collecting sex-disaggregated data on careers. The audit indicated that there were gaps between men and women when it comes to career paths and academic promotions, suggesting that one of the priorities of future action should be to reassess the criteria and procedures for recruitment, evaluation and promotion from a gender perspective. Accordingly, one of the objectives of the GEP was to establish a system for monitoring trends in career paths, including different complex factors that might be contributing to inequality. It was foreseen that the UB computing centre would establish a system to automatically collect data from the faculties on the age of promotion of teaching staff. However, it did not prove possible to implement this system due to systematic data collection issues as well as serious shortage of IT staff. As an alternative, the TARGET team established a good cooperation with the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory (one of the institutes at UB that is very active in gender research) and the Centre for Ethics, Law and Applied Philosophy (CELAP), who were conducting a qualitative gender analysis of career paths among young academics, which seemed useful for setting clearer future goals in this area.

Data collection was combined with intensive dissemination of results and awareness-raising activities throughout the entire GEP implementation process. The rector and the gender programme officer were especially active in this field, taking advantage of any university events, meetings with policy makers and presence in the media. Furthermore, the team presented the work done at several high-profile academic conferences. Awareness raising also included the development of new materials. The team conducted research on the history of UB, focusing on women who were the first to achieve outstanding results or positions within the university. As a result, a printed calendar was published to increase the visibility of women in academia and raise awareness of the importance of gender equality. In a similar vein, a brochure was prepared to support the dissemination of all gender-related courses offered by UB, and a scientific article on this topic was published (Duháček & Mirazić, 2021).

The main constraint in GEP implementation was the lack of consensus for establishing a permanent gender equality position at the university level, partially

related to the fact that the rectorate was not able to ensure financial resources for this post. The alternative was to create a gender equality committee as a permanent and advisory body with the mandate to monitor gender equality and develop policies and tools. This committee was officially established by the rector in May 2019, with the 12 appointed members carefully selected to ensure a balanced representation of all important university stakeholders – the four faculty groups, institutes, teaching and non-teaching staff, and students. Although the first constitutional meeting was not actually held until the beginning of 2021, several members were actively engaged in GEP activities.

The relatively smooth implementation of the GEP was disrupted in 2021, when some cases of sexual harassment were reported at UB, drawing media attention and mobilising students in the context of a strong wave of #metoo stories in Serbia. The situation made it clear that there was a need to take action – even if this had not been initially planned. Establishing anti-sexual harassment protocols and procedures had been a highly sensitive topic within the university for decades – it was raised by gender scholars and feminist movements but faced strong resistance. The Faculty of Political Sciences was the first to adopt a formal policy in 2014, with the Centre for Gender and Politics playing a key role in this process. It was followed in 2019 by the Faculty of Psychology. The adoption of the first anti-sexual harassment policy at the university level was clearly a process ‘from the bottom to the top’ (see also Miražić & Duhaček in this volume). Members of both the TARGET team and the gender equality committee were directly involved in these initiatives. The experience gained in supporting the establishment and enforcement of these policies at the faculty level was a key facilitating factor.

The ‘Rulebook on the prevention of and protection from sexual harassment at the University of Belgrade’ was adopted by the university’s governing bodies in July 2021 and refers to all the members institution – a fact which is of great importance given the autonomy of UB institutions. The document contains the institution’s full commitment to prohibiting discrimination and any form of abuse or harassment as well as definitions of the target groups: students, all university staff as well as all persons in the process of enrolling in any programme at the university. Furthermore, the university recommends continuous training for ‘all the students and employees on all matters relevant to prevention of sexual harassment’ and also emphasises the role of curricula and textbooks in the prevention of any kind of discrimination or harassment based on sex, gender or sexual orientation. As highlighted by Miražić and Duhaček in this volume, the most important innovation in comparison to the previously adopted faculty rulebooks is the introduction of the position of a commissioner for equality in each member institution. The main role of these commissioners would be to organise training activities with the aim of raising awareness of and preventing sexual harassment. The commissioners will also assume an important role in the procedures of protection against sexual harassment as the persons responsible for initially handling the complaint.

