

The Role for Gender Training in Bridging the Gender Gap in the Academic Community. The needs and challenges in Cyprus

Cyprus became a Member of the EU in 2004. The two genders are equal as regards the constitutional and legal framework. However, despite the fact that female higher education students and doctoral students exceed in numbers their male counterparts, women are underrepresented on corporate boards, in politics, in medicine, in academia and research.

For this reason, the *Cyprus Gender Research Centre* (EKIF) carried out a major survey between December 2011 and March 2012 entitled "**mapping the research field in Cyprus from the gender perspective.**"¹ In this paper, I will focus on the university sector² and present the views of the 218³ respondents to the closed and open-ended questions as regards gender discrimination in academia, the existence of equality policies and measures, causes of inequality and future challenges and measures. Concluding, I will make some general remarks as regards the role of training in raising gender awareness and supporting gender mainstreaming.

Gender Discrimination

The collected data confirms that in Cyprus men control high ranking decision making bodies in academia whether appointed or elected. The representation of women is very slim indeed:

Public sector

- University Council/Interim Committee (appointed body): 1woman/36
- The Senate (elected body): 4 women/46
- Rector (elected): 1 woman/3
- Vice Rector (elected): 1 woman/6

Private sector

- University Council/Interim Committee (appointed body): 8 woman/47
- The Senate (elected body): 30 women/97
- Rector (elected): 0 woman/4
- Vice Rector (elected): 0 woman/6

The overall representation of women is 26% in the public universities and 36% in the private ones. At the rank of the professor, women are 8% at public universities and 23% at the private ones. Women also constitute only 30% of the co-ordinators of funded research programmes whether European, national or transnational (15/49).

¹ The Attached Power Point was presented at the CCEAM conference in Limassol on 4 November 2012.

²The project covered all 7 universities in Cyprus (3 public and 4 private) and 6 research centres.

³ 106 women and 112 men

60% of the male participants and 94% of the female declare that there is discrimination against women academics. More women than men assert that there is discrimination against women at recruitment stage, promotion stage and appointment of women to posts of responsibility/governance (Diagrams 15 - 17).

The following statements are selected responses to the open-ended question as regards discrimination against women:

- It is too difficult for female academics to climb to leadership positions
- Family obligations are not taken into consideration at all...It is considered almost a shame to speak of them
- You are confronted with disbelief at all levels and you have to prove that you are not an elephant
- Lower salaries for same duties

Equality Policies and Measures

While the participants admit that as regards professional characteristics (dedication to work, work hours, qualifications and work performance),⁴ women are equal to men, participants claim that equal participation of the sexes is not facilitated to a high degree at the universities as regards⁵

- research teams,
- management/ governance of the organisation
- reconciliation of family and professional life
- positive measures in favour of men and in favour of women
- mechanisms for monitoring the enforcement of gender equality policies

Causes of Inequality

The far majority of the participants accept that women are equal as regards professional characteristics and in the words of one of the participants: **No organ of a woman's or of a man's body can make her or him superior or inferior.** For this reason, many attempts have been made in various countries to highlight the causes of the gender gap in academia (Bagilhole, 1993). The causes are varied and complex. In order to identify the institutional and other processes that contribute to the continuation of this inequality, the participants were asked to evaluate the impact of three factors/barriers as regards discrimination at the work place:

- social stereotypes
- organisation policies
- organisation culture

⁴ See attached Diagrams 19-24.

⁵ See attached Diagrams 30-34

The participants, female 86% and male 56%, are of the opinion that social stereotypes are mainly to be blamed for discrimination at the work place. They also believe that organisation culture (female 49%, male 24%) has a greater impact than organisation policies (female 19%, male 11%) on discrimination at the work place. As one of the participants put it "**Equality of the sexes is taken for granted in the academic world**"

Future Challenges and Measures

How can academic environment and institutional procedures become friendlier to women? Scholarly discourse and research have indicated that, despite policies, strategies or millennium goals put forward by organisations like EU, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, the academic sector has remained immune to equity policies (Bagilhole, 2002) because of the argument that their policies are based on meritocracy, research and publication.

Diagram 41

According to Diagram 41, the participants believe that the most effective measure contributing to the change of stereotypes and culture is **familiarisation with EU equality policies** (women 91%, men 79%), second measure is **training of management/governance staff in gender issues** (women 83%, men 64%) and third is **familiarizing the personnel with gender policy issues** (women 71%, men 63%). We note that the ranking of the measures is the same by both sexes. The Cypriot academics indirectly point out that gender training should aim at informing the academic community of EU equality policies, training the hierarchy of the university in gender issues as well as the university personnel. All three categories received high percentages.

