RESET

Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together

Project Information

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RESET aims to address the challenge of Gender Equality in Research Institutions in a diversity perspective, with the objective to design and implement a user-centered, impact-driven and inclusive vision of scientific excellence.

Consortium partners

White paper on gender equality and local scientific excellence policies in academia

Document Information

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Abbreviations

AUTh	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (EL)
CoPs	Community of Practitionners
CSA	Coordination and Support Action
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
ERA	European Research Area
EUA	European Universities Alliance
GEAR	Gender Equality in Academia and Research
GEB	Gender Equality Board
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment
H2020	Horizon 2020
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HREIR	Human Resources Excellence in Research
HRS4R	Human Resources Strategy for Researchers
RESET	Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together
RPOs	Research Performing Organisations
RUB	Ruhr University Bochum (DE)
ScPo	Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (FR)
SwafS	Science with and for Society
UBx	University of Bordeaux (FR)
UL	University of Łódź (PL)
U.Porto	University of Porto (PT)
UOULU	University of Oulu (FI)
WLB	Work-life balance
WP	Work Package

Executive Summary

The following document, "RESET White paper on gender equality, diversity and local scientific excellence policies in academia" (D8.3) is submitted by University of Oulu and University of Łódź as part of Work Package 8 "Promote RESET, disseminate its good practices and exploit its results". This white paper collects evidence and joint recommendations for policy-making on gender equality, diversity and scientific excellence, in a multidimensional approach. The content of the white paper also entails the joint statement issued by RESET top managers (WP6).

This white paper aligns with the RESET project's goals of driving change through Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), training to address bias and promote equality, transforming institutional cultures, co-designing new processes, and integrating gender into research. It offers a comprehensive approach to scientific excellence and gender equality in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) through intersectionality, practitioner communities, tailored training, and gender-sensitive data collection. Highlighting methodologies and actions implemented in seven universities, it provides insights and tools for HEIs, Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), and policymakers aiming to advance gender equality and support the ERA policy agenda.

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1.   Introduction

RESET (Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together) is a Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Union under the Horizon 2020 program, specifically through the call H2020-SwafS-2020-1. The project unites seven large multidisciplinary and research-intensive universities across Europe — the University of Bordeaux, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, University of Łódź, University of Porto, Ruhr-University Bochum, University of Oulu, and Sciences Po Paris — to tackle gender equality in research institutions from a diversity-focused perspective. The goal is to design and implement a user-centered, impact-driven and inclusive vision of scientific excellence.

The project integrates an intersectional approach to gender equality, harnessing collective intelligence through the co-design of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). These GEPs are developed in collaboration with institutional authorities, individual stakeholders and operational entities, forming a local ecosystem aimed at promoting gender balance and to remove gender and other bias within academia and society. RESET began in January 2021 and ends in December 2024.

1.1   The purpose and the objectives of the white paper

The main objectives of this white paper correspond to the overall goals of the RESET project: 1) Accomplishing change through Gender Equality Plans, 2) Training to raise awareness, empower, act upon bias, debunk myths, 3) Changing the institutional cultural framework to anchor equality and diversity, 4) Changing the structure through the co-design of new processes, and 5) Supporting the inclusion of gender in research activities. This white paper presents a holistic understanding of how to approach scientific excellence and GE in HEIs through the co-design of GEPs, intersectionality, building communities of practitioners, tailored-made and integrated training programmes as well as gender- and diversity-sensitive data collection. It highlights the methodology developed during this project and the actions implemented to impulse and sustain cultural change in seven universities that have the potential to inform, inspire and equip other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), as well as national and international policy stakeholders in Europe. It is therefore dedicated to HEIs, RPOs, policy makers and other policy stakeholders interested in delivering the ERA policy agenda and contributing to advance gender equality in their organisations.

1.2   Definitions of the key concepts and methods

It is important to define the key concepts, methods and data used by the RESET community and to describe how these different notions and methods have been operationalised throughout the project to produce various documents, tools and good practices.

1.2.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is both a theoretical and methodological framework that has been used in many disciplines to investigate the experiences of disadvantaged and discriminated groups shaped by the intersection of various inequality grounds such as sex, gender and gender identity, ethnicity, social background, age, abilities or sexual orientation, and the dynamic relation between those categories (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2020). It is an underlying approach to RESET's understanding of gender equality and scientific excellence. Intersectionality is "an ongoing, dynamic process" and its proponents "assert that there are never distinct and single factors that create privilege or oppression but social categories that shift in their meaning, depending on social context, relationships and interactions of individuals with one another" (Woods, Benschop and van der Brink 2021, 3). All the project outcomes presented in this white paper have been achieved through mobilising an intersectional perspective:

- co-designing of inclusive GEPs,
- collecting data on gender equality and diversity (through surveys and FGs),
- creating the gender-inclusive language toolbox,
- redefining scientific excellence,
- developing a GIA checklist and protocol,
- designing a comprehensive training toolbox, where intersectionality is used both as a tool to talk about the overlapping axes of discrimination and power relations in HEIs as well as a concept underpinning the facilitation of training on diversity and inclusivity.

1.2.2 Communities of practice/practitioners

The concept of community serves as a foundation for many participative and experiential approaches to management education and development (Reynolds, 2000, p. 67). Authors such as Kofman and Senge (1993) and Sergiovanni (1994) highlight the significance of community values, as reflected in the following quotes:

"Each of us gives up our own certainty and recognizes our interdependence with the larger community of practitioners." (Kofman and Senge 1993, 21)

"Communities are defined by their centres of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of we from a collection of I's." (Sergiovanni 1994, 7)

The appeal of community lies in its implied promise of solidarity, belonging, and a sense of personal significance. According to Wenger-Trayner and Beverly (2015): *"Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better".* Therefore, it is important to map practitioners and experts who are interested in and engaged with gender equality issues and objectives at universities, in research groups, in faculties and beyond. For example, identifying experts committed through their position, research or other interests is valuable as these individuals can be recognised as "gender change agents." These individuals play a key role in exchange of ideas, interests and experiences about gender equality as well as in building knowledge, understanding and awareness of these issues.

Communities of practitioners (CoPs) may be a group of professors working on similar problems and issues; (i.e., gender and equality) or a group of doctoral students or researchers interested in intersectionality; they can be very informal in nature. CoPs can also be more formal groups at the organisational or network level, dealing with the same issues (i.e., CoPs of the GIA in each RESET partner organisations or a CoP of Gender Equality Boards and Gender Equality Committees). Organisational learning and knowledge management are crucial when inventing new practices and integrating an equality culture through GEPs. Research in knowledge management, including systems, is essential for developing databases, digital tools to support GIA policy-making, and new practices and policies within partner organizations. For such research purposes, the data needed relates to people's own perceptions about their roles, learning in different contexts (for example, in CoPs, in their organisations). During the project, we questioned how learning takes place at different levels (individual level, team/CoPs level, organisation/university level) and how competences develop in relation to equality issues.