The adoption of this rulebook was a great achievement and had a strong impact on raising gender awareness and building commitment for adopting more

ambitious gender equality policies. With regard to the status quo, there have been no significant changes in the main areas of concern for gender equality in comparison to the initial audit. The situation has remained more or less the same concerning careers, decision-making and the content of curricula. This fact shows that previous improvements remain stable and are sustainable, regardless of the election of the new rector in October 2021.

### ***UH2C: Institutionalisation and Alliances***

The momentum gained through the adoption of the Charter of Equality of UH2C paved the way to address the institutionalisation of gender equality policies in the university, an aspect which was not initially foreseen. It was recognised that the mere adoption of the Charter was insufficient and had to be followed by setting up a commission within the university council to establish more specific objectives and monitor-related actions. The establishment of this gender equality commission was the result of intense negotiations with the presidency and members of the council. On Women's Day 2019, the university council officially agreed to set up this commission, whose status, composition and objectives were publicly discussed within the TARGET CoP in the institutional workshop held soon afterwards. The discussion highlighted the need to establish a permanent commission, similar to other commissions of the council, a fact which entailed changing the university's statute. A balanced presence of men and women was required in order to engage men in the development of gender equality policies. The commission should have a clear mandate, namely in terms of ensuring the presence of women in decision-making and recruitment boards, including the use of quota. Finally, similar commissions should be created at the faculty level.

It is telling that the commission, which was formally constituted in July 2019, followed these recommendations. It was composed of a balanced number of women and men and included members of the council and two representatives from the TARGET team. The chair was a member of the council who was also involved in the TARGET CoP. In the initial CoP meeting, all members agreed that a permanent commission would send a strong message about the relevance of gender equality for the institution – and would also acknowledge the fact that advancing gender equality should be part of a long-term and sustained approach.

The commission held several meetings until March 2020, when the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the normal functioning of the university. In these meetings, the adoption of a quota was discussed at length as a tool to increase the number of women in decision-making positions at different levels, including management and academic boards as well as recruitment and promotion commissions. However, it should also be stressed that discussion about quota went well beyond 'fixing the numbers'. It opened a wider debate on gender inequalities and how they are shaped by deeply rooted cultural prejudices and stereotypes which are present not only in society but also at the university. In this sense, even if not all the members of the commission agreed on adopting a quota, the discussion was useful to develop a broader concept of gender equality and build institutional commitment for adopting a more comprehensive approach

that dealt with cultural and organisational aspects. In terms of women's presence, the consensus was set on affirmative action, giving preference to women in cases where two candidates had equal skills and qualifications.

Building evidence of gender inequalities was a pivotal factor in this process. It was also extremely difficult because there is no systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data at the university. An additional problem were the continuous changes in administrative staff, which hindered their commitment to this task. With great effort, the TARGET team was nevertheless able to collect sex-disaggregated data on students and graduates, university staff and all kinds of decision-making bodies, although it was not possible to establish a regular updating of data. This was combined with the implementation of a survey to explore gender perceptions among research and teaching staff, carried out in collaboration with one of the gender research teams at UH2C (DEGG – Law, Economics, Management and Gender) attached to the Faculty of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences Ain Choc. An interesting aspect highlighted by the survey concerns the gap between the low presence of women in positions of responsibility and their high interest in holding such positions – women show less satisfaction than men with the achievement of professional ambitions and are more aware of the existence of gender-related prejudices and barriers. This is in contrast with the prevailing discourse at UH2C, which argues that differences in career progression are mainly located outside the university, with women being less ambitious than men because of socialisation and care responsibilities. The survey also identified a significant minority of men who were aware of gender biases in the university. The outcomes of the survey were publicly presented in December 2019, highlighting the existence of either hidden or more overt discriminatory practices related to promotion, designation of committees and access to management positions. The main recommendations of the study (DEGG & TARGET, 2019) were in line with the TARGET approach: ensure the formalisation and transparency of internal procedures, facilitate access to information and adopt institutional policies to increase women's presence in decision-making bodies, including if necessary affirmative measures.

