MONITORING AS A STEERING TOOL FOR GENDER EQUALITY POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: IDEAL AND REALITY

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DOI: 10.22163/FTEVAL.2024.634

ABSTRACT

In an ideal-typical process of gender equality policy development and implementation, empirical evidence plays a central role. The gender analysis at the beginning of the process describes the gender issue to be addressed. Based on this baseline, objectives and priorities are defined, policies are designed and implemented, and these are then monitored and, ideally, evaluated. The aim of monitoring is to provide information on the implementation of the gender equality measure so that countermeasures, if needed, can be taken at an early stage in the event of deviations from the planned implementation. However, this requires that the monitoring indicators are derived from the policy objectives and are measurable. Practice shows that the availability of data, rather than the objectives, determines the development of indicators. The procedure for developing indicators is described and reflected on using the example of monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of the Austrian Convention of Higher Education Institutions on strengthening gender competencies in higher education processes. The preconditions for the steering function of monitoring and its limitations are discussed.

Keywords: gender equality policy, monitoring of policy implementation, higher education institutions, policy steering

INTRODUCTION

When the monitoring of the implementation of policies or measures is set in a complete and ideal-typical process (May and Wildavsky 1978), the central role of empirical evidence in the design and implementation of policies becomes clear. In this setting, monitoring also has enormous potential for steering policy implementation (Markiewicz and Patrick 2016). This is especially relevant in the case of gender equality policy, an area often characterised by a lack of strong evidence. The article argues that monitoring can be a powerful tool for steering gender equality policy implementation and shows that its use remains limited, and for what reasons.

Monitoring is set against the background of reflexive gender equality policy (Wroblewski and Palmén 2022; Wroblewski and Leitner 2022). Evidence plays a central role in a complete and reflexive process of designing and implementing gender equality policy: first in the analysis of the gender equality problem (gender analysis), from which goals and priorities are defined in a further step, which in turn form the basis for designing measures. The implementation of measures is subject to monitoring. This involves the systematic collection and analysis of information on the relevant context and the implementation of the measures. On this basis, it is determined whether the measures are being implemented as planned or whether adjustments are necessary in the event of deviations. In this way, monitoring contributes to the efficient implementation of measures. To fulfil this function, monitoring indicators must be derived from the objectives of the action.

However, this model is based on a number of assumptions, not all of which are tested when developing a policy. Usually, they are only tested as part of an evaluation. The model of a complete policy cycle described above assumes that gender equality policies are designed and implemented based on the following preconditions:

- That management is not only committed to gender equality goals but also to changing the structures and processes which cause gender inequalities.

- That all actors involved have a common understanding of the gender equality problem to be addressed by the policy, as well as of the objectives and priorities to be addressed.

- That sufficient resources are allocated to the implementation of the measures and that they address the gender equality policy issue.

- That monitoring is meaningful and that there is a willingness to use it for steering purposes.

There are a number of examples that could be used to illustrate that these prerequisites are not always met in practice (see e. g. Wroblewski 2021, Wroblewski 2017). In the following, the limited steering power of monitoring will be discussed using the example of monitoring the implementation of the recommendations on strengthening gender competencies in higher education processes formulated by the Austrian Convention of Higher Education Institutions (*Hochschulkonferenz*, HSK; BMBWF 2018; Wroblewski and Englmaier 2023).

THE HSK RECOMMENDATIONS ON STRENGTHENING GENDER COMPETENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION PROCESSES

Austria has a long tradition of gender equality policies in science and research. The existing policy mix, which has been developed over the years, addresses the three central objectives that also characterise European gender equality policy in the field of science and research: (1) achieving gender balance in all areas and at all hierarchical levels in science and research (fixing the numbers), (2) integrating the gender dimension into higher education structures and processes (fixing the institution) and (3) anchoring the gender dimension in research content and teaching (fixing the knowledge).

