

HOW TO PROMOTE THE CHANGE IN THE AREA OF GENDER EQUALITY IN ACADEMIA AND RESEARCH – BULGARIAN CASE

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Abstract

Nowadays, the equality and equal treatment of women and men are general issues that have been addressed in many strategic documents at various levels (international, national and institutional) around the world. EU has a very clear policy in gender equality issues, which is contained in its legislation as a legal guarantee for gender equality. The paper starts with a short overview of EU policy on gender equality issues and main gender equality documents.

The current state in Bulgaria regarding gender equality is shown on the basis of national legislation documents and gender equality responsible units. The short statistics of gender equality of women and men in Bulgarian higher education (in public and private institutions) are provided as well.

Authors present a preliminary analysis of the current situation, in the direction of gender equality and more generally against any discrimination, at one typical Bulgarian public university – University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski”, which is the second largest university in the country. The historical, cultural, economic and organizational (structure and governance) background of the University of Plovdiv in relation to the equality is described. A special attention is given to the gender equality issues, mentioned in principal university documents and the existing organizational measures and policies, protecting students and staff from any form of discrimination.

The paper presents the first steps in the development and implementation of the Gender Equality Plan of the university in the frame of EU Horizon 2020 project – SPEAR “Supporting Plans for gender Equality in Academia and Research”. The main goals of the university team, some common positives, risks and obstacles and particular measures in gender equality work of the team are discussed. The university team plan for the project activities is presented, including activities as data collection and analysis, finding stakeholders, Gender Equality Plan development, acceptance and implementation, raising awareness and dissemination, etc.

Keywords: Gender equality, Gender Equality, Bulgaria, Higher Education.

1 INTRODUCTION

Last years gender equality (GE) issue was raised as main point in many strategic EU and world documents as well as in Bulgarian national documents. As a consequence, activities to achieve GE in higher education are gaining momentum in more and more universities. The most important activity related to GE at universities is development and implementation of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) of the institution. In the digital age, another major issue for university governance is the increase of female representation in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) field, which is typically involved in GEP.

The paper presents the first steps in the development and implementation of the GEP of the University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU) in the frame of EU Horizon 2020 project – SPEAR “Supporting Plans for Gender Equality in Academia and Research”.

The main goal of the paper is to present the GE conditions, obstacles and specificities of one typical Bulgarian public university as PU.

Next subsections briefly show existing EU legislation in GE issues, Bulgarian policy in GE and protection of discrimination and some statistics about Bulgarian universities by gender. Section 2 explains used methodology in presented research. Section 3 presents all parts of our research: PU background in context of GE, project SPEAR and the aims of PU SPEAR team, risks, obstacles and measures at PU about GE issues and plans for SPEAR project activities. Conclusions point the main messages of the PU SPEAR team to the university.

1.1 EU gender equality policy

The development of European policy is in line with the global trends. The most important global and European documents that have imprinted on the European policy in the area of GE are:

- *Treaty of Rome* [1] (from 1957) – states equal payment for equal work;
- *Council Directive 76/207/EEC of EU* [2] (is in force at time 1976-2009) – defines equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions;
- *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* [3] (from 1995) from The Fourth World Conference on Women and endorsed from the General Assembly of the United Nations – aims achieving greater equality and opportunity for women;
- *European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020* [4] – decrees GE in employment, social protection and the pay gap, work-life balance and fighting against all forms of violence against women;
- *Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019* of European Commission (from 2015) [5] – determines GE through activities to: equal economic independence, reducing pay and pension disparities, equality of decision-making, ending gender-based violence, GE outside the EU and mainstreaming gender dimension into all EU policies and programs;
- *Rome Declaration* (from 2017) [6] - proclaims building a social Europe that promotes equality between women and men, as well as rights and equal opportunities for all;
- *UN Program for Sustainable Development up to 2030* [7] – sets one of the 17 sustainable development goals to be GE.