Diagram 42

The factors that can have a positive impact from "much/very much" on changing the culture in an organisation, are

- the family – 89%
- the school – 88%
- administration of the organisation/university – 77%
- EU equality policies – 74%
- Female academic/research staff – 73%
- Government policies – 65%
- Male academic/research personnel – 59%
- Unions – 31%

As regards changing the culture of the university, we note that the family and school factors are rated higher than organisation administration and EU policies. EU policies are held higher than Member States policies. Female academic staff can have a higher impact than male academics by 14%. The ranking of the eight factors above shows that gender training

and gender awareness should begin with the family and school. In organisations, like the universities, that pride themselves of their academic freedom, the members of the governance bodies should receive gender training as well as female academics, who must be sensitised "to claim their rights." The role of male academics is not considered as vital as the role of women in changing the culture of the organisation. The role of the unions is under-rated as in Cyprus there are not strong higher education unions.

Diagram43

The policies and measures as well as the issues raised in Diagram 43, could form part of a gender training course. They are linked, as regards female faculty members, to what discourse calls the dichotomy between the 'successful academic' and the 'good mother' (Raddon, 2002).

Extracts 46 & 47

The male's view in the Extract 46, which was written in English, is copied here unabridged. The female's view, Extract 47 was originally written in Greek. The male, a young, single, PhD holder and the female Assistant Professor, 41-45 years old, highlight the dichotomy of motherhood and professionalism from a different perspective. For the male, motherhood is almost a curse or a hurdle that it is almost impossible to overcome successfully. For the female, motherhood is a female attribute that needs to be recognised and be assigned special treatment and privilege. Both speakers regard the academic world as a male's dominion, tough and almost cruel:

"..to reach the very top and remain there, you will have to work 70-80 hours per weeks from the day you start your phd till the day that you die."

"Capitalism is male and the needs of women and children are defined through the male perspective."

Conclusion

Going through the quantitative data and the responses of the participants, to both closed and open-ended questions, presented in this paper, we underpin the male domination of the governance and decision making bodies as well as the academic ranks of the university personnel (see Diagrams 7-10).

One wonders is there a need for gender training in such a powerful and highly esteemed sector of the economy, which absorbs 49.8 % of the research budget of the Cyprus Republic? Cyprus, being a small in size and population country, has no major industries or high –tech industries.

The answer is yes. As with other sectors, in my view, a survey should be conducted to identify the extent or degree of the existence of stereotypes, cultural bias and non-gendered organisation policies.

The three-pronged approach of the Action Plan of the EU 2010-2015 could be a useful guide. Definitely, the political and policy dialogue will be needed in this case to convince the university community, who pride themselves on excellence and meritocracy, to admit that

"It may be that it is not that rules are broken to obstruct and delay women, but stretched to facilitate men." (Bagilhole, 1993)

Training must be differentiated between the governing personnel, the academics and the administration. All three categories of personnel need to become aware of the gender mainstreaming strategy and specific actions needed to help demolish the deeply ingrained stereotypes and cultural bias exhibited in the answers of the participants whether of closed or open-ended type.

However, the gender mainstreaming strategy has been around since 1996. In practice, Cyprus, like many other Member States (MS), has not adopted it. References are made to it only at conferences. Unless gender mainstreaming becomes compulsory, it will not be adopted by the Member States as a necessary strategy. The Member States must be convinced to adopt it and must afford the necessary budget for its implementation.

In my view, the academic/research domain, like so many other domains, where the gender gap is wide, needs to be addressed both at EU level and MS level. As long as gender mainstreaming is not made compulsory, the only alternative is employing effective gender training in order to

- Raise awareness on gender equality issues across
- Sensitise both women and men
- Target all ranks of academic/research personnel
- Target policy makers and governance bodies

How can gender training become effective? Gender training can become effective provided a needs survey is made to identify the gender gap in a sector/organisation and find the right tools, measures and practices suitable for the particular sector/organisation. Availability of funds is an important factor to be taken into consideration, especially at the period of economic crises.

In small states like Cyprus where there are not large organisations/universities/companies, the adoption of gender mainstreaming by the Government/Parliament would be the most effective strategy. In the case that gender mainstreaming is not made compulsory, the authorities at government/parliament/municipality level must undertake to promote it and

keep it alive by offering incentives, funds and monitoring its progress at national and EU level.

Lastly, EIGE and other EU bodies should provide state of the arts training for trainers and facilitators and continuously monitor gender training and the application of gender mainstreaming in all MS and make interventions and suggestions in order to keep the interest and momentum alive. It is not an easy task as in countries, like Cyprus, the gender mainstreaming strategy has only been "hibernating" in EU publications and conference proceedings. I pray for the efforts of EIGE to materialise.

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