With the existing bundle of gender equality policy measures, Austria is considered a country with a comprehensive and consistent policy mix in a European comparison (Wroblewski 2021). However, there is a need to improve the effectiveness of existing measures, as formulated as an objective in the Austrian ERA Roadmap 2016-2020 (BMWFW 2016). In order to achieve this goal, a working group was set up in 2016 to formulate recommendations for strengthening gender competencies in higher education processes. In the first phase, the working group developed and agreed on a definition of gender competence which is defined as a basic competence all members of a higher education institution should have and is thus distinguished from gender expertise.

"Gender competence comprises of the fundamental recognition of the relevance of gender attributions in one's own work and sphere of influence (knowledge). This recognition is connected to the willingness (desire) and ability to deal with these issues in day-to-day work and throughout study life - if necessary, supported by gender experts and with knowledge from gender theories - and to take action based on this knowledge (skills). Recognition, discussion and action are subject to a constant process of reflection (reflection)." (BMBWF 2018: 33, translated by author)

The working group consisted of representatives of universities, universities of applied sciences, university colleges of teacher education and private universities, as well as representatives of the Austrian National Union of Students and gender and equality experts. The task was to develop recommendations for members of higher education institutions to improve gender competence and raise awareness of gender diversity. The recommendations are intended to serve as a guideline for the persons and committees involved at the universities and to provide concrete, action-oriented suggestions (BMBWF 2018). The recommendations are addressed (1) to the universities, but also (2) to the Austrian National Union of Students, (3) to the Austrian Convention of Higher Education Institutions itself, (4) to the Austrian Conference of Universities (Uniko), the Austrian Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK), the Austrian Conference of Private Universities (PUK) and the Austrian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Teacher Education (RÖPH), and (5) to the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF).

The working group formulated a total of 36 recommendations that address four subject areas. For each recommendation, it is made explicit who is responsible for its implementation and who benefits from its realisation.

(1) Gender competent management: The 18 recommendations assigned to this area aim to achieve a clear commitment on the part of higher education institution (HEI) management to a cultural change in the sense of gender- and diversity-equitable organisation.

(2) Gender competent action: The implementation of the nine recommendations assigned to this area is intended to support the responsibility of all HEI members to build and develop their own gender competence. All members of the HEI are thus called upon to actively help shape their own field of work and activity in a gender-competent manner.

(3) Gender competent teaching: These seven recommendations are aimed at anchoring the gender dimension more firmly in the curricula as well as gender- and diversity-appropriate teaching.

(4) Gender competent research: These two recommendations aim to consider the gender dimension in research content as a cross-cutting issue.

OVERVIEW 1   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER COMPETENT MANAGEMENT

No.	What?	Who is responsible?	Who profits?
1	Setting targets to develop and strengthen gender competencies	All HEI members	All HEI members
2	Consideration of existing strategy papers and instruments	All HEI members	All HEI members
3	Consideration of knowledge platforms	All HEI members	All HEI members
4	Responsibility of a member of management to develop and strengthen gender competencies	All HEI members	All HEI members
5	Provision of resources to develop and strengthen gender competencies	Management of Universities of applied sciences, University colleges of teacher education and private universities	All members of Universities of applied sciences, University colleges of teacher education and private universities
6	Integration of gender competencies into the profile for commissions/committees	All HEI members	Members of decision making bodies, future applicants
7	Integration of gender competence into organisation development and quality management	All HEI members	All HEI members
8	Developing expertise to create an index for gender competencies	All HEI members	HEI management, BMBWF
9	Organising a cross-sectoral networking meeting	Austrian Convention of HEIs	All HEI members
10	Cooperation when developing gender competence trainings	All HEI members, human resources department	All HEI members, especially teachers and researchers

11	Establishment of platforms to bundle knowledge on gender competence	FHK, RÖPH, PUK	All members of Universities of applied sciences, University colleges of teacher education and Private universities
12	Bundling and developing human resources in the area of gender education/gender studies	Steering groups of the networks developing teacher education	All HEI involved in teacher education, all students of pedagogy and teacher education
13	Designing the infrastructure so it does justice to gender diversity	Owners of HEI buildings, HEI management	Non-binary HEI members
14	Integration of gender competence into the development and finance plan	BMBWF, FHK, RÖPH	All members of Universities of applied sciences and University colleges of teacher education
15	Legal anchoring of gender competencies	BMBWF	All HEI members
16	ÖH-department on gender at every HEI	BMBWF	Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH), students
17	Consideration of real gender diversity when collecting data	BMBWF, HEI management, Statistics Austria	Non-binary HEI members
18	Design forms based on gender diversity	BMBWF, HEI management	Non-binary HEI members

Source: BMBWF 2018: 28f.