RESET collaborates with many other EU-funded projects also actively involved in working towards gender equality in research and academic environments. CoPs are also actively used in sister projects and other projects dedicated to promoting gender equality in academia. For example, in the project of ACT on Gender they set up and supported eight CoPs as agents to develop gender equality actions at universities, research centres and research funding organisations in the European Research Area. In the INSPIRE project, CoPs were seen as effective means of overcoming the isolation of many practitioners and organising equality work across organisational boundaries, as well as playing a key role in building capacity for change.

1.2.3 Inclusive excellence

The concept of scientific excellence in the RESET project elaborates upon the critical discussion of this notion from the social sciences. Excellence, as a categorical imperative for staff and institutions, has been the subject of increasing debate since the early 2000s that has notably arisen from feminist criticisms (O'Connor and al., 2020). The myth of meritocracy and the belief in scientific excellence are key to the production of inequalities in European HEIs (Jenkins et al., 2022). In particular, feminist theories and research tend to challenge this belief, on the one hand by criticising the processes through which formal and informal power is distributed within academic organisations and in the production of knowledge (Benschop, 2021), and on the other hand, by showing that scientific excellence is a social construct projecting a disembodied academic ideal, whereas multiple intersectional inequalities are deeply rooted in its construction and evaluation.

The RESET project seeks both to change the definition of scientific excellence at the European level acknowledging career inequalities, gender-biased metrics of individual merits and aiming at a more collective and inclusive notion of academic performances. The RESET approach to and reflection on scientific excellence is illustrated in the Joint Statement (described in subchapter 4.1), signed by our institutions' presidents, directors and rectors. The RESET Joint Statement is the result of a collective effort conducted in four stages: 1) qualitative data collection and literature review, 2) collaborative reflection and capacity-building sessions to define a shared vision of scientific excellence, 3) a decision-making session involving participation of university stakeholders including top management (presidents or directors, rectors and vice-rectors of seven partner universities), and 4) the selection of common indicators. Consequently, the novel definition of scientific excellence is accompanied by new indicators.

In addition, we have sought to generate knowledge about scientific excellence and the perception that university workers may have of it by collecting qualitative data. In 2021 we organised 15 focus groups at four RESET universities (AUTh, UBx, UL, UPorto). These homogeneous groups were made up of university personnel and composed depending on their profession (teachers, researchers, administrative staff, top management). In total, 95 people (70 women and 25 men) took part in interviews. The focus groups were designed to provide input for Gender Equality Plans. They all began with a section devoted to scientific excellence, with an initial general instruction: "For you, what does the term scientific excellence mean?". The topic of excellence has been addressed in two rounds of surveys disseminated by GEP-implementing partners in 2021 and in 2024.

Excellence has also been a topic of meetings of Gender Equality Boards at UBx, RUB and UPorto, and of capacity-building sessions delivered to RESET partners' stakeholders. In addition to that, UBx conducted a set of individual interviews with five institutional stakeholders related to the excellence funding schemes (personnel of

research support services, vice-rector for strategy and development, officer for open science).

To sum up, the redefinition of excellence has been made possible thanks to a variety of methodologies: analysis of qualitative content, co-design activities, and monitoring through data highlighting the new indicators of excellence. These methods, with their focus on qualitative data collection, governance and on collaborative design, can be used by other HEIs and research projects to contest traditional understanding of scientific excellence.

1.2.4 Co-design

The basic principles of co-design, i.e., active, effective, meaningful stakeholder participation, mutual reciprocal learning, valuing each other's expertise, iterative, collaborative design, equalising power relations, striving towards democratic practices, and giving a voice and a say to those who might otherwise be marginalised (see Iivari et al. 2023, see also e.g., Kinnula and Iivari 2021; Greenbaum and Loi 2012; Luck 2018, Sanders and Stappers 2008) have been followed. New and modified methods facilitating co-design have been developed and experimented with. Participation inside HEIs has been broad, including top and middle management, researchers, teachers, administration and students from different faculties, disciplines and positions.

We recommend mainstreaming the co-design approach (RESET Co-design starter kit 2022) as an institutional practice for efficient gender equality policy-making and greater stakeholder engagement and support that underpins high-quality and high-impact actions. For example, co-design has been used in RESET and partner HEIs comprehensively in the design of the GE surveys, focus groups and Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), and in redefining scientific excellence and associated policies and practices. Structures established by the project to steer change - Gender Equality Boards (GEBs) have been the ideal forum for deploying co-design in order to mobilise stakeholders, but also to hear and respond to criticism in order to build consensus.

2.   Policy backgrounds

In this chapter we discuss the multi-level policy background against which our approach was implemented (from the EU policy context through the national policy framework and our own, institution-based scientific excellence policies), highlighting how the three levels are entangled and those that revealed the most decisive and influential for the challenges met in our partner institutions.

2.1 EU level

Since the integration of the principle of equal pay in the Treaty of Rome (1957), through the adoption of first directives on gender equality in the 1970s, endorsing gender mainstreaming and establishing gender equality as a EU principles in the treaties of the 1990s, to the adoption of anti-discrimination directives in the 2000s, and latest directives on parental leaves and gender quotas in company boards of the 2010-2020s, the European Union as a long track record in advancing gender equality. Lately, the EU has also been adopting pluri-annual gender equality strategies, with the new one, to be enforced as from 2026, being currently negotiated.

In the area of research and higher education, 25 years of EU policies have aimed at ensuring gender equality in universities and RPOs, while progressively adopting the objective to transform how institutions work. The European Research Area policy agenda 2022-2024 recalls that gender equality is one of its core values. Inclusive GEPs are considered as an efficient tool to achieve structural changes in research and the academia, and have thus been set in 2021 as a mandatory requirement in the Horizon Europe framework program, while being endorsed by Member States as a core instrument for systemic changes in the Ljubljana Declaration (2021).

Less specifically, the European Charter for Researchers, which was adopted in 2005, is dedicated to research careers and provides recommendations to enhance best practices in recruitment and research careers. It integrates certain aspects about gender equality, especially concerning a gender balance at all levels.