In recent years, many organizations and groups have been set up to work in the field such as: European Institute for Gender Equality (founded 2006), The Council of Europe's Committee on Gender Equality (founded 2012), High-level group on gender mainstreaming to the European Commission (founded 2001), Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men at EU Commission (founded 2008), etc.

1.2 Bulgarian gender-relevant legislation

Nowadays, the legal guarantees for equality and equal treatment of women and men are contained in the currently effective Bulgarian legislation – *the Constitution of Republic of Bulgaria, the Labour Code, the Social Security Code, the Discrimination Protection Act, the Social Assistance Act, the Employment Stimulation Act, the Domestic Violence Protection Act, the State Employee Act*, and a number of other special and sector laws.

Since the year 2000 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy organizes and coordinates at national level the implementation of the state policy of the Republic of Bulgaria in the field of GE, in cooperation with a number of institutions and organizations. Since the year 2004 a specialized unit was set up in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy – *Equal Opportunities, Antidiscrimination and Social Assistance Benefits Department* with the directorate Policy for Persons with Disabilities, Equal Opportunities, and Social Assistance Benefits. In addition, there is a Secretariat of the National Council for Gender Equality to the Council of Ministers. The foundations of a national coordination structure at the highest executive level were laid in 2004 by the creation of the *National Council on Gender Equality*.

Series of principal documents define the equality policy of women and men of the Republic of Bulgaria. The *National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality 2009-2015* [8] represents the principal strategic document of the conducted uniform policy for equality of women and men. The national strategy corresponds to the similar European strategic documents. The strategy is executed via the implementation of *National Action Plan for Promotion of Gender Equality* [9] (from 2005). The results are presented in *Annual Reports on Gender Equality* [10], recording the performance of specified measures and the progress of the conducted policy. In 2016, Bulgaria adopted a new *Law on Equality between Women and Men* [11], which establishes the principle of equality as a coordinated state policy and designates specialized bodies and mechanisms for its implementation at all levels. Moreover, the Government upgraded the *National Strategy for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2016 – 2020* [12] to further strengthen the provisions related to equal treatment, equal access to resources and equal participation in decision-making, as well as to ensure GE in all spheres of social, economic and political life of the country.

The national GE policy is also assisted by the implementation of projects, financed by the state budget, European and other sources as: the directions „Gender equality” and „Antidiscrimination” of the *Programme for employment and social solidarity PROGRESS (2007-2013)* [13], the objective „stimulation of equality between women and men and gender mainstreaming” of the *Programme „Rights, equality, and citizenship” (2014-2020)* [14] of the European Commission and *Programme „Justice” (2014-2020)* [15] of EU financing promotion GE and combating discrimination and violence against women.

Bulgaria has not adopted any specific legislation related to GE in higher education. Gender as a topic of discussion and GE work are novelties for most higher education and research institutions in Bulgaria.

It is important to note, however, that the GE measures taken at national level are not well publicly motivated and widely announced in the society. As a result, and probably based on some historical facts (e.g. Bulgaria is one of the first countries that gave voting opportunities for the women – from 1937 and right for women to study at universities – from 1901), and also due to some good "quantitative" GE characteristics, a big part of Bulgarians do not consider that there is a problem in this respect. They do not pay enough attention or are not familiar with the "qualitative" equality between women and men (hidden forms of gender discrimination, equal living and job conditions, etc.).

But yet, the GE policy at national level with its series of principal documents related to GE will be the basis for further development of the PU equality policy and project activities.

1.3 Gender equality in higher education

According to data from the National Statistical Institute [16] for 2018, 80% of working people in Education (incl. all educational levels) are women and only 20% are men.

As far as higher education is concerned, the statistics is almost the same in public and private universities as it is seen in Fig. 1. High level positions (professors and associate professors, Grade A and Grade B) are respectively 60% and 53% men, and 40% and 47% women for public universities and 64% and 54% men, and 36% and 46% women for private universities. The distribution for the low level positions (Grade D) is the opposite – in public universities are 45% men and 55% women, and 46% men and 54% women in private universities.