OVERVIEW 2   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER COMPETENT ACTION

No.	What?	Who is responsible?	Who profits?
19	Provision of information on gender aspects of the HEI	HEI management	All HEI members
20	Recognition and processing of information on gender issues	All members of HEI	All HEI members
21	Discussion of gender competence among personnel managers	Human resources department	All HEI members, future applicants
22	Creation of individual and collective reflection opportunities, also with external support	HEI management	All HEI members, future applicants
23	Development of an self-assessment tool	HEI management in cooperation	Specific groups of HEI members
24	Development and/or provision of a guide on gender sensitive language	HEI management	All HEI members
25	Low-threshold access to language guide and promotion of its use	HEI management	All HEI members
26	Provision of training for ÖH representatives and tutors	Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH)	ÖH representatives, students
27	Collection of good practice examples by departments/disciplines	HEI management in cooperation	Teachers, researchers

Source: BMBWF 2018: 29.

OVERVIEW 3   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER COMPETENT TEACHING

No.	What?	Who is responsible?	Who profits?
28	Integration of Gender Studies in Curricula	Collegial bodies responsible for curriculum development	Teachers, students
29	Anchoring the development of gender competence in the content of AHS and BHS curricula	Curriculum commission	Students in secondary education
30	Anchoring the development of gender competence in STEOP	Collegial bodies responsible for curriculum development	Students
31	Provision of further training in gender-sensitive didactics	Human resources department	Teachers, students
32	Individual coaching for teachers to develop the gender dimension	Human resources department	Teachers, students
33	Award for theses addressing gender issues	HEI management	Students
34	Award for gender competent teaching	HEI management	Students

Notes: AHS – Academic secondars school, BHS – Vocational secondary school; STEOP –introductory phase of the study programme
Source: BMBWF 2018: 30.

OVERVIEW 4   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER COMPETENT RESEARCH

No.	What?	Who is responsible?	Who profits?
35	Targeted funding for research projects	BMBWF, HEI management	Researchers, students
36	Establishment of gender professorship(s)	HEI management	Researchers, students

Source: BMBWF 2018: 30.

AIM OF MONITORING AND ACCESS TO INDICATOR DEVELOPMENT

The monitoring which accompanies the implementation of the HSK recommendations was initiated and funded by the BMBWF. On the one hand, the monitoring provided a comparative presentation of the activities undertaken by the universities to enhance gender competence. On the other hand, the monitoring should provide input for the accompanying process of the BMBWF which supports the implementation of the recommendations through a collegial consultation process and the provision of a platform for exchange and discourse (see recommendations 9 and 10).

The development of the indicators for monitoring the implementation of the HSK recommendations was based on four principles (see also Wroblewski et al. 2017):

- Indicators must meet established quality criteria for social scientific measurement, i.e. they must be objective, valid and reliable.

- Valid criteria must make explicit the underlying understanding of gender and gender competence and relate to specific gender equality policy objectives.

- Relevant stakeholders must be involved in the process of developing indicators to ensure their acceptance and use.

- The development of indicators should be understood as a reflexive process, analogous to the development of strategies to enhance gender competence in higher education processes. The analysis of the indicators should be combined with a reflection on the meaningfulness of the indicators for the particular context of application and thus constitute the starting point for the further development of the indicators or the respective data base.

In light of these principles, the development of the monitoring programme was designed to be participatory and discursive. Drawing on the approaches of feminist institutionalism and practice theory (see Lipinsky, Wroblewski 2021), the project was based on the assumption that the development and expansion of gender competence among all HEI members is a prerequisite for achieving the central goal of gender equality policy in science and research - cultural change. The creation of structures for gender equality as well as the development and implementation of concrete measures should support the development of gender competence (Löther et al. 2021).