2.2 National level

The Gender Equality Index developed by EIGE shows that different gender regimes persist in the EU, with sharp differences across member states in terms of women's access to power, education or health. While the EU average is at 70,2 in 2023, countries represented in RESET score differently: France (75.7), Finland (74) and Germany (70.8) all score above average, while Portugal (67,4) and Poland (61.9) have significantly lower scores and Greece (58) ranks among the laggards. Some substantial differences can also be found on the level of the national legal framework.

Thus, in Poland, equality and discrimination are enshrined in the constitution and regulated by the Civil Code, the Labor Code and the Equality Act. The Portuguese Constitution also integrates a principle of equality, while the German Federal Constitution lays the foundation for gender equality policies in Germany, particularly in its Article 3, which mandates equal rights for men and women and prohibits discrimination based on gender. At the federal level, the Gender Equality Act (BGleiG) promotes gender equality within public institutions, including universities, by requiring measures to improve the representation of women in leadership positions and academic careers. In France, the Constitution also guarantees the equality of rights and,

as in Poland, several legal frameworks enshrined equality and discrimination including the Labor Code. In Greece, its the article 2 of its Constitution which enshrines gender equality in terms of rights and obligations.

Yet, despite this national legal frameworks, which enshrined equality, different legal gender regimes exist when it comes to academia.

In Poland, gender equality is scarcely mentioned in the legal regulations on higher education. The Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science, does not address gender equality as a goal or value for HEIs and research organisations. In Finland, specific laws exist regarding gender equality and diversity in academia. Thus, Gender Equality Plans are mandatory since the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986, revised in 2015). It also mandates that teaching, research, and educational materials must align with the Act's objectives by preventing discrimination based on sex or gender identity and promoting gender equality, particularly improving women's employment conditions. In Germany, obligations for academia exist both at the federal and regional level (Länder). Since the Framework Act for Higher Education (2007), gender equality is a prerequisite for public funding. The Gender Equality Act of North Rhine-Westphalia, where Ruhr-University Bochum is located, sets specific legal requirements for public institutions, including universities, to promote gender equality. It outlines a framework to actively realise the fundamental right of equal rights for women and men. In accordance with this Act and other provisions on gender equality, women shall be promoted in order to reduce existing disadvantages. The aim of the Act is also to improve the compatibility of work and family life for women and men. In France, since 2013, public institutions, including HEIs must appoint a Gender Equality Officer. In 2019, the Law for Transformation of Civil Service reinforces the Gender Equality Strategy and compels HEIs and other public institutions to implement a Gender Equality Plan.

2.3   Local level

In RESET, four universities had GEPs before the beginning of the project. At Ruhr-University Bochum, in Sciences Po or at the University of Bordeaux, Gender Equality Officer was a mandatory position before the beginning of the project. With RESET, three universities designed and implemented their first GEPs in 2022, while one university designed its first GEP in line with EU requirements in 2022 as well. At the end of 2024, those 4 universities designed their second GEPs, based on the successes and challenges of their first GEPs. As a result, no matter of their national and political contexts, all RESET universities have GEPs aligned with EU recommendations. In addition, Gender Equality Boards are being institutionalised, for example at the University of Lodz or at the University of Bordeaux. Importantly and as a result of the engagement in the RESET project, UL introduced its first ever position of the Rector's Representative for Equal Treatment in September 2024.

3. RESET approach to advancing gender equality by transforming and reshaping local excellence policies in the academia

In this chapter, we describe the most relevant methods and outputs created, developed and improved during the project. The RESET approach to promoting gender equality has taken place by challenging and reforming local excellence policies in higher education. These goals were achieved during the project through three key actions: enhancing institutional capacities, reshaping practices, and monitoring and evaluating change towards inclusive excellence.

Figure 1 - Key actions of the RESET project achievements

3.1 Enhancing institutional capacities

We can identify two key achievements for improving institutional capabilities in the operations of partner organisations: the enhancement of institutional data collection and valorisation processes, and the institutionalisation of gender equality mechanisms.
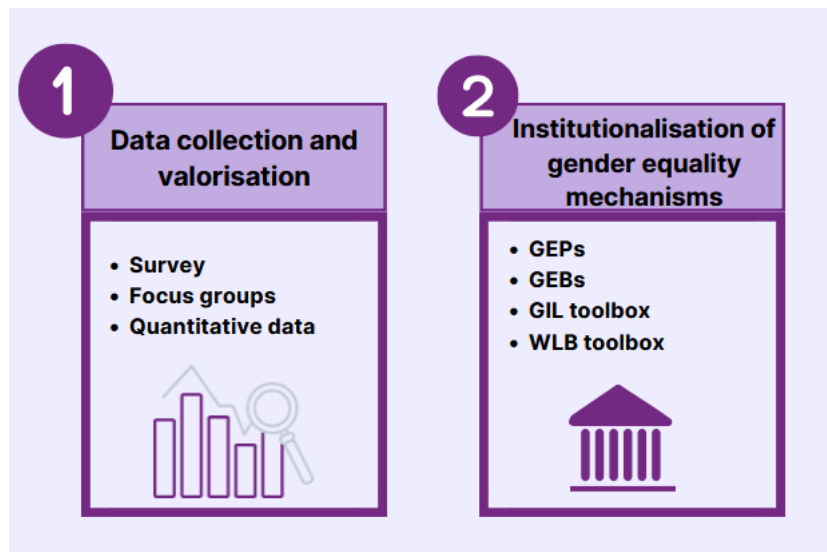
Figure 2 - RESET key achievements for improving institutional capabilities

3.1.1 Data collection and valorisation

Our project's outcomes are built on a thorough analysis of existing practices, informed by a comprehensive literature review and inspired by examples from other institutions, including HEIs and (inter)national organisations. RESET partners actively contributed by collecting different data on their institutions, by organising surveys and focus-groups. The scope of the project was broad, addressing key issues such as institutional charters and documents, gender-based violence and discrimination, laboratory engagement and initiatives, gender-inclusive language, work-life balance, and the recognition of all university community members' contributions to scientific excellence.

In line with the Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) tool, RESET GEP implementing partners collected sex-dissaggregated data to gain a comprehensive understanding of their organisations' current state regarding gender equality. The analysis served as a foundation for establishing clear objectives and crafting targeted measures to design their GEPs 1.0 and 2.0. When preparing the second survey on GEP 1.0 awareness, relevance and perceived change were included, as such partners were able to monitor the evolution of academic perceptions on gender equality and scientific excellence. This second round of surveys also allowed for collecting information regarding the areas to be tackled and the measures to be included in GEP 2.0.

