

## **Gender Equality Plans at Universities in Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

The Gender Equality Plan (GEP) requirement for institutions to apply for EU funding appears to be incentivizing universities in Turkey to adopt gender equality plans. This paper uses Turkey as a case study to examine how the EU's inducement to create GEPs is being implemented in universities in Turkey. Using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, the paper examines the extent to which institutions of higher education have adopted GEPs since the EC implemented its GEPs requirement for funding and whether those plans adhere to the requirements established by the EC. The study then moves on to a discursive examination the thirty-six GEPs found at the time of the study. This aspect of the paper revolves around two questions: what assumptions about gender and organizations underlie the GEP and to what extent does the GEP propose to transform the gendered practices within the institution. Although a few proposed actions can be considered

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transformative, the vast majority of the GEPs at universities in Turkey do not undertake the kind of institutional transformation that is necessary to achieve sustainable and inclusive gender equality. While the GEPs examined here represent a step towards gender equality in academia, too often GEPs in Turkey embody either a fix the numbers or a fix the women approach which leaves the institutional and cultural structures that generate inequality intact.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality Plans, universities, intersectionality, Turkey.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In 2022, the European Union began requiring institutions applying for funding to have a gender equality plan (GEP) in place. This eligibility criterion came into effect after years of commitment to gender equality as well as funding numerous gender equality planning projects (Bencivenga and Drew 2017; Rosa, Drew, Cavanaugh 2021; Sağlamer *et al.* 2018). A gender equality plan is defined as “a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through a process of structural change” (EIGE 2023). The emphasis centres on the transformation of institutional processes and culture to combat inequality (*Ibidem*).

Prior to the enactment of this new requirement, the European Commission (EC) published a detailed guidance on the recommended contents of gender equality plans that includes four mandatory elements and suggests five thematic areas for inclusion in all GEPs (European Commission 2021a). The requirements consist of: the GEP must be (i) a public document, (ii) retain dedicated resources, (iii) include data collection and monitoring and iv) include training on topics such as gender

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equality and unconscious bias. The recommended thematic areas that should be addressed in the GEPs include: work-life balance and organizational culture; gender balance in leadership and decision-making; gender equality in recruitment and career progression, integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content; measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment (European Commission 2021a, 2). For actions related to these themes, the EU further recommends using “concrete measures and targets” (European Commission 2021a, 3).

Despite extensive efforts to achieve gender equality in the area of higher education, equality remains elusive (Bergman and Rustad 2013; Caprile *et al.* 2011; Meulders *et al.* 2010; Silander *et al.* 2022). Both horizontal and vertical segregation persist throughout higher education. Although near parity exists overall in doctoral graduates in Europe (47.8% are women), at the same time decided gender segregation exists among academic fields (European Commission 2021b): where women remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as internet and communication technologies (ICT) (*Ibidem*). Among researchers, parity exists at grade C (46.8%), but men are much more likely to reach the top level of grade A. Women hold just 26.2% of Grade A positions in Europe (*Ibidem*) and there are even fewer women as head of higher education’s institutions (*Ibidem*). However, the issue of gender equality in academia does not simply concern advancement to top positions but also the issue of precarity where more recently there has been an “emergence of a new precarious, predominantly female, academic ‘underclass’ of teachers and researchers” (Rosa and Clavero 2021, 16).

An examination of academia regarding gender (in)equality in Europe continues to be important, however solely focusing on the big picture masks many differences between national, institutional, and academic contexts. Too often the focus remains on the numbers of and or the absence of women as if simply recruiting

more women will solve this problem. It won't. Moreover, academia is not a monolithic space and gender practices vary according to different academic fields, institutional and national environments (Laoire *et al.* 2021; Van den Brink 2011). These contexts are not empty spaces but rather in possession of their own cultures and political constraints through which gender equality policies are translated, mediated, and enacted (Laoire *et al.* 2021).

There is little doubt that organizations are gendered (Acker 1990) and that gender constitutes a foundational aspect of organizational practices (Poggio, 2006; Van den Brink 2012). As Poggio (2006, 225) elaborates, "gender is constantly redefined and negotiated in the everyday practices through which individuals interact; how men and women 'do gender' and how they contribute to the construction of gender identities by engaging in a process of reciprocal positioning". This definition allows for an examination of gender practices specific to academic organizations and suggests that, in order to create equality, we must "do" gender differently.

Too often gender practices comprise applications that both create equality but also generate inequality (Van den Brink 2012). GEPs are often trapped in a binary approach to sex and gender, and this does not acknowledge the myriad ways that exist when "doing" gender. There is little doubt that those who identify as women remain disadvantaged, but too often GEPs treat the category of woman as an undifferentiated whole, hiding concrete inequalities between different groups of women. In the pursuit of gender equality, GEPs often elevate a particular type of women or performance of womanhood (heterosexual, young, married, with children) at the expense of others. At the same time, masculinity remains unquestioned and untouched, often serving as the norm for all. Thorton (2013, 128) reminds us that the academic ideal or "Benchmark man" continues to be constructed as masculine, middle class, able bodied and heterosexual; and, as long as this is

the point of comparison, women and “others” will always be considered inadequate. Although recently the EC has placed more emphasis on intersectionality within GEPs (European Commission 2021a), the difficulty remains in how to operationalize such an approach when so many GEPs remain rooted in a binary approach to gender.