The study also underscored the need to strengthen gender in research and curricula, an aspect that had until then not been a priority in the work carried out by the TARGET team. Building on the positive collaboration with the gender research team that conducted the study, it became clear that other gender scholars should be more actively involved in the process. Contacts were initiated to align agendas, which resulted in a workshop held in April 2021 in which all the heads of the gender research teams participated. The purpose of the workshop was not only to support and disseminate the work done in this field but also to explore how to strengthen the gender dimension in curricula in the framework of the overall reform of the UH2C curricula which was then under discussion. The workshop acknowledged the importance of the Equality Charter and the need to further develop gender equality policies at all levels, including measures and resources to integrate the gender dimension into education. It highlighted the need to establish a clear and shared framework in this area, considering as a starting point the 2015 Joint Statement of the General States of Research and

Education, which was signed by the university's president and several deans. In this vein, it was recommended to create a committee of four or five professors to steer and monitor the process, develop a transversal module on gender, introduce targeted training for teachers and arrange para-university cultural activities to raise gender awareness among students and research staff.

It is worth noting that the process initiated by TARGET created a more supportive climate towards gender equality in the university – related at least partially to positive developments concerning women's presence. In 2019, a woman was elected as president of the university, only the second woman to have ever held such a position in Morocco. Positive change has also been recorded in other high-level positions (vice-president, deans, vice-deans, general secretaries and heads of departments).

In contrast, an unexpected constraint was the postponement of the constitution of the new equality commission since the renewal of the university council for the period from 2021 to 2023. In spite of this, the TARGET team was quite successful in following the agreed plan, i.e. to establish similar commissions at the faculty level. In November 2021, three commissions were operating, and another three were in the process of being formed, already with the approval of the deans. It goes without saying that this process was only possible through intense efforts: one of the interviewees noted that she was referred to as 'Ms. Gender Issues' in her faculty. It also shows how the adoption of gender equality policies has gained legitimacy among deans and other people in managerial and academic boards. Nevertheless, the constitution of this commission at the university level with a permanent status and clear mandate, is a key factor for sustaining change.

## **Conclusions**

In both universities, TARGET has been a catalyst for building evidence of gender inequalities, raising gender awareness and institutionalising gender equality policies. The most important mechanisms for ensuring long-term, sustainable support for gender equality at the institutional level are the GEP (UB) and the Equality Charter (UH2C) alongside the gender structures which have been created: the gender equality committee at UB and the equality commission of the UH2C university council, replicated in some faculties.

The process of initiating structural change has opened a space for building evidence and reflecting more systematically on gender issues among different actors in both universities including top management, gender scholars and activists. At UB, the bridge between gender knowledge and practical expertise in developing gender equality policies has been a key facilitating factor, along with the full commitment and support from the rector. The process has been more challenging at UH2C, where there was no previous experience of gender equality policies. Strengthening both institutional commitment and collaboration with gender scholars has been a great achievement. The analysis also shows that the process has been complex and nonlinear, and that the interplay and desired complementarity between top-down and bottom-up approaches is highly dependent on contextual factors and the specific constellation of opportunities and constraints.

The commitment of university leaders to gender equality has been extremely important given the national contexts, which are characterised by a lack of discourse on gender equality in academia. However, this commitment may be fragile and changing. In both universities, a priority is to ensure a clear mandate of the gender equality structures that have been created and facilitate a regular work dynamic. In this regard, the lack of resources and the dependency on elections or top management are problematic issues.

The experiences of both universities also clearly show that actual change relies on decades of bottom-up activism by feminist movements and networks, both inside and outside the universities. Here, the bridge between gender scholarship and practitioners' expertise is of high relevance to address both institutional and academic logics. It is hoped that this gender equality academic work will be recognised and valued.

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