One broad goal was also to support data-driven GE and diversity policy-making in designing qualitative assessment tools and processes. In order to achieve this, data collection and processing pipeline and establishing a strong GE repository and dashboard (RESET dashboard n.d.) to support policy-making were crucial entities of actions in the development of the platform. This also allows for a certain degree of

comparability, key data collected at partners level have been made available and regularly updated on a dashboard, accessible from the project website, which also serves as a demonstrator for similar databases at other institutions.

3.1.2 Institutionalisation of gender equality mechanisms

Institutionalisation is achieved when the institution takes up the cause of women and minorities (independently of the occasional mobilisation of a few people) (Blanchard, 2018). This is to be evidenced through incorporating gender equality goals in strategic documents, establishing gender equality (and diversity) positions, units and bodies granted with sufficient expertise and resources to steer and monitor gender equality work, and adopting and updating action plans to deliver change.

A key goal of the project was to revise institutional core texts to embed gender equality and diversity as foundations of scientific excellence. Due to the context-specific political and institutional dimensions, partners actively contributed to 1) surveying and analysing existing gender equality (GE) and diversity charters at local and national levels, 2) creating an inventory of impactful practices and regulations at RESET institutions and the EU level, supported by a literature review, and 3) developing recommendations for revising or drafting core charters that position gender equality and diversity as pillars of scientific excellence.

GEPs

The most important step towards institutionalisation of gender equality was introducing - or considerably enhancing Gender Equality Plans (RESET Resources - Gender Equality Plans n.d.), which consisted of the following phases: drafting partner organisations specific GEPs 1.0, executing and disseminating GEPs and developing GEPs 2.0. Simultaneously to this process, the concept of scientific excellence was revised through capacity building sessions, the use of the GIA and collecting indicators that allows for a detailed analysis according to gender and other dimensions (e.g., age). The design of GEPs was enhanced through the co-creation of a gender equality survey and data collection process, which examined perceptions of scientific excellence and prompted reflection on the complex and often uneasy relationship between scientific excellence and gender equality. Furthermore, GEPs 2.0 were focused on integrating an intersection dimension in gender mainstreaming, which was quite absent from first versions of GEPs.

GEBs

One significant development was *establishing Gender Equality Boards.* These structures first set up within RESET are now being institutionalised - or their expertise and tools transferred to other statutory gender equality bodies such as the legally mandatory Gender Equality Committee at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and

will ensure that gender equality and diversity perspectives are mainstreamed in university policies and actions. The setting up of GEBs was accompanied by capacity building sessions for their members and other relevant academic stakeholders focusing on gender awareness and diversity-friendly actions. Furthermore, the organisation of capacity building-activities, co-design sessions and online events enabled us to collectively advance with such crucial gender-related areas as GBV, gender-inclusive language and work-life balance. These events were the occasion to share experiences and knowledge in terms of research (with PhD students and researchers working on those topics), implementation of activities and actions (with operational staff) and decision-making (with top management members).

Gender-inclusive language (GIL) toolbox

The creation and implementation of the toolbox (RESET Toolbox for gender-neutral, diversity-oriented institutional communication 2022) for promoting gender-neutral and diversity-oriented communication represent a significant achievement as it is publically available and accessible from the RESET website and Zenodo[1]. The toolbox offers a set of tips facilitating diversity-oriented communication, including updated guidelines for gender-inclusive pronoun use, instructions for creating handouts on GIL, framework for workshops on GIL as well as institutional practices, resources on anti-racism and disability inclusion. The toolbox offers adaptable tools and frameworks that institutions can use to promote gender-neutral and diversity-oriented communication, fostering inclusive environments. It also presents a customisable framework by encouraging local adaptations, and demonstrating how resources can be tailored to specific institutional and cultural contexts, making it widely applicable, and actually some RESET partners adapted it to their local contexts. The toolbox can also help in capacity building, where workshops and training frameworks support organisations in building internal expertise in gender-inclusive practices. Also this iterative development process (feedback, updates and dissemination) serves as a replicable model for other HEIs to design and refine their initiatives towards gender-inclusive and diversity-sensitive frameworks.

Work-life balance (WLB) toolbox

The RESET project offers an innovative take on promoting non-gendered, modern forms of parenting and work-life balance (RESET Toolbox on implementing actions towards work / studies and personal life balance, impact assessment and lessons learnt 2024) through establishing local task forces. Their aim is to develop family-friendly policies and initiatives for work-life balance, with a focus on fatherhood. Also, various media campaigns, like "*Faces of Campus*" highlighted the contributions of women in science support roles. Here, contributions of women from the RESET universities to scientific excellence were featured with interviews and photographs. One of the examples of another awareness-raising campaign related to this topic is "*Work = Life on Campus*" (RESET Resources - Campaigns WORK = LIFE OF CAMPUS – Media Campaign FACES OF CAMPUS n.d.), which focused on sharing experiences of balancing work and family

life at RESET universities. It included interviews, weekly schedules, and videos from researchers about WLP, parenting and building gender-friendly environments. These activities provide inspiration for other universities and increase visibility of gender equality, WLB, and the challenges that parents working in academia have to face. Besides the participatory aspect of co-designing initiatives, it can be ensured that the resulting policies are relevant and tailored to local needs, when communities in creating gender-sensitive practices should be engaged. By sharing real-life experiences and institutional practices, specific campaigns provide valuable insights into creating a supportive environment for work-life balance, also offering a roadmap for other institutions to adopt similar strategies.

3.2   Reshaping practices

In RESET, reshaping practices notably involved co-designing inclusive excellence and mainstreaming GIA, and developing and rolling out a comprehensive training programme.
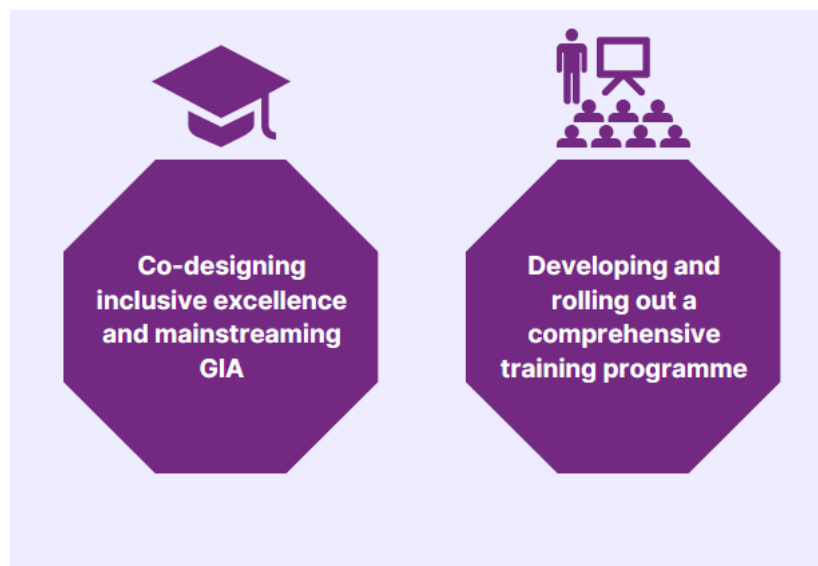
Figure 3 - RESET main areas of reshaping practices