A common argument used to support gender equality initiatives relies on fairness, asserting that those with equal talents and abilities should expect equal treatment (Clavero and Galligan 2021). This often translates to a “fix the numbers” approach where the solution is to ensure more women are entering the system and then advancing. Without doubt, creating equal opportunities for underrepresented groups remains vital, but this approach does not, in any way, attempt to create institutional transformation. Rather, it simply continues to “do” gender with more representation but in the same manner. Similarly, many GEPs include activities such as mentoring and leadership trainings for women, which are a way to “fix” the women. If women can simply be taught to embrace ambition and achievement in the same ways that men do, then they will succeed. Again, the onus for transformation remains upon women rather than the institution and there is little focus on transforming the very ways that institutions embody certain gender practices.

This paper uses Turkey as a case study to examine how the EU’s inducement to create GEPs is being implemented in universities in Turkey. Using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, the paper examines the extent to which institutions of higher education have adopted GEPs since the EC implemented its GEPs requirement for funding; and whether those plans adhere to these requirements.

The paper proceeds in three parts. The first section begins with an overview of gender in higher education in Turkey. This includes both the history surrounding the issue as well as the current state of gender in academia in Turkey. The second section presents the methodological approach of the study, including a description

of the sample analysed as well as the research questions. The third part presents the results and a discussion of both a quantitative and qualitative examination of the GEPs currently in place at universities in Turkey. They prove an interesting case given the high rates of women in academia but also as a site where, in recent years, anti-gender discourse has become quite prominent.

## **2. Gender and Higher Education in Turkey**

Women in Turkey have had access to higher education for more than one hundred years. In 1914, the İnas Darülfünunu or Women's University opened its doors. Any woman could attend classes but those seeking a degree entered the University by exam and those students who completed three years of education and successfully submitted their exams were awarded a degree. The Women's University consisted of two branches: one for literature and one for mathematics and natural sciences (Arslan and Akpınar 2005). In 1919, single sex university education effectively ended when the Women's University was merged with men's although the Women's University remained officially open until 1921. By the time of its closure, 53 women obtained their degrees introducing a century of success for women in higher education in Turkey (Baskın 2008).

The first woman academic received her appointment in the 1931-32 academic year and more widespread recruitment of women began in the 40's (Acar 1993). As of today, Turkey maintains 204 universities of which two-thirds are public and the remains not for profit private institutions. The academy is comprised of more than 85,000 women academics constituting 46% of the professoriate (Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi n.d.). Although Turkey the lowest female labour force participation rate in Europe at 35% (OECD n.d.), it maintains a substantial number of women academics. Among women academics, 33.9% are classified as grade A or full professors in comparison to just 26% in all the EU-27 (European

Commission 2021b). Despite this success, many women remain concentrated at lower levels (Fig. 1).

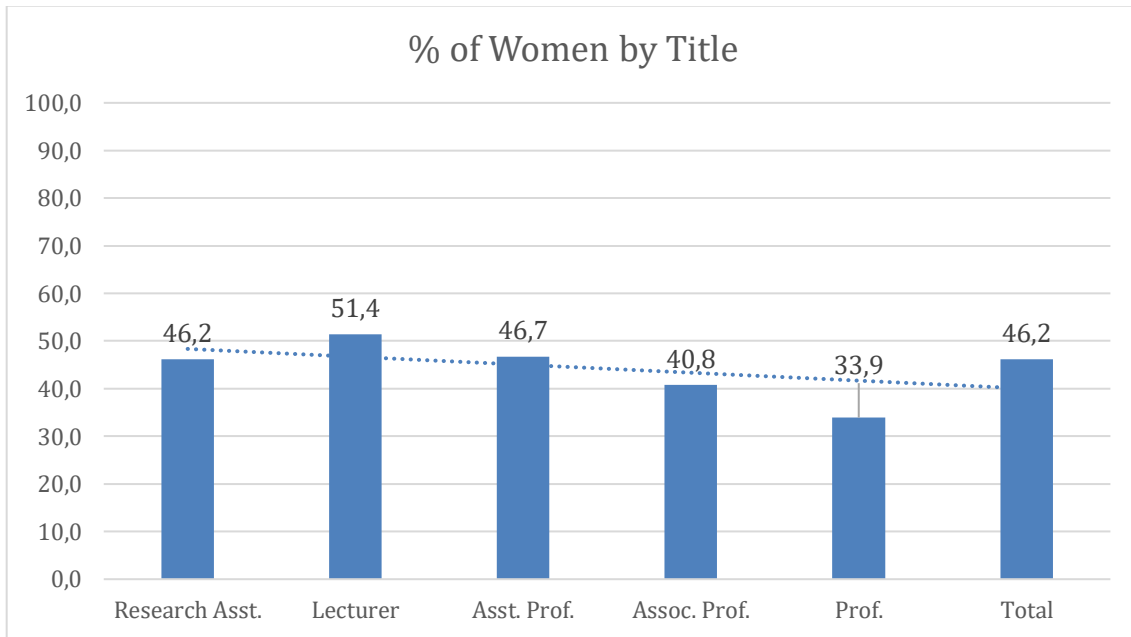


Fig. 1 - Percentage of women by title from Özet Öğretim Elemanı Sayıları Raporu, Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Sistemi (2023). Source: <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

Since 2000, the number of higher education institutions has doubled but most of the growth has taken place through opening more private universities. The number of private institutions has increased at a rate 311% more than double that of public universities (Council of Higher Education 2021). Interestingly, the gender divisions at public and private universities in Turkey are nearly the same: but men constitute a majority at public universities while women are the majority at private institutions (Fig. 2).

