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Equality for all? Support for equal opportunity among professors in Europe

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Abstract

Equal Opportunity programs (EO) continue to be at the center of the debate about promoting equality in higher education. While support for EO has been well-studied in American higher education, this research is the first to investigate the attitudes towards and support for a range of EO policies among professors in Europe. We specifically examine faculty support for seven different EO measures used in European universities that require varying levels of involvement and commitment. From a sample of 689 profes- sors, findings show that women professors tend to show more support for all EO programs compared to men profes- sors. We also see differences across disciplines. Professors from the humanities and social sciences are more likely to endorse such programs than their counterparts in STEM disciplines. Moreover, the differences across disciplines and gender decrease substantially when controlling for racial and gender attitudes. Finally, soft/differential programs, which prioritize merit but take group membership into account are preferred over hard/preferential programs which prioritize achieving equality by targeting members from marginalized groups. This research is innovative for its geographical loca- tion, sample of study, and range of included measures.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, Equal Opportunity programs (EO) and policies, including diversity policies and affirmative action, have become indispensable to the operations of European higher education institutions (HEI). Based on European-wide research, 70% of institutions have a (vice-)chancellor working on the topics of equity, diversity, and inclusion. While 83% of the institutions address gender as a dimension of diversity, only 55% consider staff's ethnic background (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019). Equality policies, recently transformed into gender and diversity policies, are the result of internal and external pressures, such as the encouragement from the European Commission to tackle gender inequality in science and research. The various goals mandated by the European directives range from changes such as eliminating unconscious bias in hiring processes to securing top management support to generate equitable institutional practices across all levels of the university. One specific incentive offered by the European is the HR excellence in research award which requires universities to adhere to 40 proposed practices. These practices include maintaining gender balance at all academic levels, including gender equality in recruitment and promotion procedures (European Commission, 2005). Furthermore, the increasing internationalization of universities has pres- sured them to become more culturally aware and sensitive accommodating a diverse student and staff population.

Bottom-up movements within academia have risen the demand for equality. Attention to the enduring gender gap in tenured positions is increasing and more recently, the Black Lives Matter movement has renewed the debate for greater racial equality in academia with calls for decolonizing the curriculum and representation of ethnic and racial minorities among professors and lecturers (Griffin et al., 2019; Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Thomas & Ashburn-Nardo, 2020). These pressures have resulted in an amalgam of policies whose public aim is to ensure an equal (work) environment for students and staff.

The implementation of diversity policies in HEI has not been without setbacks and difficulties, with the use of hard measures, such as admission quotas, being the subject of political debate about instigating ‘reverse sexism/ racism’ (Arcidiacono et al., 2015; Dovidio et al., 1989). This notion was created by opponents to capture the perceived inequality that hard measures of affirmative action enable towards white men. Critical scholars, however, have disa- greed finding no evidence that hard policies harm members of privileged groups. Feagin (2000) describes reverse racism as an “oxymoron” that diverts attention from strong forms of racism (Cashmore, 2004). Other scholars also indicate how most diversity policies

are ‘weak’ in the sense that they do not achieve desirable equality outcomes in the academy (Ahmed, 2012). This ineffectiveness is caused by prioritizing superficial changes that does not affect existing power structures. Ahmed (2012), among others, discusses how the replacement of ‘equality’ with ‘diversity’ has brought in an all-encompassing term that no longer addresses the sources of inequality, but has provided the university with a glossy image with which to achieve its neoliberal rather than its equality aims. This coincides with a general policy trend in Europe away from more targeted ‘multicultural’ policies toward more general ‘colorblind’ policies in which citizens are seen less as part of ethnic minority groups and more as individuals who are increasingly super-diverse in many ways (Bleich, 2003; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). This general policy discourse may be assumed to have an impact on diversity policy in HEI.