3.2.1 Co-designing inclusive excellence and mainstreaming GIA

The RESET project focused on co-designing new institutional processes and governance structures to foster a more inclusive and expansive definition of scientific excellence. Its goal was to develop and implement institutional frameworks that promote equality and diversity in recruitment, career progression, work-life balance, and research excellence.

Co-designing inclusive excellence

RESET partners collaborated across seven universities to co-design new institutional and governance processes. These processes aimed to enhance diversity and equality in recruitment, career advancement, and leadership opportunities, aligning with the project's vision for inclusive scientific excellence. These workshops aimed to develop actionable solutions for increasing women's representation in leadership positions and committees. Engaging local communities was achieved through webinars like *"Women in Science: intersectional & international perspectives on scientific careers"*, and *"Science. Community. Diversity"* held in 2023, where RESET directly engaged local communities, gathering their perspectives, ideas, and feedback on creating more inclusive scientific environments. The University of Bordeaux developed an educational board game *("Catch me if you can")* designed to raise awareness about inequalities and discrimination in career paths. The game addresses four key discrimination criteria: gender, age, origin, and (dis)ability, using a playful format to spark discussions and raise awareness about systemic barriers in academic and professional settings.

The co-design methodology used in the RESET project can serve as a model for other institutions aiming to develop inclusive policies and practices. Engaging stakeholders and local communities in the design process ensures that solutions are grounded in the needs and experiences of those directly impacted by inequality. The workshops and co-design sessions that focused on increasing women's representation in leadership roles provide valuable insights into how universities and other institutions can improve gender equality in decision-making positions. The RESET webinars demonstrate how engaging local communities through open discussions can help shape inclusive policies and practices. This approach can be replicated by other institutions to involve a broader range of voices in the development of their equality and diversity strategies. Also those innovative awareness tools (like games) offer a creative and interactive way to raise awareness about inequalities in career progression. This tool can be used by other universities and organisations to foster dialogue about discrimination and create spaces for sharing experiences and solutions. These results are valuable insights and practical tools that other institutions can adopt to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion in scientific and academic environments.

Mainstreaming GIA

Mainstreaming the gender dimension in research is critical for achieving excellence and ethically sound, high-quality outcomes. Increasingly, research funding organisations emphasise analysing gender dimensions in research, challenging researchers to adapt their methodologies. The Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) approach addresses this challenge by fostering equality and improving the quality of knowledge produced.

Rather than a fixed methodology, GIA (RESET GIA Checklist n.d.) is co-designed by local CoPs to ensure its relevance to specific academic settings. It aligns with Horizon Europe's mission-oriented objectives, addressing global challenges with a gendered

perspective. GIA guidelines outline institutional structures, processes, and resources required for successful implementation and emphasise the role of local CoPs in institutionalising the approach.

Key elements of the GIA include:

1. Institutional and operational set-up: the GIA guidelines provide frameworks for institutionalising gender impact assessment processes, emphasising the importance of CoPs in tailoring the approach to specific contexts.
2. Collaborative development: CoPs facilitate co-design sessions to refine the GIA approach, ensuring its sustainability and adaptability. Feedback from follow-up reports and consultation sessions guides improvements.
3. Support for researchers: checklists and consultation sessions, managed by institutional grant-writing staff, assist researchers and teams in incorporating gender perspectives into research content.
4. Sustainability: A tailored GIA protocol formalises the institutional commitment, specifying structures, resources, and responsibilities. This protocol is reviewed and approved by university leadership at various stages.

Initial GIA protocols, signed by vice-rectors of research, provide a foundation for implementation. As institutional practices evolve, revised protocols will secure further approvals, ensuring that GIA becomes an integrated, sustainable component of institutional research practices.

A preliminary survey conducted with representatives from six RESET project partner universities assessed the current state of gender dimension mainstreaming in research and teaching. This survey aimed to inform interventions for integrating gender perspectives into higher education curricula, researcher education, and research practices during the project's final year. Key findings emphasised the importance of adequate resources, the legal recognition of gender studies, and the need for a clear operationalization of sex, gender, and intersectional dimensions. Expertise in gender studies was highlighted as critical for successful implementation, and synergetic networks were proposed to address gaps in universities lacking dedicated gender studies programs.

Despite progress reported in the 2020 ERA Progress Report and She Figures 2023, the integration of gender dimensions in research remains limited, with only about 2% of publications incorporating these aspects. To address this challenge, the RESET consortium focuses on embedding Gender Impact Assessments (GIA) in research design, monitoring GIA implementation, and producing policy recommendations. A follow-up report compiled activities related to GIA operationalisation and institutionalisation within RESET partner universities. This report included:

- Promising practices and recommendations for piloting effective GIA methods institutionally,
- Translations of the initial GIA checklist into six national languages (Finnish, French, German, Greek, Polish, and Portuguese),
- Guidance for institutionalising and operationalizing the GIA approach, ensuring its sustainability.

Assessing the operationalization and institutionalisation of the gender dimension in research content is a priority for the project's sustainability, with efforts aimed at building capacity and embedding gender perspectives in research excellence and impact.

The ground for actions was taken in 2024 to disseminate the GIA approach further. The GIA checklist has been digitalised and is now available online[1]. Secondly, our plan was to gather digital feedback systematically from the various users through the RESET online forum. The third development step was to include a feedback function to the GIA checklist, so that the ones who fill in the form will receive positive and encouraging responses on gender dimension in their research based on their checklist answers.