According to She Figures (European Commission 2021b), Turkey boasts a relatively low glass ceiling index of 1.24: however, the numbers of women in higher administrative positions remains low. Just 8.3% of higher education institutions are

headed by women (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu 2021). The same pattern of women concentrated at private universities continues at the level of head of institutions. Just 2.4% (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu n.d.a.) of heads of public universities are women while at private universities 6.3% are headed by women. (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu n.d.b.).

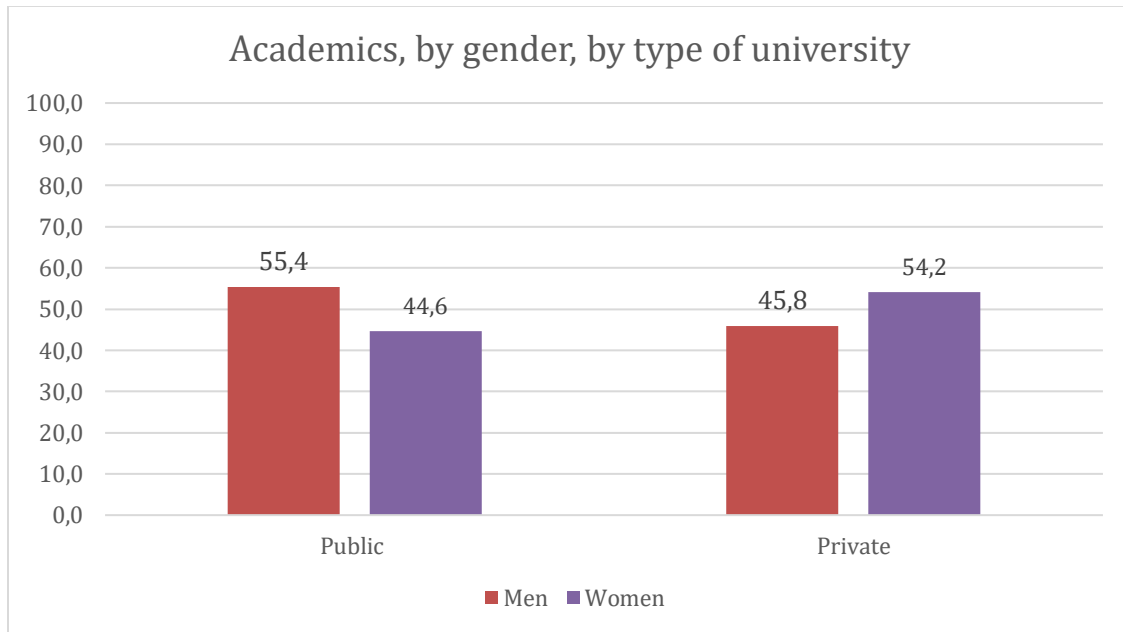


Fig. 2 - Faculty member by gender and type of institution from Özet Öğretim Elemanı Sayıları Raporu, Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Sistemi 2023. *Source:* <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>

Despite the long presence of women in academy, in Turkey the struggle for equality continues and there have been setbacks in recent years. In the wake of the horrific murder of university student Özgecan Aslan in 2015, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) issued a policy statement on gender equality at universities. The policy statement centred on the need to increase awareness on gender equality through education for all parts of university communities, from top to bottom, but also to specifically address violence against women and make campuses safer spaces (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu 2015). This policy statement originated



from a series of workshops attended by numerous faculty members in gender and women's studies in Turkey.

More recently, the country has succumbed to the rise of anti-gender discourses and, eventually, in 2019 the CoHE removed the policy statement from its website claiming that “different meanings are being attributed [to gender] other than those intended, and that these meanings are not compatible with our social values and traditions and are not accepted by the society” (YÖK'ten 'cinsiyet eşitliğinde' geri adım! 2019). At the time, the then president of the CoHE claimed, “the work on updating the concept of 'gender equality' has reached its final stage and will be announced to our universities soon” (*ibidem*). Four years have passed, and this long-promised update has still yet to appear. Meanwhile, the CoHE has denied new programs and research centres using the work gender in their titles permission to open. It has ordered at least one research centre to remove the word gender from its title and renamed it as women and family studies. The number of programs and research centres opened in recent years under this name makes clear that this is the new model for Turkey. The rise of anti-gender discourses provides an important context for the evaluation of gender equality in academia in Turkey and for how higher education institutions negotiate the competing paradigms of gender equality and powerful anti-gender forces in creating their gender equality plans.