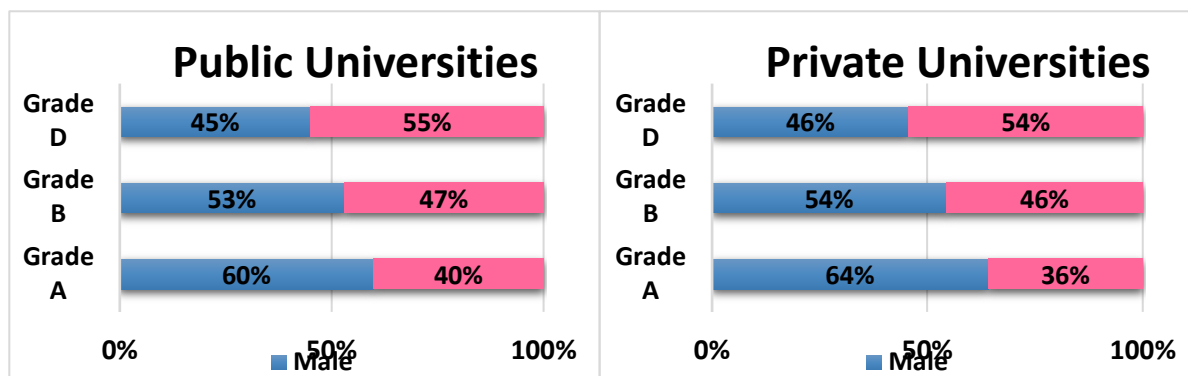


Figure 1. Distribution of teachers by gender and grade at Bulgarian universities in 2018.

2 METHODOLOGY

The main goal of the team is to develop and implement GEP at PU. The authors use methodology from GEAR TOOL [17], which is a step-by-step guide on the process to set up, implement, monitor and evaluate GEPs. The guide also contains suggestions on how to overcome obstacles and challenges, a list of basic requirements and success factors for realizing GEP and many other useful things. GEAR TOOL offers guidance in six steps: Understanding the context of the institution, Analyzing and assessing the state-of-play in the institution, Setting up a GEP, Implementing a GEP, Monitoring progress and evaluating a GEP and What comes after the Gender Equality Plan?.

The research follows the first step of GEAR TOOL – “Understanding the context of the institution”. The work was conducted in two stages: study of PU background and on this base planning SPEAR objectives and activities in the institution. During the study of the university background, some risks and obstacles for GEP implementation were identified and corresponding handling measures were planned.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Study of historical, cultural, economic and organizational university background

PU is the second largest university in Bulgaria offering training in 7 fields of higher education (Pedagogical Science; Humanities; Social sciences; Economics and legal sciences; Natural sciences, Mathematics and informatics; Technical sciences; Arts; Security and Defence) in 228 study programmes. PU has received official state accreditation, which allows it to confer each form of educational degree i.e. specialist, bachelor, master and doctor. This section presents a preliminary analysis of the current situation in the direction of GE and more generally against any discrimination at PU – one typical Bulgarian public university.

History: PU is founded in 1961. During the first decades of university history there were admission quotas of students by sex. Today, PU is one of the leading higher education institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria. The admission quotas of students by sex are removed and future students have equal opportunities for access to training, depending only from their exam grades, marks of the secondary education diploma and not least by their willingness.

In Bulgaria a woman is assigned to work in higher education institutions for the first time in 1918. Women had rights to work in the area of higher education together with men since the establishment of PU, which was about half a century after 1918.

Economic situation: PU is a public university financed (for staff salaries and training) directly from the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria. PU has autonomy in management and financial activities. The financial policy and staff salaries are voted by the Academic Council. Staff salaries don't depend on the gender – they mainly depend on academic hierarchy and scientific degrees.