3.2.2 Developing and rolling out a comprehensive training programme

One of the major achievements of RESET is the delivery of an comprehensive, open-source training programme (RESET Database of teaching material and methods of teaching 2024). It is tailor-made and adjusted to the needs of various groups, including PhD candidates, students, teachers and researchers, administrative staff, top and middle management. Pilot tested at GEP implementing partners and through joint online sessions at consortium level, the toolbox is adaptable to various national, institutional and sociocultural contexts and to the diversified expectations of different recipients. Addressing all stakeholders and profiles - in line with the notions of intersectionality, co-design and scientific excellence - the toolbox enables both project-scale and context-specific applications. The overall goal of the training is to engage the whole university community in creating an academic culture of equality, beyond the affected groups (according to an inclusive approach). The main assumption behind the conception of the training toolbox is an emphasis on both widening knowledge and enhancing skills and competencies of trainees. Importantly, the designed training is of a cumulative character, deriving from the already existing training practices and resources developed at both European and national levels as well

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[1] https://toolkit.wereset.eu/#/gia-checklist

as within sister projects (e.g.: GE Academy, UniSAFE, Gearing ROLES, SUPERA GENDER-NET, GENDER-NET Plus ACT ON GENDER, etc.).

The toolbox[2] offers comprehensive content divided into eight thematic areas: 1) Psychosocial risks at work – aggression, mobbing and sexual harassment; 2) Reacting to harassment and inappropriate behaviours; 3) Diversity and inclusivity, 4) Enhancing diversity and inclusivity culture & preventing discrimination and unconscious bias; 5) Building positive relationships and enhancing positive attitudes toward diversity at work; 6) Work-life balance – orientation on knowledge competencies improvement; 7) GEP implementation; 8) Gender and diversity dimensions in research and teaching (including GIA and intersectionality). Each module has the same structure and consists of the following elements: goal, participants, recommended and basic forms of training, duration, main and specific objectives, learning outcomes and educational effects, learning areas, useful references, methods and training activities, tailor made training for each university, useful terms and definitions, practical tips and guidelines. What is more, each of them is ready-to-use as it contains all the necessary materials, assignments, presentations, which trainers in various places and contexts can simply download and adapt to their training purposes. The whole toolbox is publicly available to all interested in conducting GE and diversity workshops (scholars, teachers, activists, practitioners, coaches, mentors, etc.).

One of the most important aspects to be planned to facilitate the training process in universities is to use the train-the-trainers (TTT) approach. The role of trainers in promoting gender equality and awareness raising is of crucial significance, and their preparation demands special attention. The TTT programme equips trainers in competences to conduct specialised training and to create safe space for trainees, facilitating self-reflection and the exchange of personal and professional experiences. It is recommended to HEIs, which decide to build a D&I institutional framework and establish a series of workshops devoted to GE and diversity, to create the TTT possibilities, which foster development and support for trainers as well as make the training programme long-lasting and sustainable.

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[2] https://toolkit.wereset.eu/#/training-toolbox/overview

3.3 Monitoring and evaluating change towards inclusive excellence

Monitoring and evaluation are two core components of structural change, which aim to capture how, under which conditions, and to which extent change happens. Experienced with delivering and evaluating gender equality policies, Sciences Po designed several tools to support RESET partners in their own monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts. Intended to be both *formative* - that is to enhance GEP implementing partners' capacity to monitor their actions and achieve their objectives, and *summative*, through impartially evaluating their actions and performance throughout the project, RESET M&E strategy was also innovative.

Figure 4 - Main types of evaluation of the RESET project

3.3.1 Supportive evaluation: building capacities

Elaborating upon a tool developed by Sciences Po for the SUPERA project, a checklist for GEP monitoring and evaluation was designed early in the project and annexed to a comprehensive M&E plan aimed at capturing, beyond performance in delivering project's outputs, the capacity of RESET universities to institutionalise gender equality and deliver promised changes. Partners were thus equipped with relevant capacities and tools for self-evaluation, and for strategically devising their actions to achieve the greatest impact. Rooted into feminist neo-institutionalism, the M&E strategy for RESET primarily focused on the following dimensions: a) stakeholders' involvement in the process of change from its early stage, b) the resources available to advancing gender equality and the gender dimension (in terms of staff, knowledge, skills and time), c) the mechanisms put in place to ensure accountability towards the set objectives, d) the support secured from the top management and e) the sustainability of implemented measures and their long-term impact on organisational practices and cultures.

The specificities of RESET – such as the intensive use of co-design methodologies, the extensive use of GIA or the focus on intersecting inequalities were fully integrated in the M&E framework, so as to assess their potential to support change, and to expand the understanding of compounded inequalities in the academia. Throughout the project, Sciences Po provided support to GEP implementing partners through on-site visits aimed at capturing local change dynamics and resistances, and regular capacity-building sessions delivered online and at project meetings through participative methods. An interim monitoring report delivered mid-way of the project highlighted windows of opportunities for greater institutionalisation of gender equality, and the impact pathway for each university to achieve sustainability, while accounting of the specific challenges met at RESET universities over the first half of the project.

Elaborated in the same spirit, the final evaluation report compiled at the end of RESET, showcases how three of the four GEP implementing partners succeeded in delivering institutional change in different domestic environments, and how all partners contributed to delivering the innovative instruments described in this white paper. It also acknowledges how resistances to gender equality and diversity mainstreaming can shape the institutional outcomes, highlighting the way forward.

3.3.2 Experimental evaluation

Taking stock of the rare, yet ground breaking occurrences of experimental evaluations conducted in the academia (Boring 2017, 2021, 2024), notably by Sciences Po as part of the EGERA project (FP7), Sciences Po also contributed to the innovativeness of RESET, through developing a methodology for the use of experimental evaluations - in the form of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) - to measure change and its impact on perceptions and practices. Based on an extensive literature review, RESET evaluator identified the use of board games designed for awareness-raising activities, as the most promising instrument for conducting localised RCTs. Different board games developed with the purpose to tackle gender bias in academia, such as Nobel Run, designed by the Gearing ROLES project or Catch Me if You Can, developed by RESET, were considered for those experiments. It is yet WAGES (Workshop Activity for Gender Equality in Science), designed in the US, that was used for supporting pilot RCTs conducted at Pasteur Institute (October 2023), Oulu University (March 2024) and Aristotles' University in Thessaloniki (November 2024). Those pilot experiments were instrumental to refining the methodology, presented at the biennale conference of the European Evaluation Society (September 2024), and to identifying cultural and logistical obstacles - such as its resource-intensiveness of this methodology. Summarised in a report to be updated at the end of the project, this methodology is supported by practical recommendations for its successful deployment in other HEIs and RPOs. A fully-fledged RCT, involving over 300 researchers, will be conducted in 2025 at Pasteur Institute, as a further demonstration of its replicability and potential for upscaling.