### 3. Method

This study employs a mixed method approach. The first level is quantitative and determines how many universities in Turkey retain gender equality plans and to what extent those GEPs adhere to the guidelines established by the European Commission. The second level examines each of the thirty-six GEPs currently in place. This approach represents a more discursive analysis of the GEPs revolving around two questions: what assumptions about gender and organizations underlie the GEP

and to what extent does the GEP propose to transform the gendered practices within the institution.

Given that this is an examination of gender equality plans on paper rather than in practice, there are limitations to this approach. However, this will establish a baseline of knowledge in terms of gender equality plans at universities in Turkey. Moreover, an examination of what institutions are promising, and the approaches embodied in their plans, seems a good place to begin to question the extent universities are committed to transform the culture of their institutions towards equality and justice.

Turkey currently has 208 institutions of higher education: 204 of which are universities and 4 are classified as vocational schools. I removed from the sample the four vocational schools because these institutions are precursor institutions that will most likely become universities in the future but are not currently classified as such. The search began with the university names paired with the phrase gender equality plan in both English and Turkish. For those that failed to generate a result, I proceeded to search each institution's website using both their search function and looking through each page of their site, when necessary. The first search took place between October-December 2022 with a second search conducted between January-February 2023. I have included in the analysis each of the thirty-six gender equality plans<sup>2</sup> discovered as a result of the search (Fig. 3). The thirty-six GEPs included in this study represent the GEPs available at the time of the search. Additionally, three institutions published GEPs that were substantially the same, in

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<sup>2</sup> Acibadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University, Akdeniz University, Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Ankara University, Atatürk University, Bahçeşehir University, Bayburt University, Bitlis Eren University, Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çukurova University, Ege University, Fenerbahçe University, Fırat University, Hacettepe University, Hasan Doğramacı Bilkent University, İstanbul Okan University, İstanbul Technical University, İstanbul Topkapı University, İstanbul University, İstinye University, İzmir Democracy University, İzmir University of Economics, Kadir Has University, Koç University, Marmara University, Mudanya University, Necmettin Erbakan University, Pamukkale University, Sabancı University, Selçuk University, Süleyman Demirel University, Ted University, Üsküdar University, Yaşar University, Yıldız Teknik University.

whole or in part, as other institutions. I have not removed them from the study since they are the published GEP of that institution and as such reflect the approach these institutions have chosen to take with regards to gender equality in their respective institution.

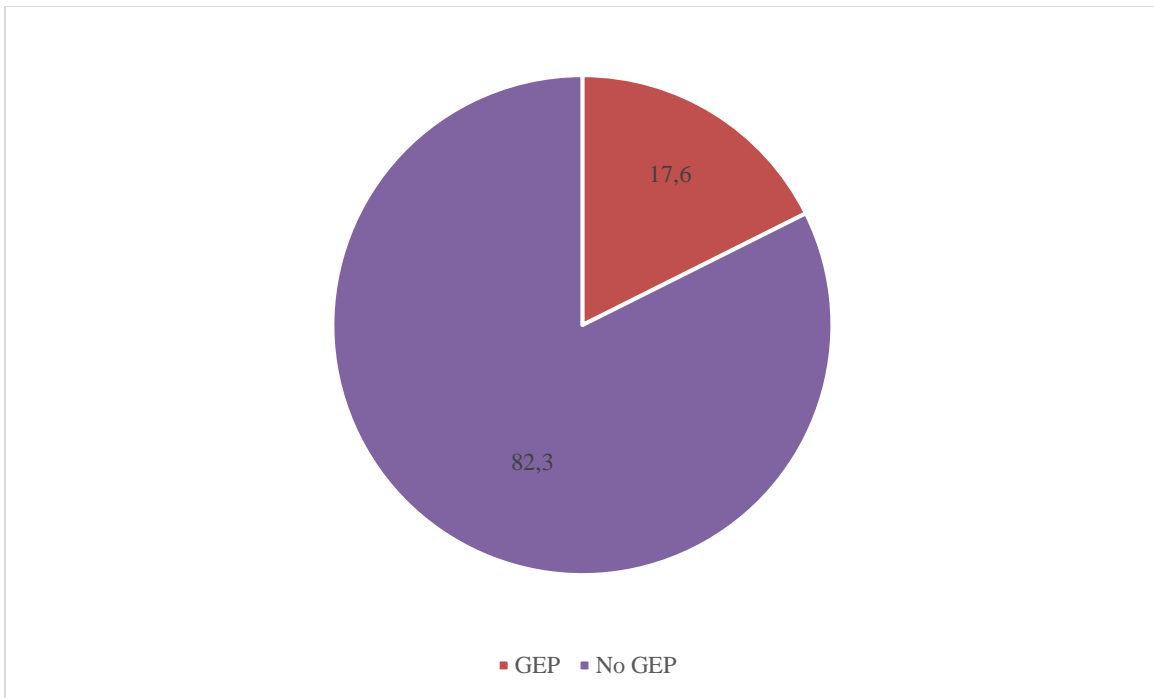


Fig. 3 - Universities with GEPs in Turkey

Of the thirty-six institutions with GEPs, there are a nearly even number of public (51.4%) and private (48.6%) institutions. Ten institutions are classified as research universities and four GEPs were developed as part of EU funded projects.