The specific aim of the monitoring was to contribute to an evidence-based discourse on gender equality, in particular on the status quo and changes in activities and measures to enhance gender competence in HEIs. To ensure the use and acceptance of such monitoring, relevant stakeholder groups were involved in the process and the link to a feminist discourse was ensured (Wroblewski et al. 2017). Broad acceptance of monitoring also seems important to enable its use as a steering tool for higher education processes in the context of gender equality policy (Wroblewski, Lipinsky 2018; Eckstein 2017; Wroblewski 2017). Furthermore, the monitoring should represent a further development or complement to the established gender monitoring (www.unidata.gv.at) and be based as far as possible on available or easily accessible data.

Indicators were developed for different levels: Input indicators provide information on the activities carried out. In the case of recommendations addressed to universities, this provides a basis for comparing implementation activities. Implementation indicators do not only show whether activities have been carried out, but also their scope and intensity. Impact indicators illustrate the achievement of objectives and the changes brought about by the measures implemented. Implementation and impact indicators are less suitable for making comparisons between higher education institutions, as they would have to consider differences in, for example, the size of the institution or its thematic focus.

Implementation and impact indicators are therefore intended as suggestions for universities that wish to know more about the effectiveness of the measures they have implemented. However, there are no plans to collect implementation and impact indicators for all HEIs on a comparative basis. This is also because it only makes sense to generate the relevant data if the institution is interested in promoting the evidence-based further development of specific measures to establish and expand gender competence.

THE PROCESS: INDICATOR DEVELOPMENT AND FEEDBACK

The indicators were developed in the following way: In a first step, an impact logic (based on the logic model developed by W. K. Kellog Foundation 2004) was formulated for each recommendation in the light of the current state of gender equality policy debate and research. The formulation of the impact logic is intended to adequately reflect the complexity and multidimensionality of the recommendations. Gender equality in higher education is not a goal that can be easily quantified, i.e. an adequate set of indicators will have to include both qualitative and quantitative indicators. For example, the proportion of women in

professorships alone is not a meaningful indicator of gender equality in universities (Wroblewski 2021). The proportion of women says nothing about potential sources of bias in appointment procedures, e. g. how appointment procedures are organised, how many women applied or were invited to interviews. In general, Indicators are only an approximation of a construct that is not directly measurable (Meyer 2004: 27). The construct can be defined theoretically, politically or ad hoc. In our case, the recommendations are a political goal, the operationalisation of which forms the basis for the development of the indicators.

Each of the recommendations addresses complex and, in some cases, multidimensional objectives. Recommendation 24, for example, suggests that universities develop a guideline on the use of gender-sensitive or gender-inclusive language for HEI members. The aim is to ensure that all types of teaching, research and administrative texts are formulated in a gender-sensitive or gender-inclusive manner. However, the existence of a guideline does not mean that members of the HEI are aware of it and use it, or that texts are actually formulated in a gender-equitable or gender-inclusive way.

The development of indicators to monitor the implementation of the recommendations was based on the ideal approach to developing gender indicators (Wroblewski et al., 2017). Accordingly, the monitoring system to support the implementation of the HSK recommendations should include indicators that can be derived from the objectives of the recommendations and provide information on their implementation. A distinction is made between input indicators, implementation indicators (activities) and impact indicators (short, medium and long term). These indicators are derived from the so-called logic model, i.e. the formulated assumptions as to why a measure should contribute to a desired result. Compared to logic models used in evaluations (Rossi et al. 1999), the model used for the development of indicators to monitor the implementation of the recommendations is rather simplified. For the sake of simplicity, a linear model is formulated, although in practice the implementation of interventions is often characterised by feedback loops or similar non-linear relationships.