European research on Equal Opportunity policy is conducted in three main traditions. One is concerned with the rhetoric and discourse that universities present in their diversity documents through in-depth discourse or docu- ment analysis (Archer, 2007; Bowl, 2018). Another stream pays attention to the perceptions and experiences of the target groups of these diversity policies, who are mostly (white) women faculty or faculty from ethnic minority back- grounds (Bourabain & Verhaeghe, 2021; Deem & Morley, 2006), and explores how they view these policies in terms of accountability, effectiveness, and engagement. Finally, the focus is on the experiences and perceptions of diversity officers and their work within the institution regarding the implementation of diversity policies. Ahmed's (2012) influ- ential work highlighted how diversity officers feel trapped within Human Resources silos constantly hitting a ‘brick wall’. This refers to the disinterest and resistance of faculty, most of whom are in managerial positions and have the power to change the university's climate and culture toward greater inclusion and equality. Therefore, it's surprising that, to our knowledge, no research has been conducted in Europe on faculty support for EO measures.

By investigating gender and ethnic bias in European HEI and faculty support for EO measures, we aim to contrib- ute to this field of research in the following ways. Most research has been conducted in the U.S. which has a distinct context with regards to gender and racial equality making this study's European context innovative. This research is the first to quantitatively explore professors' attitudes and support for EO in Europe. Traditional research on the support for EO has predominantly used the term Affirmative Action without defining specific measures. Here we consider support for seven different measures which has the advantage of removing the politicized understanding of

affirmative action. Investigating a range of measures allows revealing differences in support for hard or preferen- tial treatment programs and soft or differential treatment programs. Furthermore, most European universities have implemented policies that prioritize gender equality, with an emphasis on enhancing women's academic careers. Less attention is paid to the equality of staff from ethnic minority groups. We can, therefore, question whether faculty distinguish between gender equality and ethnic equality leading to disparate support for the two goals.[1] Finally, the context of HEI is a relevant research context as they are considered the epitome of knowledge and places of toler- ance and equality. But there is a growing backlash from the right against academics asserting that universities have become "left-wing bastions, unwelcoming to conservative and right-wing professors" (van de Werfhorst, 2020, p. 47). This context is rarely investigated in terms of racial and gender attitudes and their ideas on equality. Therefore, we reverse the lens 'upwards' to study the attitudes of faculty, and in particular professors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Support for equal opportunity: Individual and contextual predictors

Social scientists have predominantly studied support for and attitudes toward affirmative action programs, a concept popular in the United States but less common in Europe. For our hypotheses, we build on the previous literature on affirmative action by looking at individual and contextual predictors that influence attitudes toward EO policies from a sociological perspective.

First, research conducted at US HEI has shown significant differences across demographic characteristics such as gender, race, and ethnicity (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Hughes & Tuch, 2003; Kane & Whipkey, 2009; Sears et al., 1979). Support for and attitudes toward affirmative action for women differ considerably between women and men. Most research indicates that women agree with affirmative action to a greater degree than men (Baunach, 2002; Davis & Robinson, 1991; Hughes & Tuch, 2003; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Simien & Clawson, 2004). In terms of racial background, whites are more likely to oppose affirmative action than non-whites (Baunach, 2002; Sears et al., 1979). These findings can be explained by interest theories (Strolovitch, 1998). One dominant theory is Blumer's (1958) *group position theory* that posits that prejudice in the dominant group stems from *"*(1) *a feeling of superiority,* (2) *a feel- ing that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien,* (3) *a feeling*

of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, (4) *a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race"* (1958, p. 4). For affirmative action, interest theories propose that support is based on ideas about privileged status in society and whether policies will harm or benefit their individual position and/or the position of their group. Thus, they expect that self-interest significantly influences one's support for equal opportunity. People in less privileged positions would be more supportive of policies such as EO programs and measures than people in privileged posi- tions, who might see this as detrimental to their own individual advantages. In terms of gender, this would mean that women would be more supportive of affirmative policies targeted at women and, conversely, men would be less likely to do so because they might perceive it as detrimental to their privileged position. Similarly, we could expect affirmative policies targeting ethnic minorities to be viewed as less beneficial to members of an ethnic majority.