## 4. Results and Discussion

While university GEPs in Turkey are tailored to institutional cultures and contexts, it remains clear that many have followed the guidance offered by the EC albeit not slavishly (Fig. 4).

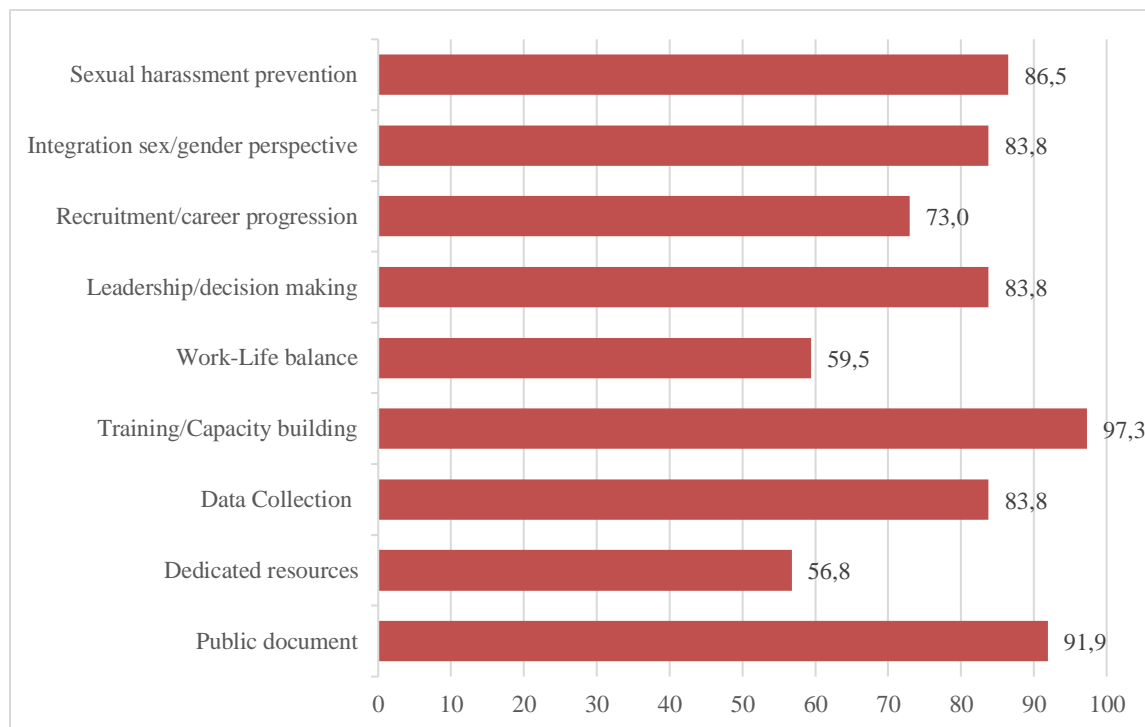


Fig. 4 - EU Requirements/Recommendations for GEPs

### 4.1. GEPs must be public

The first of the four process-related requirements for GEPs is that it must be a public document, signed by an upper management figure and published on an institution's website. While the vast majority of institutions fulfilled this requirement, they also challenged ideas of what constitutes public. It was rare to find

GEPs located prominently on the home page of the universities. In fact, just eight institutions placed their GEPs on their homepages. The remaining schools filed their plans in a variety of places, ranging from their gender/women's studies research centres to the university's quality control and sustainability units. While many of these could be reached through a direct google word search, they were not accessible through a navigation of the institution's own website.

Further complicating the issue of public availability is that of language. Nearly half (43.6%) of the institutional GEPs are only available in English, which raises the question "public for whom?". Beyond this, there is also the use of different terminologies in English and Turkish. The term for sex in Turkish is *cinsiyet* while gender is *toplumsal cinsiyet*. Several plans use both terms interchangeably while six institutions specifically used the term for sex (*cinsiyet*) in the title of their plans (sex equality plan/*cinsiyet eşitliği planı*) rather than the term for gender (*toplumsal cinsiyet*). In the most extreme example of language manipulation, two institutions used entirely different names for their plans in Turkish. In English, both plans are titled "Gender Equality Plan" but in Turkish one institution adopted a broader title of "Equality and Diversity Plan" while another titled their plan "Male and Female Equal Opportunities Plan". With one exception, the plans included in this study were adopted after the CoHE announced that gender is antithetical to established social values in Turkey. The fluid use of terminology appears to be a strategy invoked to avoid any potential censure from the CoHE. This is a result of universities in Turkey attempting to balance opposing sets of incentives in order to survive. This serves as a reminder that context remains a vital aspect of policy making (Laoire *et al.* 2021) but at the same time there needs to be an acknowledgment that sex and gender are not the same and the use of the terms interchangeably elides this difference.