Size: PU is one of the Bulgarian leading research and teaching institutions (according to the National University Ranking System) where more than **14000 students** are trained and important scientific research are conducted in humanities and natural, mathematical, computer, social and technical sciences.

PU staff consists of **929 academicians**, including 143 full professors and 270 associate professors, and **205 administrative staff**. The **representation of men and women** among the PU academic staff and students is as follows:

- academic staff: 529 women/400 men;
- top management: 24 women/21 men;
- students: 9437 women/4962 men.

The relatively large size of the institution is favourable for the implementation of the project activities, because the current GE situation will be explored in the second largest university in the country. The large number of study programmes offered will allow GE at PU to be explored in a very wide range and not be limited to a narrow circle of specialties – preferred mainly by men (e.g. Technical sciences) or by women (e.g. Humanities).

Structure and governance: Higher education institutions in Bulgaria are autonomous organizations which can reach independent decisions as to their internal organization and the management of their resources, the teaching and research they undertake, and the selection and promotion of staff. Their right to academic autonomy was initially established and governed by the *Law on the Academic Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions* (from 1990).

The structure of the public higher education institutions is strictly laid down in the current Higher Education Law. The Higher Education Law defines a centralised governance of the public higher education institutions and regulates the processes and the actions of the management bodies, but institutions are free to elect them. A special provision specifies a maximum of two consecutive terms of office for the top management positions.

PU prides itself on being an institution that accepts students, and hires and indeed promotes staff in full compliance with the Law of Higher Education.

PU consists of nine faculties – Biological, Chemical, Economic and Social Sciences, Law, Mathematics and Informatics, Pedagogical, Physics and Technologies, Philosophy and History, Philology (situated in Plovdiv) and two affiliated colleges (situated in Smolyan and Kardzhali towns).

The governing structure of PU is similar to ones of all Bulgarian public universities – three levels structure (Rectorate, Faculty and Department).

The top management (Rectorate) of PU is done by University General Assembly, Academic Council, Rector, Vice-Rectors and Assistant Rectors.

The faculty management of PU is presented by Faculty General Assemblies, Faculty Councils, Deans and Vice-Deans of the university faculties and colleges.

The department management is done by Department Councils and Heads of the academic departments.

The PU middle management also includes Heads of different research, service and administrative units, departments and centers that support the activity of the main academic units at the university. The main non-academic units which are expected to support SPEAR activities at PU (considered as important support stakeholders) will be: Department “Human Resources Management”, University Information Provision Unit, International Cooperation Unit, University Centre for Career Prospects, Scientific and Research Department, etc.

The complex structure of the PU leadership could make it harder to introduce gender related change at the university. It can be assumed that the following main obstacles would have an undesirable impact on the project activities or at least some delay: the rather big number of members of the top and middle management that should be reached for achieving change; the low level of gender awareness and lack of interest in the issue of the members of the top and middle management (because, as expected, they, like most Bulgarians, feel that there is no problem with GE).

But on the other hand, the strictly organized centralized structure and governance of the university is promising because after adoption of any gender-related decision by the Academic Council, all faculties and their governing bodies must respect them.

University Policies: The PU policies related in some degree to GE (for students and staff) are set out in a number of university documents adopted by the Academic Council but in the broader context of providing equal learning opportunities or job conditions and eliminating any discrimination.

The *Collective Employment Contract at PU* [18] governs the employment, insurance and corresponding relationships between the employees and the employer in PU on the principle of equality. The Contract doesn't permit any discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity and political convictions. According to it the employer and the Trade Unions must create suitable working conditions for workers with a serious illness or disability and specially protected persons (pregnant women, mothers of children under 6 years of age, etc.). The *University Code of Ethics* [19] (adopted in 2016) establishes that PU will avoid discrimination in any form.

According to one of the key activities pointed in the *Development Strategy of PU (2011-2020)* [20], PU has to provide equal learning opportunities to all students and “create conditions to support the training and integration of disadvantaged students”. The equal rights of all students are set out in the *Rules on Learning Activities at PU* [21] too.