4. The impact on local scientific excellence policies

In this section we are specifying key contributions and lessons learnt towards achieving the objectives set out in the paper. We are presenting the process for and principles set out in the Joint Statement, and the impact of gender equality on scientific excellence.

4.1 Process for and principles set out in the Joint Statement

One of the objectives of the RESET project is embedded in its title: to redesign scientific excellence from the collaborative perspective, making it more inclusive and adaptable to contemporary challenges. We aimed to achieve these goals through a joint statement by the top management of all partner organisations – about their commitment to promoting equality, diversity and excellence in research.

In this framework, top management members of the seven RESET partner institutions co-designed and endorsed a Joint Statement in 2022 (RESET Joint statement of top management on their engagement for equality, diversity and excellence in research 2024), demonstrating their commitment to equality, diversity, and excellence in research. The primary purpose of this document is to highlight findings from critical feminist studies to foster institutional change in the conception of scientific excellence within the European Research Area (ERA). It challenges the false neutrality of scientific excellence and sets out the conditions for making it fairer. This document illustrates RESET members' joint conception of a more inclusive scientific excellence, namely by its social and environmental dimensions, through engagements anchored in four thematic areas:

Figure 5 - Four thematic areas of RESET Joint Statement (D6.5), 2022

- Governance: by strengthening their institutional engagement to equality and diversity principles through the review of core texts and official guidelines; enhancing co-design and collaboration in the creation, development and monitoring of ideas and actions in favour of equality and diversity and by fostering diversity and equal representation in decision-making bodies and processes.

- Institutional culture: by promoting sustainable cultural change through the establishment of a gender and diversity-friendly environment and communication; integrating gender mainstreaming in their policies and combating all forms of discrimination or gender-based violence.

- Occupational equality: by refining recruitment, retention and decision-making processes, in line with HRS4R and European standards, reflecting on the impact of parenthood on careers and solutions to enable a work-life balance, and valuing contribution of administrative and academic communities within European responsible research & innovation.

- Production and transfer of knowledge: through the development of training programs and pedagogical content that raise awareness to equality and diversity issues, the implementation of the Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) tool of RESET, and the development of societal and environmental dimensions of research.

This document supports a paradigm shift in the understanding of scientific excellence. Through this joint statement, the RESET team members aim to share their vision of scientific excellence and contribute to the progressive change of its assessment: to make its criteria more inclusive and diverse, in accordance with social challenges, as well as with the diversity of people who produce it.

The request of top management's engagement in discussions about our joint definition of scientific excellence was extremely important for the institutionalisation, impact and sustainability of such engagement. Indeed, a diversity policy only comes under the scope of change management when it is part of a strategic, systemic, cross-functional

and sustainable approach (Bruna, 2013). To achieve this, it needs to be endorsed at an institutional level by decision-makers who embody the university's culture.

After combining results of qualitative analysis (focus groups, survey, interviews, literature review), a meeting with representatives of top-management from all RESET institutions took place in March 2022, in order to agree on the document, that was consecutively endorsed by all representatives within a few months. The statement principles have been integrated in the elaboration of Gender Equality Plans and the development of RESET actions at a local level. It is publicly available on the partner university's websites and the RESET website to guarantee its dissemination at the ERA level. After the signature and dissemination of the joint statement, RESET members reflected on the best way to ensure the endorsement of its principles by all institutions, giving it a more coercive dimension. For that purpose, a list of 83 indicators was defined, further refined and shortlisted by the Department of Economic Analysis and Statistical Studies of the University, that all RESET institutions would engage in following even after the end of the project's lifespan. To elaborate the short list, the following questions were asked:

- Is the indicator already followed up at the university and by who?

- If it is not yet followed, is it really useful to follow it?

- If yes, is it possible to collect this data, and who will be responsible for it?

This reflection was completed by an analysis of other lists of indicators that the University of Bordeaux has to follow, such as the ones for the label on Sustainable development (DD&RS), or national calls for projects. The UBx team could also count on the support of various institutional services to reflect on the relevance and feasibility of metrics follow-up.

The RESET Joint Statement has been described as an "unprecedented bold statement in favour of transforming the governance, culture, and missions of universities towards equality" in the RESET Monitoring report, in 2023. It is one of the main achievements of the RESET project and can be seen as an ambitious step forward in the academic debate on excellence.

4.2   Impact of gender equality on scientific excellence

Our concept of scientific excellence emphasizes fostering inclusive, reflective, impact-driven, and socially relevant research and innovation. Within RESET, we have leveraged the unique strengths of each partner institution to implement qualitative, stakeholder-driven actions aimed at continuously enhancing cultural and organizational environments. RESET serves as a framework for structural change, grounded in two core principles—intersectionality and co-design—creating the foundation for more inclusive universities.

Gender equality has profound and measurable impacts on scientific excellence, particularly in areas such as research productivity, collaboration and diversity, and the retention and advancement of researchers. These impacts foster a more inclusive and innovative research environment.

The RESET project tackled the challenge especially by mainstreaming the Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) into the design of new research projects of the participating universities. The RESET GIA guidelines and protocol were co-designed to inform, train and assist institutions in setting up a support system for local researchers. Together with the GIA checklist and protocol, they are available in all project languages and online.

The Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) is an ex-ante evaluation designed to assess the integration of sex and gender dimensions in research activities and proposals. It aims to evaluate gender responsibility, encourage reflection on intersecting social categories, and integrate these aspects into research where applicable. GIA enhances the success of individual projects, research teams, and organizations while contributing to societal and scientific progress. Mandated under the European Commission's Horizon Europe Work Programme, GIA requires addressing gender dimensions in research unless deemed irrelevant. The RESET project's GIA checklist expands this approach by incorporating sex, gender, and intersectionality considerations across all application sections—Excellence, Implementation, and Impact—providing targeted questions to identify and address gaps in gender sensitivity. GIA checklist may be thus used as a device to identify grey areas whereas gender-sensitivity may be increased in all the above-mentioned areas:

- GIA of the research content and identification of gaps in knowledge;
- GIA concerning equal participation in research design, execution of research and decision making related to various aspects in a research project;
- GIA of beneficiaries of the research results.

What is needed more is to set up a systematic institutional follow-up and analysis within each of the higher education institution i.e. Gender Impact Assessment related Knowledge Management (KM) in collaboration with:

- University libraries - research publication analysis;
- Research support services - grant application analysis;
- HR - career development analysis;
- Strategy and Science Policy Unit: stakeholder analysis;
- Some other locally relevant institutional body.