#### **4.2. *Dedicates Resources***

The second requirement for GEPs centres on dedicated resources. The EU defines this as an assigned person such as a Gender Equality Officer or staff member that is expressly earmarked for work on institutional GEPs. This must be accompanied by a clear statement regarding dedicated resources (European Commission 2021a). A little over half of the universities (56.8%) with GEPs delineated some kind of dedicated resources. However, this usually took the form of designating a committee to deal with the work of gender equality and ensuring the implementation of the plan. Furthermore, 80% of these institutions made no statement on committing resources in terms of personnel or time for those assigned to gender equality committees. Just five institutions expressly stated an intention to add new staff to oversee the gender equality plan. The remaining institutions claimed to use existing committees and units to implement their gender equality plans and this was often a gender/women's studies research centre. The problem with assigning gender equality work to committees or existing units without expressly designating additional resources, including time, stems from the additional burden this generates for those assigned to this work. Assigning the monitoring and implementation of GEPs to women studies' research centres not only adds to their existing workload but places them in a position to monitor the institution that is responsible for their continued existence. This may make it difficult to criticize the institution or point out shortcomings in the GEP given that these research centres are dependent on the very institutions they are asked to monitor.

#### **4.3. *Data Collection and Training***

Data proves vital for establishing baselines and measuring progress as well as providing an evidence base for targets included in GEPs. The absence of gender disaggregated data has long concealed inequality and results in an androcentric approach. Despite most institutions commitment to regular collection of data, six

institutions did not include data collection and a further ten GEPs provided no numbers and/or concrete targets. The absence of data reduces a GEP to a policy statement or a set of promises rather than a document serving as a basis for action to transform an institution towards equality.

There is almost unanimous commitment to training, but with the rare exception that training actions focus solely on awareness raising. In only six instances did institutions provide specifics concerning topics or target groups. The majority of plans contained a stock sentence concerning raising awareness among staff, faculty, and students on gender equality. This same action appeared in many sections of the plans, from the recruitment process to creating equality in decision making and battling gender-based violence. These plans seem guided by an assumption that gender inequality is rooted in a lack of awareness and with sufficient education will move us towards equality. Without doubt, the raising of awareness on gender equality occupies an important step in potential transformations of institutions; however, it should be remembered that it is not a panacea. An effective training program requires an acute understanding of how inequality functions in each context and then attempts to rectify that through training. These plans lack such specificity, making it clear they have not effectively identified the specific ways that gender inequality manifests in their institutions.

#### **4.4. Work/Life Balance**

Despite the recommendation that the theme of work-life balance should be included in GEPs, a third of institutions chose not to include actions on this topic. One explanation for this may draw upon the fact that a number of traditional work life balance actions are enshrined in the civil servants and labour laws in Turkey (Devlet Memular Kanunu 1965; İş Kanunu 2003). These laws provide for sick leave, maternity, and paternity leave as well as leave related to marriage, adoption, and bereavement. Furthermore, the labour law requires that institutions with more

than 100 women employees provide a room for breastfeeding/pumping and if there are 150 women employees an onsite childcare centre is required (Gebe veya Emiren Kadınların Çalıştırılma Şartlarıyla Emzirme Odalar ve Çocuk Bakım Yurtlarına Dair Yönetmelik 2013, mad. 13). Unfortunately, only slightly more than half of universities (52%) provide childcare solutions, despite being bound by law to do so (Kadir Has Üniversitesi 2020). The problem proves particularly acute at private universities where just 19% provide childcare facilities (*ibidem*).

In those GEPs that include work life balance measures, actions concentrate almost exclusively on family. In fact, eight universities explicitly renamed the theme as “work and family” and the majority of actions associated with that are focused on activities such as expansion of childcare facilities and ensuring spaces for employees to care for their children. Additionally, three institutions chose to create actions concerning the “effective” use of paternity leave and two of these schools added training for those on paternity leave, something they do not require for those on maternity leave. To smooth the return to work after parental leave, two institutions included calls for support programs including course reductions and measures to ensure that extended leave does not impact evaluations and promotions.

This issue of work-life balance has largely become synonymous with women and their needs as mothers and partners/spouses (Utoft 2020), only on rare occasions including men. Furthermore, work life balance measures rarely mention life pursuits such as hobbies, sports, passion projects (including the GEPs analysed here). The focus remains on caring responsibilities. This brings us to a very poignant and vital question that Utoft (2020) asked when writing about her struggles as a single woman academic during the Covid 19 pandemic, “will you accept my struggle as legitimate when it strays from this normative perception of what the struggles of ‘women’ in their work lives presumably concern?” (783). If the GEPs presented here are any indication, the answer is no.



Although the emphasis remains squarely on family, a few GEPs attempted to move beyond this and expand the definition of care leave. Three institutions called for gender neutral expanded care leaves to include elder care, care for those with disabilities, care for those with illnesses etc. Four more schools included measures for both the formal adoption and subsequent regulation of flexible work arrangements. Perhaps in a reaction to the recent COVID 19 pandemic, two universities emphasized the need for explicit action for the restriction of work outside of work hours and a limit to email outside of work hours. While the actions related to work life balance are important this is perhaps the area where gender equality measures most often reproduce inequality at the same time. The emphasis on family, more specifically women with children, retains at its core a specific performance of womanhood ignoring those who do not have children or even family. Here, many GEPs embody a narrow idea of both gender and family rendering everyone else invisible.