Figure 1   Logic model
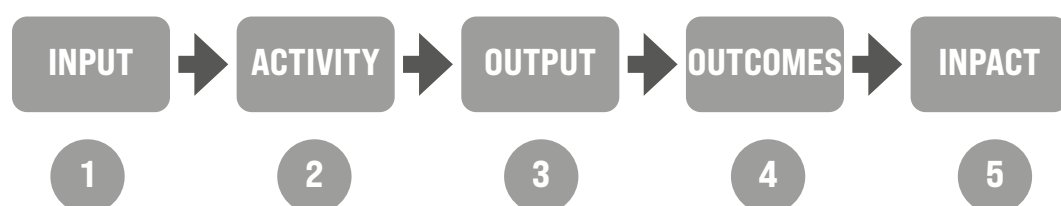
Source: own elaboration based on W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2004: 1.

The first two stages of the logic describe the measure and its implementation. Corresponding input indicators are, for example, the resources available for a measure, the planned training units or the number of participants. Implementation indicators describe the activities carried out and the results produced by a measure, such as the number of people trained, or the number of consultations carried out. Outcome indicators show short-term effects, for example when trained people are able to apply the newly acquired knowledge in their daily work. Impact indicators, on the other hand, are designed to reflect long-term changes and in the case of gender equality in HEI cultural change, such as the integration of the gender dimension in research projects as a crosscutting issue.

The examples already show that in some cases the relevant information is relatively easy to obtain from administrative data, such as the number of participants in a training course. In other cases, the information is more complex and needs to be generated through separate surveys, such as the skills acquired by participants in a training programme. The complexity of gender monitoring is compounded by the fact that many databases are not inherently suited to analysing gender issues. While gender equality policies tend to focus on social gender, i.e. different groups of women and men in specific life situations and with the role expectations placed on them, databases tend to represent biological gender (sex) (Döring 2013). Sometimes databases allow a differentiated view of social phenomena, e. g. when women and men can be represented as heterogeneous groups, for example by differentiating according to age, qualification level, childcare responsibilities, health impairments or sexual orientation. As such differentiations are rarely possible, reflection on the validity of existing databases for gender analysis should be embedded as a quality standard in the indicator development process (Hedman et al. 1996). The development of gender or equality monitoring is therefore a long-term process and monitoring itself becomes a 'living tool' that is subject to constant adaptation and development (Wroblewski, Leitner 2022). Hedman et al. (1996: 11) even state: "The production of gender statistics is a never-ending process".

The indicators were formulated knowing that not all indicators have corresponding databases or that existing information cannot be used for analysis without considerable effort. A second step was therefore to identify what data was available, what information was easily accessible (e. g. through documents) and what information should ideally be available. The indicators were deliberately formulated before data availability was checked in order to identify data gaps (D'Ignazio, Klein 2020; Criado-Perez 2019), to include them in the reflection on the indicators and to stimulate discussion on alternative ways of gen-

erating data (Wroblewski et al. 2017). Where possible, several indicators have been proposed for each recommendation. For each of these, the level of indicator addressed is explained and possible data sources are discussed.

Parallel to the development of the indicators at the theoretical level, a survey was conducted among the universities on the status of implementation of the HSK recommendations and a systematic search was conducted for available information on the implementation of measures to develop and expand gender competence (strategic documents of the universities, homepages, etc.). The survey of the universities took place in spring 2022, whereby the contact persons nominated by the universities for the implementation of the recommendations were contacted. A total of 66 of the 71 universities took part in the survey, representing a response rate of 93%. An internet search was carried out in April and May 2022. Publicly available documents (such as performance agreements, development plans, plans for the advancement of women or gender equality, gender reports, diversity strategies, statutes, checklists, position papers or information brochures) were included in the research. The information in the completed questionnaires was compared with that from our own research to check the validity and significance of the results.

Based on the results of the survey and the research, the indicators and the underlying data were analysed with a particular focus on their validity. The focus was on the institutions' understanding of gender competence in the implementation of the recommendations. What understanding of gender competence can be gleaned from the documents or the survey? To what extent can different concepts of gender competence be identified? To what extent does this limit the meaningfulness of the indicators? This reflection took place together with Dr Anke Lipinsky from GESIS in June 2022. The set of indicators has been revised on the basis of the reflection, e. g. by providing more precise definitions or by removing multidimensional indicators. This set of indicators was discussed with the BMBWF (June 2022). The set of indicators and the results of the survey and research were presented and discussed at the networking meeting on gender and diversity competence in October 2022. The first monitoring report was sent to all participants of the networking meeting in September 2022; the survey participants also received a summary of their answers and information in case the answers were interpreted differently by the monitoring team.