Other issues related to GE are set out in the *Rules on the Structure and the Activity of PU* [22] (from 2018). PU is a family-friendly university, ensuring special privileges (reduction of attending lectures/labs and providing alternative training methods, permanent sessions, scholarships, tax-free education, etc.) for socially disadvantaged students (orphans, blind, deaf, first and second group disabled, military invalids, mothers with three or more children and with children under 6 and in dispensary).

These university documents will be a good basis for implementing the project activities (incl. creation and implementation of GEP), because it is clear where it will be possible to develop further the existing PU equality concept in the direction of GE.

PU is in the priming stage concerning GE work in the institution. PU has not previously worked extensively with GE and yet has not its own GEP. The issues of GE are touched literally only in some documents (cited above), in the light of the commitments to avoid discrimination in any form. The only ongoing GE work is in the frame of the SPEAR project. Therefore, the work of PU SPEAR Team on development and implementation of PU GEP should start almost from zero.

University Culture and Gender Awareness: Officially an essential feature of the cultural identity of PU is the equal access to education and tolerance to people of different sex, origin, culture and language and especially to people with special educational needs.

On the other hand, everyday interactions are influenced by the social and family cultures of individuals that are historically burdened by some gender-based negative traditions and stereotypes in society.

Furthermore, PU has 'business-like' ambiance on the base of hierarchical relationships, stemming from its governance structure. The hierarchical relationships within the university clearly create dependencies, which could stand in the way of a culture oriented towards equal treatment.

The university ensures equal opportunities for access to training and work for women and men. As a result, people at PU do not think there are GE problems at the university level and they are not talking about these issues. In this regard, the PU SPEAR team will face the challenge to look for the hidden GE issues at the university and raise awareness about these issues.

3.2 Planning SPEAR objectives and activities in the institution

The presented work is supported and done in the frame of EU's Horizon 2020 Programme under SPEAR project "Supporting and Implementing Plans for Gender Equality in Academia and Research" (2019-2022).

The **Project SPEAR** has four **overall objectives**:

- increasing the number of research performing organizations (RPOs) with implemented GEPs;
- removing barriers and improving career prospects for women in academia;
- improving the gender balance in decision-making bodies;
- strengthening the gender dimension in research content.

SPEAR also adds some **specific objectives**:

- supporting GE-practitioners in GEP implementation;
- collaboration through communities: Community of Learning and Community of Practice;
- ensuring long-term sustainability.

3.2.1 Objectives of PU SPEAR team

Based on the preliminary analysis of the GE state of the university, the goals and project activities in the PU are determined.

The **main goal** of the PU SPEAR team is to set a basis of promoting, strengthening, providing, ensuring and preserving equal access for university students and employees to all activities and opportunities, related to education and research.

The SPEAR-related activities at PU aim to:

- follow European and national policies to ensure GE for students, faculty and administrative staff;
- change the attitudes of PU community about gender-based traditions and stereotypes in society;
- find, to communicate and to raise awareness of the existing gender inequalities (even hidden) at PU;
- promote and disseminate culture of equality within and outside PU (through international, national and university activities, initiatives and networks);
- introduce gender dimensions in university organizational, educational and research activities in the interests of both students (incl. future students) and staff;
- increase women's participation in education and research in STEM;
- raise awareness for GE opportunities at the university in order help improve PU image and make it a preferred university for future students, faculty and administrative staff.

The main **target groups** for our research and those, which will be influenced by the project results are all main university groups: students, PhD students, junior and senior staff, management bodies and administrative and technical staff.

The PU SPEAR team understands that change must be accepted by everyone and be for everyone, that is why during the implementation of project activities, the team plans to engage as many men as possible and especially from top and middle management members.

The main **action areas** for our GEP will be: Academic careers, Research content, Work-life balance, Teaching (gender in content of courses or gender sensitive teaching methods), Outreach activities (for example student recruitment), Awareness raising, Organizational culture, etc.