Such an institutional GIA monitoring system would aid in developing institutional processes towards greater gender sensitivity, if coordinated with a staff with sufficient professional training on gender in knowledge production.

5. Conclusions and summary of findings

The RESET Joint Statement has been hailed in the 2023 RESET Monitoring Report as an "unprecedented bold statement advocating for the transformation of university governance, culture, and missions toward equality." As one of the key accomplishments of the RESET project, it represents a significant and ambitious contribution to the academic discourse on excellence.

Having all above considerations into account, the following recommendations can be formulated for HEIs and their stakeholders:

1. It is of crucial importance to redefine the common meaning of scientific excellence by a) contesting its gender-blindness, b) making it more inclusive in line with intersectional approach, c) making it context-specific (e.g., discipline-specific), d) contesting indicators upon scientific excellence is evaluated (both at institutional and individual levels).

2. There is a need to establish a clear link between scientific excellence, gender equality and diversity and RESET's Joint Statement can serve as a perfect example of how to convince top management to acknowledge the relationship between gender equality and DE.

3. HEIs should unite in putting pressure (locally, nationally and internationally) through various networks such as research associations, CoPs, European university alliances, etc. in order to reformulate the goals and measures of scientific excellence.

4. Contemporarily, in line with EU recommendations, gender equality should be approached, analysed and fostered through intersectionality, taking into consideration multiple and overlapping processes of empowerment and disempowerment to make academia inclusive, diverse, respectful and open to various people.

5. Intersectional approach should be used to investigate situations where intersecting identities (such as gender, age, nationality, race, academic affiliation, field of study, etc.) may contribute to discrimination, exclusion and disprivilege in the academia.

6. Gender Equality Plans - the most important documents outlining university policy, tasks and activities aiming to enhance gender equality - ought to be supported by in-depth diagnosis of the state-of-the-art at HEIs, by creating effective systems of collecting and monitoring gender-disaggregated data as well as by investigating the needs and expectations of various academic stakeholders and community members.

7. The process of institutional change and enhancing gender equality needs to be accompanied by a complex and diversified training programme, focusing on GE, gender mainstreaming and D&I as well as on developing certain skills and competencies to react to inappropriate behaviours and prevent discrimination and bias in academia. While training should be tailored-made and designed for different trainee groups and national/institutional contexts, RESET training toolbox is ready to use and to be appropriated to different HEIs. It contains a complex and multi-thematic database of teaching material and methods of teaching to be easily adapted for local purposes, usefully complementing training materials developed under Gender Equality Academy.

8. We recommend using the train-the-trainers (TTT) approach in planning training, capacity building activities and gender awareness initiatives in order to facilitate the local training processes and make it a long-lasting, sustainable and deeply ingrained into academic environment programme.

9. Drawing from experiences in applying co-design for advancing gender equality within HEIs, several key lessons have emerged. We recommend adapting co-design methodologies to create safe spaces where participants can openly discuss and navigate controversial or sensitive issues, which are often central to gender equality efforts. Furthermore, co-design should be tailored to facilitate critical thinking, challenge existing norms, and explore alternative futures, values, and agendas—essential for driving social and political change. Lastly, fostering broad and inclusive participation is crucial. Ideally, this participation should develop organically, driven by the genuine interest and initiative of the HEI community members.

10. We recommend identifying and also establishing Communities of Practitioners (CoPs) in organisations in order to utilise their knowledge and expertise on issues of equality and gender value, as well as building such scientific excellence policy, the operating models and processes that support not only GIA and GEP work but also structural and cultural change in HEIs.

11. Gender equality and diversity work at HEIs and RPOs requires to set up permanent positions, units and consultative/steering bodies such as the GEBs established by RESET. Those have demonstrated their capacity to support the change process through capacity-building and co-design activities, and mobilising members from across the institution. Establishing gender equality units granted with sufficient human and financial resources has proved to be challenging to some of RESET partners universities, where gender equality efforts are still recent and/or do not yet benefit from a consolidated policy environment at national level. Yet this step is necessary to ensure full institutionalisation, oversee the fulfilment of above recommendations, and perform long-term monitoring.
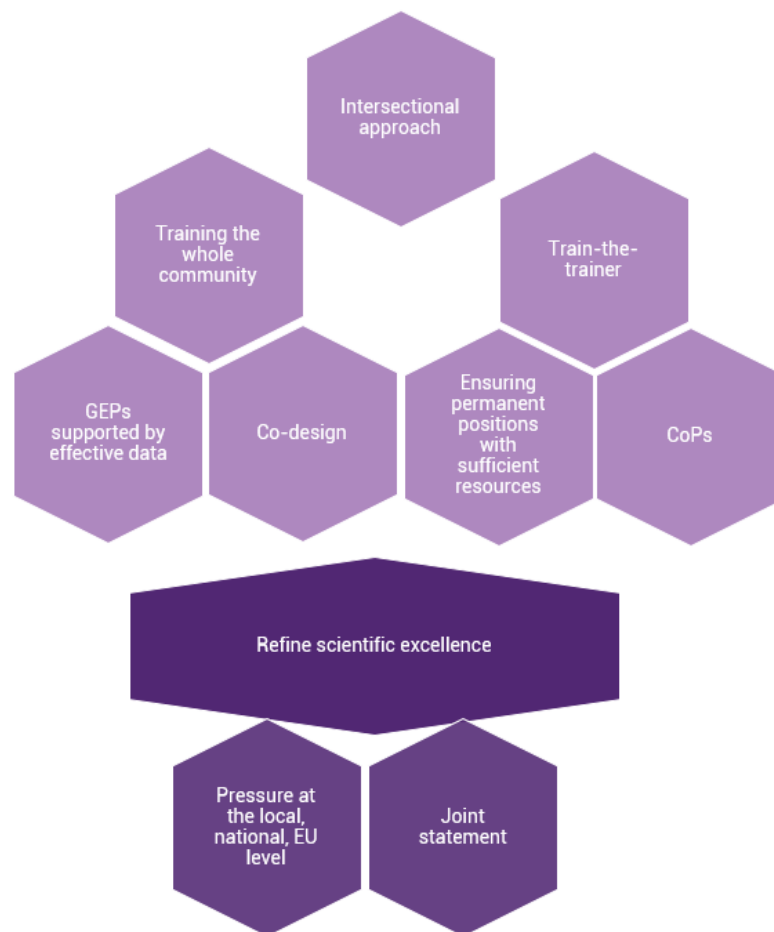

Figure 6 - RESET recommendations for HEIs and their stakeholders

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