Four one-day workshops were held in February and March 2023 for representatives of the higher education sector. Each of the workshops addressed one of the four sectors which make up the higher education sector in Austria

(universities, universities of applied sciences, teacher training colleges and private universities).[1] The workshops took place at the Institute for Advanced Studies and were moderated by Dr Birgit Buchinger (Solution, Social Research & Development). The contact persons nominated by the universities for the implementation of the HSK recommendations and the respondents to the survey were invited to these workshops. A total of 40 universities provided feedback during the workshops.

The aim of the workshops was to discuss with HEI representatives the relevance of the recommendations in general and the possibilities of using the indicators of the monitoring to steer gender equality policy at HEI level. Strengths and weaknesses of the implementation in the respective sector as well as the meaning of the indicators from the perspective of the HEIs should be reflected upon.

MAIN RESULTS OF THE REFLECTION PROCESS

The workshops with HEI representatives were characterised by constructive and active discussions between the participants. The opportunity to give feedback was appreciated by the participants, as was the continuation of the exchange through the annual networking meetings.

In all four workshops, the recommendations were described as helpful and supportive. Participants saw them as a guide for action. They allow them to take stock of what has already been implemented at their own HEI and provide suggestions for future action. The recommendations were also used by the participants as an argumentation aid vis-à-vis the HEI management in the course of developing concrete measures. In this context, it was considered helpful that the recommendations were brought to the universities from outside and that the gender equality actors at the universities could refer to them. The recommendations were perceived by some participants as "pressure from outside" - especially from the BMBWF - which increased the willingness of the management level to deal with the issue of gender competence.

All the workshops pointed to the need to increase the "visibility" of the recommendations and to the fact that sustained communication of the recommendations is essential for their successful implementation. When managers change, there is no guarantee that new members of management will be aware of the recommendations or consider them relevant. There is also a certain turnover of gender equality stakeholders, so it is important to ensure that new stake-

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1   This approach was chosen to take account of the different frameworks (e. g. legal requirements) for gender equality in the sectors.

holders have access to the recommendations as quickly and directly as possible.

At the same time, the discussions in all workshops showed that the recommendations' significance and binding nature remained unclear. On the one hand, the external pressure mentioned above was perceived, on the other hand, the word "recommendation" and the associated low level of commitment was pointed out. In none of the workshops were the recommendations perceived as a product of the Austrian Convention of Higher Education Institutions, and only a few of the participants were aware that the representatives of the higher education sectors themselves had adopted the recommendations. The BMBWF was perceived as the central actor, probably also because it took over the organisation of the annual networking meetings and the communication of the recommendations.

The complexity of the recommendations was also discussed in relation to their importance or binding nature. In all four workshops, it was discussed that the simultaneous implementation of all recommendations would overburden HEIs. This is particularly the case if the implemented measures are also to be monitored beyond the input level or even be subject to an evaluation.

The indicators were also considered helpful and supportive in principle. However, the discussion on the level of commitment focused mainly on the indicators. It was unclear to the participants why, in the context of "recommendations", reporting on their implementation should take place (input indicators). The lack of clarity was even greater for the implementation and impact indicators. The necessary data collection was seen as problematic, as it requires the commitment of the HEI management on the one hand and the provision of considerable resources on the other. Both seem realistic to the participants only if there is a corresponding demand and support (including budget) from the BMBWF.

Beyond the issues of commitment and resource allocation, participants saw a need for further concretisation - in the recommendations themselves and, subsequently, in the indicators. It was repeatedly emphasised that it is unclear how gender competence can be measured in concrete terms - at HEI level and at individual level. How can one know that a HEI has achieved the goal, or how can one know that an individual is gender competent? In general, there is a need for more concrete examples of how the recommendations or indicators can be implemented, e. g. how gender competence can be specifically asked of applicants in the application process and how this can be captured by indicators in monitoring.