3.2.2 Risks and obstacles handling

Bulgarians do not pay enough attention or are not familiar with the "qualitative" equality between women and men (hidden forms of gender discrimination, equal living and job conditions, etc.). Therefore, during the implementation of SPEAR, a special attention should be paid to the awareness of the existing qualitative dimensions of gender inequality in Bulgaria.

While communicate the GE issues, it is important to bear in mind that generally, in our society there is no sense of sex inequality, but in the same time there is a complete intolerance to the word "gender".

In the process of evaluation of university GE state are marked some risks and obstacles in GE further work and appropriate measure to deal with them.

Risk 1. Lack of awareness/interest

The PU community shows no interests in GE issue, because, like most Bulgarians, people feel that there is no problem with GE. Moreover, officially the university ensures equal opportunities for access to training and work for women and men and PU people do not think there are GE problems at the university level and they are not talking about these issues. This concerns ordinary academic or administrative staff and students, but more importantly, the low level of gender awareness and lack of interest in the issue is true also for the members of the top and middle management.

One indirect indicator in this direction is that some study programmes are preferred mainly by men (in the field of STEM) and others by women (in the field of humanities), despite the provision of equal opportunities for access to training, depending only by the applicant's achievement.

Measures:

- using proper awareness approach – both in parallel, top-bottom and bottom-up – from members of the top management to lower levels of the PU governing structure and from ordinary staff and students to higher management levels;
- reaching big university auditory with GE initiatives – by various mass information channels as SPEAR Project Web Site, SPEAR Project Local Web Site, university newspaper, social networks, paper-based promotional materials, etc;
- finding gender-aware or gender-responsive members (incl. men) inside each stakeholder group to engage them as supportive stakeholders for the SPEAR work at PU – by personal talks, discussions, interviews;
- discovering any (even) hidden GE issues at the PU and raise awareness about these issues by collection and analysis of gender related data – using university DB, surveys, interviews;
- engaging members from different stakeholder groups (incl. men) in GE initiatives – by dedicated awareness events, presentations, trainings, etc.;
- gaining academic staff from the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology and other scientist in the field of Differential Psychology and Sociology to take part in trainings (with expertise and knowledge on equality issues), in analysis of GE data and in introducing gender dimensions in educational activities – by personal talks, discussions, interviews;
- engaging gender-responsive members of the old and new middle and top management to assist in introduction of gender dimensions in university organizational and research activities;
- stimulating the willingness of young women to study in the field of STEM – through special measures in university enrolling campaign and awareness initiatives.

Risk 2. Resistance in the organization to GE measures

At the university level there is no open visual resistance to GE, as well as any speaking about GE issue. As, there are no visible GE problems at the surface – neither for the students nor for the teachers we expect to collide with some form of silent resistance in the gender issue that the PU SPEAR team should overcome.

Measures:

- conducting a well-thought-out awareness campaign (see Measures for the above risk);
- detecting and defining the hidden GE problems at the PU and communicating them throughout PU community;
- using intensively those members of the current PU leadership (involved in the project from very beginning) that already have concerns and ideas on GE work;
- involving gender-responsive members from different stakeholder groups (incl. men) in GE initiatives that will make positive impact to others (see Measures for the above risk).

Risk 3. Lack of resources

PU does not have employed special team or particular person engaged by working contract with GE problems in the institution. People are normally overloaded with their specific work and it will be difficult to find people to be engage with GE issues permanently. The relatively large size of the institution also represents a certain difficulty in implementing project activities in finding gender-aware or gender-responsive members inside each stakeholder group (students, academic staff, management, etc.) and to engage them for the SPEAR work at PU.

In addition, the main part of the PU budget is dedicated for staff salaries and other expenses related to educational activities. Thus the only possible financial source to cover expenses about GE initiatives and SPEAR-related activities is the project budget.