Research on gender differences in the support for EO measures for ethnic minorities is inconclusive. Based on interest theories, we expect the attitudes of ethnic majority women to be no different from men in their support for measures for ethnic minorities. However, Robinson's underdog thesis states that, due to their underprivileged position in society, women's sympathy for justice for other out-groups is greater (Davis & Robinson, 1991; Robinson, 1983). We could, therefore, expect that:

Hypothesis 1a *Women professors are more supportive of gender-targeted policies than their men counterparts.*

Hypothesis 1b *Women professors are more supportive of ethnic-targeted policies than their men counterparts.*

Besides demographic membership, research has shown that perceptions of and attitudes toward equality depend on one's social position within the institutions of work and family (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2010). In this paper, we specif- ically address faculty support for EO measures in HEI. Higher education portrays itself as a meritocratic institution. They promote individualistic interpretations of social outcomes by emphasizing competitive individual effort and achievement (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2010; Jackman & Muha, 1984; Kane, 1995). Scholars, however, have exposed this 'equality mystique' demonstrating that the university inherently produces inequality as an institution (Davies, 1993). Still, research on university representatives show that they consider merit and excellence as primary indicators of success (Acker, 2009; Deem, 2009). This meritocratic culture influences individual attitudes and support for EO (Park & Denson, 2009). Milem and Hakuta's (2000) work in the U.S. shows that professors are less supportive of EO programs because they

believe it compromises academic excellence. In addition, differences across disciplinary lines regarding support for EO may occur. Perceptions of equality depend on the socialization of academics within disciplinary fields. More specifically, in STEM fields (includes science, technology, engineering and mathematics), the emphasis on talent and skills for academic success is much more present than in non-STEM fields (i.e. humani- ties and social sciences (García-González et al., 2019; Handley et al., 2015). Additionally, social scientists are more aware of the structural barriers that women and ethnic minorities face in domains such as the labor market (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2010). Furthermore, gender may be a less significant attribute in STEM fields. While STEM fields are still male-dominated compared to the humanities and social sciences, being one of the few successful women in the field may reinforce meritocratic beliefs and their opposition to EO programs (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2010; Ellemers, 2001). Even more, Bourabain and Verhaeghe (2021) have shown that women in STEM are less supportive of quotas compared to women from the social sciences and humanities. Women from STEM disciplines are less keen on the use of quotas for fear of being tokenized and consequently having their skills undervalued. Instead, women from the social sciences and humanities believe that compulsory measures like quotas are necessary for equality in academia (Bourabain & Verhaeghe, 2021). Within academia, we can therefore expect distinctions across disciplines:

Hypothesis 2a *Professors from the humanities and social sciences are more supportive of gender-targeted policy measures than their counterparts from STEM disciplines.*

Hypothesis 2b *Professors from the humanities and social sciences are more supportive of ethnic-targeted policy measures than their counterparts from STEM disciplines.*

Another predictor is gender and racial attitudes in the support for EO. Given that contemporary society is perceived to be post-racial and post-feminist, attitudes about inequality underlie a meritocratic belief (Anderson, 2014; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003). There is general agreement in today's society that blatant inequality based on race and gender is no longer acceptable or justifiable. These societal changes have introduced a color- and gender-blind frame for understanding inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). More specifically, systemic differences between men and women and between ethnic minority and majority groups are no longer defined by biological differences or beliefs in gender racial superiority. Rather, systemic differences are assumed to be simply the result of differences in individual performance. The core component of color- and gender-blind attitudes is the denial of discrimination, racism, and/or sexism.

This is particularly relevant as sociologists have indicated how beliefs about inequality

influence attitudes and perceptions regarding social change and social policy (Kluegel, 1990; Tuch & Hughes, 2011). Within HEI, we can expect that the idea of a 'culture-fair meritocracy' trickles down to staff who are less aware of the hidden structural dynamics that contribute to the reproduction of the university as an inequality regime (Acker, 1990). In turn, these meritocratic beliefs and associated gender- and col-blind attitudes may create resistance to EO policies targeting specific groups such as women and ethnic minorities.