#### ***4.5. Leadership/Decision Making***

It is no surprise that in this category which deals explicitly with power and decision making, there are few specifics to be found. Only seven institutions outlined concrete targets that ranged from ensuring 25% to 50% of women in university committees. One institution included a target of 10% increase for managers who are women, and one proposed the principle of rotating the gender of managers when positions needed to be filled. Just one institution stated that it would apply quotas and positive discrimination to ensure women obtained leadership and decision-making positions. Despite what appears to be a lacklustre commitment to change the highest levels of these institutions, two universities proposed measures to include the promotion of gender equality as an evaluation criterion for those in managerial positions. This is the type of impactful action that could help transform individuals in positions of powers from gatekeepers of the status quo into change

agents. All the GEP actions for this theme are guided by the assumption that the simple addition of more women will somehow lead to equality.

One plan specifically states that “the increase in women's progress towards managerial positions will lead to the strengthening of gender equality practices”.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, there is ample evidence that this is simply not the case. for institutional transformation.

Training/capacity building activities comprised another set of actions to help women to be more successful both in terms of achieving leadership positions but also of career progression. These actions consisted principally of empowerment for women faculty members, mentoring for women in particular, leadership training and training for securing project funding. These actions will generate an impact and more likely help women advance within their institutions; however, this approach focuses on transforming the women rather than the institution. One GEP includes a planned action to “show women ways to cope with the obstacles in academic life”<sup>4</sup>. Inherent here is the idea that women are doing something incorrectly and need to be shown the right path. One action makes this clear. Under the matter of decision making and leadership, two institutions’ planned action take into account identifying “the reasons for women not partaking in leadership positions” and calls for interviews with women “who refuse leadership positions”<sup>5</sup>. This approach presumes that taking up a leadership position is the norm and refusing is somehow an abnormal or irrational choice. This also reveals the extent to which, when creating equality practices, we also often generate inequality. While it may be desirable to have more women and underrepresented groups in leadership positions, an overemphasis on this relies on a narrow idea of success and excellence that is also deeply gendered.

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<sup>3</sup> Large public University.

<sup>4</sup> Large public University.

<sup>5</sup> Small private University, large public University.

#### **4.6. Recruitment and Career Progression**

In Turkey, women constitute 46% of the professoriate and 33% of those have obtained the rank of full professor (Yüksek Öğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi 2023.). This is a number that surpasses many European countries where just 26% of women occupy Grade A positions (European Commission 2021b). The hiring and promotion of faculty at both public and private universities requires public advertisements of open positions. While this system is not free of bias, research shows that more transparent and open systems tend to result in the hiring and promotion of more women (Özbilgin and Healy 2004; Neilsen 2021). In particular, the promotion system in higher education in Turkey is relatively standardized and transparent and this may contribute to more gender equality (Healy *et al.* 2005). For the rank of associate professor, there exists:

- (i) a centralized and published set of criteria;
- (ii) the candidates submit their portfolios to the CoHE; and
- (iii) they are evaluated by a jury composed of members of the appropriate field faculty.

Once an individual is awarded the title of associate professor from the CoHE, they are often subject to additional requirements posed by their own institution. The law that regulates higher education in Turkey also imposes several requirements for the position of full professor. The position must be publicly advertised, and a candidate must wait five years after being awarded the title associate professor and provide a portfolio of original research (Yüksek Öğretim Kanunu 1981). The portfolio is then reviewed by a jury of five members of the professoriate, three of which must be from outside the candidate's institution. While many job advertisements are carefully crafted for a given candidate, the centralized requirements and mandatory openness of the process does appear to reduce inequality (Healy *et al.*, 2004; Nielsen 2021).

Although the appointment process does seem to have some advantages over closed systems commonly used in Europe, women remain stalled in terms of progression to the upper ranks. The actions concerning the appointments divided almost evenly between those that sought to change the institution and its practices and those that placed the locus of change on women themselves. Interestingly, just one institution acknowledged the existence of barriers to women's advancement and stated that they would work to remove them<sup>6</sup>. Concerning institutional practices, actions focused on the creation of transparent, gender equality based, meritorious recruitment and hiring procedures. Two GEPs contained means to ensure that personal questions regarding marital status, family or personal issues would not arise at any point in the hiring process. Actions also included ensuring job advertisements were both free of discriminatory language and included statements encouraging unrepresented groups to apply. Gender equality training and implicit bias training also featured prominently for recruitment committees and those making hiring decisions. The most potentially transformative action ensured that for every vacant position at least one individual from the underrepresented gender be included in the short list before a position can be filled. This type of action places the onus on recruitment committees to engage in targeted advertising and recruitment and helps ensure more representative pools for hiring.

One glaring oversight in the area of career progression is the absence of attention on anyone who is not full-time academic staff. The focus remains exclusively on the careers of women academics, even though many educational institutions employ legions of women as contract researchers and administrative staff. This is contributing to a re-masculinization of the academy as "subordinate workers, overwhelmingly women, service those who generate academic capital, mainly men..." (Thornton 2013). Those in administrative positions, research assistants, contract researchers and academics in more precarious situations are ignored in these GEPs

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<sup>6</sup> Large public University.

and relegated to the periphery, though their work is what in many ways allows full-time academics to produce.