Measures:

- encouraging people through showing them the reasons and motives why the promotion of equality between women and men is an important issue for everyone;
- relying mostly on the support of staff of those key organizational structures whose work is most closely related to different groups of PU community and/or with processing their data. Their assistance will be temporarily requested according to the needs of the implementation process;
- thorough planning the project finances to overcome the lack of committed finances (for employment of GE officer, payment of additional workload to the existing staff);
- using after translating in the local language SPEAR teaching/learning materials and presentations (collected in SPEAR's learning repository) to train members from different stakeholder groups and to overcome no prior training on GE;
- considering different way of non-material rewarding and training with existing in-house capacities;
- planning executable measures (in respect of available resources) while developing PU GEP.

Risk 4. Change of key persons

The upcoming elections for academic top and middle management in the beginning of the project lead to the possibility of some changes in the representatives in management bodies. At this point it is impossibility to estimate the extent to which the new leadership would be engaged in GE work.

Measures:

- influencing the expected new leaders before they become leaders;
- conducting interviews with new key persons;
- prioritizing the stakeholders on the management positions while engaging them, taking into account that after adoption of any gender-related decision by the Academic Council, all faculties and their governing bodies must respect them.

Risk 5. The complex structure of the PU leadership

The complex structure of the PU leadership could make it harder to introduce gender related change at the university. The main obstacle in this relation that would have an undesirable impact on the project activities or at least some delay is the rather big number of members of the top and middle management that should be reached for achieving change. Moreover, the hierarchical relationships within the university clearly create dependencies, which could stand in the way of a culture oriented towards equal treatment.

Measures:

- to rely on and use intensively those members of the current leadership (involved in the project from very beginning) that already have concerns and ideas on GE work;
- to find and engage gender-responsive members of the new middle and top management that will be elected this year.

3.2.3 *Main activities*

The PU SPEAR team plans to ensure sustainability of the promotion and drive of the change in the equality area and successful implementation of the SPEAR project by following main planned activities:

- Collecting and analysing statistical data (from university databases, interviews and surveys);
- Finding and engaging stakeholders from different groups;
- Conducting interviews with stakeholders;
- Conducting surveys;
- Communicating and awareness raising of multiple people from all stakeholder groups with different means (SPEAR project local web site, events' presentations, newspaper publications, etc.);
- Developing GEP;
- Accepting and implementing GEP at PU;
- Introducing gender dimensions in university organizational, educational and research activities;
- Developing institutional procedures for continual monitoring;
- Dissemination of project results (incl. organization of national conference).

4 CONCLUSIONS

The main goals of the PU team in the frame of Horizon 2020 SPEAR project are pointed: finding and raising awareness of existing gender inequalities (even hidden) of the students and staff, changing the attitudes in the PU on the gender-based traditions and stereotypes in society, improvement of the university image, introduction of gender dimensions into university organizational, educational and research activities in the interest of both students and staff, increasing women's participation in education and research in the area of STEM, and promoting and disseminating a culture of equality inside and outside the PU.

Some common risks and obstacles are discussed with particular measures: lack of awareness/interest, resistance in the organization to GE measures, lack of resources, change of key persons, organization complex structure of the leadership, etc. In this regard PU SPEAR team faces the challenges to overcome the lack of interest (or resistance) in the gender issue, to find, to communicate and to raise awareness of the existing gender inequalities (even hidden) at the university, to find and engage gender-responsive members of the middle and top management, etc.

The PU SPEAR team points three **main messages to the university**, which will help in raising awareness:

- 1 The equality between women and men is one of the objectives of the EU (integrated into all EU policies and EU funding programmes and promoted within the Member States and across the world), that's why a modern university, such as PU, should not be lagging behind on gender policy.
- 2 The offered GE opportunities by PU are key factors for the university image improvement and can make it a preferred university for future students, faculty and administrative staff.
- 3 In the digital age, it is necessary to increase women's participation in education and research in the area of STEM.

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