To investigate the role of modern gender and racial attitudes on the support for EO, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 3a *The more gender-blind (the higher the scores on the Neosexism Scale), the lower the support for gender-targeted EO measures.*

Hypothesis 3b *The more color-blind (the higher the scores on the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)), the lower the support for ethnic-targeted EO measures.*

Finally, we are interested in the influence and role of EO programs in two ways. First, we are interested in the association between implemented EO measures and positive attitudes towards new EO measures. We can expect that faculty will be more supportive of implementing new EO policies in an environment where EO measures are more widespread. At the same time, the opposite can be expected. Nonetheless, given that the aim of EO policies is to ensure commitment from the university and faculty to guarantee an equal environment and climate, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4 *A positive association exists between implemented diversity policies and support for new EO programs.*

Second, previous research shows that the support for EO depends on the perceived fairness of EO programs (Scarborough et al., 2019). The perceived unfairness of EO is based on the idea that merit is the most relevant factor for social advancement, whether it is admission to higher education or being hired for a particular position. This meritocracy principle is perceived to be violated in programs in which group membership, for example, in terms of gender or ethnicity, is used as a criterion for allocating resources or outcomes. Affirmative action programs can be divided into non-preferential treatment, preferential treatment and differential or mild preferential treatment programs (Kravitz, 1995). While non-preferential treatment programs include policies such as parental leave or mentoring programs, preferential treatment programs include policies that specifically target members underrepre- sented groups. Differential or mild preferential treatment programs include

policies that consider group membership only when the merit principle is not violated. This is common in hiring quotas, where the candidate from an under- represented group gets selected over the candidate of a privileged group only when all other qualifications are equal.

There are not many studies that have looked at differences in support for a variety of EO programs (Scarborough et al., 2019). In this paper, we look into seven different measures to test for potential differences in support for EO. We can expect that differential treatment programs are perceived to be more fair than preferential treatment programs, and thus:

Hypothesis 5 *Differential/non-preferential treatment programs (e.g. mentorship, formal hiring criteria, voluntary bias training) are more supported than preferential treatment programs (e.g. quota, mandatory bias training).*

METHODOLOGY

The research population consists of professors employed at HEI in the European Union as our sampling frame consisted of all countries within the European Union. In each country[2] at least five HEI were randomly selected. These HEI were university-level institutions including business or technical schools. We conducted a non-purposive sampling of departments. Within each selected department purposive sampling was conducted to select tenured professors at the associate level and above. If the department head was a professor, he or she was included in the sample. This procedure resulted in 1409 respondents who started the survey with a completion rate of 49%. The average age of the respondents is 52 years with a standard deviation of 9.52 years. 56.5% are men and 42.5% are women. 86.2% belong to the ethnic majority group of the country, 1.9% are ethnic minorities, and 10% are international researchers. 46.3% work in the humanities and social sciences, and 53.5% work in STEM fields. 62.6% hold a managing position, which includes (vice)head of departments/centers/units (54.8%) or deans and execu- tive heads (5%). In terms of non-response, 49.6% of non-response were from the social sciences and humanities, while 50.5% of non-response were from STEM disciplines. For gender, men are slightly overrepresented with 56.4% compared to 43.5% of women, which is comparable to the distribution in the sample.