In addition, the need for more concrete examples and handouts related to an intersectional approach was discussed. In practice, it is often unclear how other dimensions of diversity in addition to gender can and should be taken into account when designing and implementing policies.

It was noted in all the workshops that HEIs had developed specific tools for themselves to implement the recommendations. Participants felt that it would be more efficient and contribute to consistent standards if such tools were developed jointly by HEIs within a sector or across sectors (e. g. by setting up a working group) to avoid a situation in which the wheel is reinvented several times. Examples of issues raised in this context were a guide to gender-inclusive language or criteria for gender competence in application procedures (on the part of applicants and HEI staff involved in the application process). Other common challenges were the design of training courses on different topics, the development of quality standards for training courses or the creation of a pool of qualified trainers.

The discussion highlighted both sector-specific characteristics and challenges in implementing the recommendations that are common to all four sectors. For example, differences in HEI culture were repeatedly mentioned, although these can also be found within a sector. On the other hand, it became clear that the starting point for existing measures at public universities differs from that at private universities. For example, the recommendations for universities with a long tradition of gender equality policies contain little that is new. The different importance of research in the sectors and the different relevance of teacher training were also discussed.

The effective involvement of senior management in the implementation of recommendations was identified as a common challenge. Although the recommendations are addressed to the management level, in most cases they delegate implementation and rarely take an active role in the implementation process. In addition, all workshops discussed the extent to which the implementation of recommendations could be strengthened through incentives or sanctions.

CONCLUSIONS

The recommendations for strengthening gender competencies in higher education processes were developed by a working group of the Austrian Convention of Higher Education Institutions (HSK) and adopted by the HSK. Individual recommendations were addressed to the BMBWF, which was requested, among other things, to organise an annual networking meeting (recommendation 9), to develop a gender competence index for universities (recommendation 8) or to anchor the development of gender competence in existing management instruments or legal bases (recommendations 14, 15 or 29, among others). During the implementation of these recommendations, the BMBWF continuously emphasised their importance. Due to this visibility in the process, those involved in their implementation at HEIs see the recommendations as a requirement of the BMBWF and not as a product of the Austrian Convention of Higher Education Institutions. This would also result in the loss of the character of a voluntary commitment on the part of the universities that have undertaken to implement the recommendations.

The monitoring of the implementation of the HSK recommendations was initiated by the BMBWF and met with broad support from the universities. Almost all Austrian HEIs participated in the survey on the status of implementation of the recommendations on gender competence in higher education processes (participation rate 93%). The results of the survey show a wide range of implementation activities and individual priorities at the universities. They illustrate the differences between the higher education sectors resulting from the different framework conditions (e. g. legal requirements vs. recommendations).

The project commissioned by the BMBWF (Wroblewski, Englmaier 2023) implemented input-side monitoring for the year 2022. Feedback from the workshops has shown that it is currently not very realistic for universities to undertake monitoring and evaluation of gender equality measures on their own initiative. Rather, it is expected that the initiative will come from the BMBWF and that resources will be made available. It was also clear from the workshops that the limited commitment of management to implementing the HSK recommendations and their lack of embedding in existing control mechanisms hinders the use of the steering potential of monitoring.

The design and implementation of the monitoring was carried out in a complex and participatory process that aimed to create transparency, build competence among the actors involved and establish a common understanding of the

objectives of the monitoring and the indicators. This was largely successful and the project contributed to a cross-sectoral discourse on gender competence and gender equality. However, it has also become clear that this is a process that needs to continue in a planned and facilitated way.

A key aspect of the discourse on gender competence and gender equality is that the indicators implicitly set standards for the evaluation of the measures implemented. Establishing a common understanding of these standards would be an important objective for the continuation of the process. This would include making the concepts used in the recommendations more concrete. In the survey, but also in the workshops, it became clear that some of the concepts used are operationalised differently when it comes to the development of concrete measures. These include, for example, gender, gender competence, gender diversity or gender mainstreaming, but also the relationship between gender and gender competence and diversity.

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