

Training and Mentoring programmes to enhance gender equality and women empowerment in higher education institutions: an example of Latin American countries in the *Equality* project

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Introduction

According to data on educational standards and employment in OECD countries as well as in Latin America (LA) the number of female on average exceeds the number of male graduates of Bachelor degree programmes.

Specifically in Latin American countries, higher education enrollment rates have progressively increased from the 70's. In the last 40 years, women have reached levels of enrolment equating male levels and, in some cases, have become significant majorities in some degrees/subjects; same is true when looking at graduates figures in such countries.

In spite of the fact that women are highly qualified, females are still underrepresented in management positions in both, academics and business, as well as in the positions of professors and rectors at most universities. The reasons for this female underrepresentation in top positions are manifold: traditional gender roles in society, lack of child care facilities, aspirational deficits, lack of career networks for women, and beyond. Policies implemented in many countries to reduce segregation have so far proven to be not effective enough.

In this sense, a European Funded Project (Alfa) the so called EQUALITY aims to improve the situation of women by strengthening capacity building and creation of networks through training and mentoring programmes fostering gender mainstreaming within HEIs.

The project coordinated by the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica, has led to the implementation and modernization of gender units in 18 Latin American partner universities which have undertaken training of internal and external academics as well as mentoring for academic staff, master students and junior researchers to improve women leadership skills and strength the female representativeness in key positions. In addition, through the EQUALITY project a network of 18 Latin American and 4 European partner universities has been created for the purpose of research, exchange of good practices and applied support on policy making in gender equality and women empowerment topics.

Methods

Within a duration of 36 Months (2011-2014) the project structure reflects four main work packages that starts from an in-depth analysis and a comparative study of existing deficits, relevant legislative frameworks and good practices available in supporting gender equality and women's empowerment within HEIs (year 1); passing through the implementation of relevant supporting measures and structured: Gender Units and Observatories (years 2 & 3) been surrounded at all stages for the **enhancement of female academic community skills on strategic gender-related topics** (years 2 & 3).

The present poster focuses on the project work package number three (WP3) that aims at **capacity building and skills enhancement in LA Universities.**

- **Target groups:** university leadership, heads of departments and institutes, academics, researchers and administrative staff, female undergraduates and graduates.
- **Timeframe:** 20 months
- **Methods:** Presence workshops, training and seminars

Literature & References

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Results

The skills enhancement work package was developed in the years 2 and 3 of the project (2013-2014) comprising four different phases:

1) Train the trainers: intensive training to enhance the skills of the consortium members staff, who will act as trainers (phase 2), in the topics related to Gender mainstreaming in Universities.

Total of workshops: 4

Total of hours: 100 (25 hours per WS average)

Total of people reached: 176

N. of participating countries: 22

2) Replication workshops for Non-partner Universities: workshops to transfer the contents and knowledge acquired in the "training the trainers" phase to other universities "non-formal project partners" in Latin America.

Total of workshops: 33

Total of hours: 330 (10 hours per WS average)

Total of people reached: 1292

N. of participating countries: 18

3) Internal Info-days: institutional trainings to improve the skills of female university community in acquiring leadership positions.

Total of workshops: 54 (aim*)

Total of hours: 540 (10 hours per WS average)

Total of people reached: 1350 (aim*)

N. of participating countries: 18

4) Mentoring programmes: support programmes targeting at female university staff and undergraduate and graduate students to improve their chances of acquiring leadership positions in universities as well as promote the placement of students in high-quality jobs in collaboration with the business sector.

Total of programmes: 18 (aim*)

Total of people reached: 900 (aim*)

N. of participating countries: 18

* Project activities 3 and 4 are still in course – to be concluded until 31/8/2014.

Conclusions

It is known that the topic of gender equality still need to improvement in all societies, some more than others, but still the real gender balance is lacking. Initiatives like the project Equality reveals that the topic is still new for the majority of the university community and, although there is still a reluctance from some levels in the Higher Education hierarchies, **the interest in the subject is present and increasing in all levels and for both genders.**

By establishing gender units in each of participating universities and building capacity inside them we start the path to a more gender mainstreaming in the higher education institutions and give the topic a **higher level of discussion and visibility, supporting the critical thinking and the incorporation of gender aspects in learning and didactics, internal rules and policies.**

Based on the project results and the number of thematic trainings and workshops undertaken as well as the number of participants trained in each phase **it is possible to conclude that the trainings were definitely a need in all universities involved having the level of enrolment surpassing the expectations and primary target numbers of participants.**

In addition, **the feedback given by the audience and actors involved in the phases 1 and 2 (results section) already concluded gave us the impression of high level of satisfaction and engagement.** The involvement of non-partner universities also wide up the reach of the project thematic and provided the actors and institutions involved **new opportunities of synergies and joint work in the gender topic** inside their countries, also giving the notion of stronger joint capacities.

The last trainings and mentoring results (points 3 and 4) were still not available until the moment this poster was produced, however preliminary results pointed a great participation of female target in the info-days and even more a massive interest and pre-enrolment for the mentoring programs having by the female students.

Further information

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