The remaining actions substantially overlap with those under the heading of leadership and decision making. These actions reflect a “fix” the women approach manifested in offering support and training to women so that they can advance in their careers. One of the words that occurred most often within these actions was “encourage”; encourage women to apply for higher positions, encourage them to publish more and apply for more grants. Essentially these plans seek to spur women to work harder to succeed, an assessment implying that somehow women are not currently working hard. In any way it addresses inequalities in the form of lack of opportunities and discrimination and once again returns us to a narrowly defined and gendered path of supposed progress.

In a truly innovative and potentially transformative move, one university included a call for academic care labour to be included in performance evaluations. Women often assume more responsibly the necessary administrative and care work that is required but also undervalued within educational institutions (Thornton 2013). The inclusion of this type of labour in evaluation systems recognizes and gives value to work that is not traditionally considered part of academic production and presents a way of redefining and expanding the ways that institutions do gender.

#### ***4.7. Integration of sex/gender perspectives in research***

Despite the importance that the EU has placed on the integration of a sex and/or gender perspective into all areas of research in recent years (European Commission n.d.), just two institutions outlined positive, concrete actions for this theme. The proposed actions included requiring application for internal funding to include a statement on how the project will integrate a sex/gender dimension similar that which is required by the EU in its own funding applications. The absence of action

on this issue represents a substantial oversight in nearly every GEP. They instead focus on gender/women's studies and the need for more research in this area. While this is a welcomed action given the rise of anti-gender rhetoric, this is not the same as integrating sex and gender into academic areas such as science, mathematics, and technology fields where they are often absent. This seems to operate as a confinement strategy or, at the very least, represents a path of least resistance to retain sex and gender within gender studies rather than recognize the extent to which gender is constitutive in all academic fields.

#### ***4.8. Measures against Gender based violence and sexual harassment***

Sexual harassment is a crime under the penal code in Turkey (Türk Ceza Kanunu 2004, 105). Despite the seriousness of this offense, many universities do not retain policies that specifically prevent gender-based harassment and sexual harassment among their members. Recognizing this, five institutions specifically created actions regarding the creation of policies against harassment which also included the establishment of prevention units. For those universities already equipped with these types of policies, the emphasis remained on raising awareness, creating guidelines, and providing training for staff and students on the subject. Interestingly, more than half of GEPs (57%) include gender-based violence and gender-based harassment as part of their prevention efforts while the remaining institutions focus exclusively on sexual harassment. The inclusion of sexual harassment within the category gender-based violence better reflects the nature of the type of harassment and may provide space for the prevention of harassment based more specifically on gender identity and sexual orientation depending on how the institution chooses to apply these terms. This may be a means for universities to offer such protections without openly stating their intention to do so and thus providing

protection to the institution as well. In an environment where the LGBTI+ community is regularly the target of homophobic hate speech, this is an important possibility.

## 5. Excellence and meritocracy

The EU requirements and guidance on GEPs does not mention issues related to excellence and merit and as a result only one plan questions these concepts which comprise the very foundation of academic culture.<sup>7</sup> Yet research shows that these concepts themselves are deeply gendered and reproduce gender inequality (Helgesson and Sjögren 2019; Linková 2017; Treviño *et al.* 2018; Van den Brink and Bishop 2011). Definitions of excellence centre on competition, efficiency, productivity, autonomy, project funding and high impact factor publications and are rooted in the masculine culture of science (Linkova 2017). The current norms of excellence and merit result in epistemic injustice whereby those who do not belong to the dominant group are excluded or marginalized (Clavero and Galligan 2021). What is needed is a transformation of both academic culture and the institutional cultures operating within these organizations. This must include an undoing and rethinking of the current gendered practices within academia.

## 6. Conclusion

The GEP requirements for institutions to apply for EU funding appears to be incentivizing universities in Turkey to adopt gender equality plans. This represents a first step towards gender equality in academia. However, we must acknowledge the limiting nature of the thirty-six plans reviewed here. They appear to meet many of the basics of what the EU requires concerning a GEP, but is this enough?

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<sup>7</sup> Small private University

A large majority of these plans in their pursuit of equality tend to reproduce inequality.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of the GEPs examined here do not undertake the kind of institutional transformation that is necessary to achieve sustainable and inclusive gender equality. Too often GEPs in Turkey embody either a “fix-the-numbers” or a “fix-the-women” approach which leaves the institutional and cultural structures that generate inequality intact. Moreover, the lack of intersectionality and absence of gender inclusive language combined with the near exclusive focus on women makes clear that these plans privilege a certain group of women. This approach further reinforces the gendered structures that are in place. These plans are fully invested in the binary gender system and make no attempts to address a wider category of women or those individuals who do not identify as women. Given the current anti-gender context in Turkey perhaps this is all that can be expected of institutions that need to survive within competing incentive structures. The GEPs examined in this paper represent a significant commitment of time and effort on the part of those that produced them and in no way should this be dismissed, however the current GEP requirement for institutions to apply for EU funding has resulted overall in GEPs that anything but transformational, and we can and must do more if we are to achieve equality.

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