Survey design

E-mails were sent out with the request to complete an online survey about gender and diversity measures at HEI. Before responding to the survey, respondents were requested to read the informed consent and indicate their agree- ment. This contained a description of the study, confidentiality, and personal data-protection. The distribution of responses are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Dependent variables

The dependent variable in this study is the support for EO policies for ethnic minority and women staff. Inspired by the work of Scarborough et al. (2019), respondents were offered seven different measures used to ensure an equitable workplace. First, quotas are measures that mandate that a certain percentage/number of women/ethnic minorities be represented in the applicant pool. Quotas can be considered one of the most stringent forms of equality meas- ures. Second, we included the current gender and diversity policies implemented at institutions to address gender/ ethnic inequality in the workplace. Third, we looked at both voluntary and mandatory gender/ethnic bias training for employees which aim at addressing implicit bias amongst employees. This distinction allows us to test the extent to which making an EO measure mandatory may trigger different attitudes toward these measures. Fourth, we included mentoring programs for women/ethnic minorities. Fifth, we included formal criteria for decision making in hiring and promotion. And finally, we included the current special offices/committees that identify barriers that women/ethnic minorities face in the workplace. It is worth noting that preferential treatment programs, such as mandatory bias training, are more labor- and time-intensive than differential treatment programs, such as voluntary bias training. On a seven-point scale, ranging from "strongly oppose" to "strongly favor", they were asked their opinion concerning the use of these practices in HEI. For clarity, we grouped these EO programs into two categories: differential and preferential programs. The Cronbach alpha for gender-targeted differential programs is 0.707 and for gender-targeted preferential programs is 0.876. The Cronbach alpha for ethnic-targeted differential programs is 0.612 and for ethnic-targeted preferential programs is 0.854. This indicates good scale reliability for both groups. Before we presented the question on their support for policies for ethnic minority staff, we offered a definition of who is defined as ethnic minority staff. The definition goes as follows: *"ethnic minorities are defined as individuals who were born in the country but have a migration-background or who migrated to this country but have been living for the majority of their lives in the country"*. We distinguished it from international staff by providing the following definition: *"international colleagues are academics who have come to the country for their academic job (and are moving away at the end of their contract)"*.

Independent variables

First, we include two demographic variables as independent variables in our models. These are the gender of the respondent and their discipline. The variable of discipline has two categories: 'non-STEM' and 'STEM'. Non-STEM includes respondents working in the humanities and social sciences.

TABLE 1 Distribution of responses for categorical variables

	%	*N*
Gender		689
Men	56.5	389
Women	43.5	300
Discipline		687
Humanities & social sciences	46.3	319
STEM	53.7	370
Implemented gender-targeted policies		
Quota		596
Yes	10.3	61
No	89.7	529
Gender policies		622
Yes	43.3	267
No	56.7	349
Voluntary bias training		616
Yes	22.8	139
No	77.2	471
Mandatory bias training		593
Yes	4.4	26
No	95.6	561
Mentorship		600
Yes	15.0	89
No	85.0	505
Formal hiring criteria		620
Yes	38.5	265
No	50.7	349
Diversity office/committee		611
Yes	174	25.3
No	431	62.6
Implemented ethnic-targeted policies		
Quota		588
Yes	3.1	18
No	96.9	570
Diversity policies		607
Yes	27.7	168
No	72.3	439
Voluntary bias training		616
Yes	26.8	165

No	73.2	451
Mandatory bias training		590

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	%	*N*
Yes	5.9	35
No	94.1	555
Mentorship		597
Yes	13.6	81
No	86.4	516
Formal hiring criteria		608
Yes	35.4	215
No	64.6	393
Diversity office/committee		607
Yes	23.1	140
No	76.9	467

TABLE 2 Distribution of responses for metric variables

	$\bar{y}$	σ	*N*
Support for gender-targeted policies			
Quota	3.84	1.70	689
Gender policies	5.09	1.61	689
Voluntary bias training	4.76	1.66	689
Mandatory bias training	4.03	1.64	689
Mentorship	4.38	1.73	689
Formal hiring criteria	5.16	1.54	698
Diversity office/committee	4.87	1.60	689
Preferential treatment programs	3.94	1.50	689
Differential treatment programs	4.84	1.31	689
Support for ethnic-targeted policies			
Quota	3.60	1.67	689
Diversity policies	4.85	1.74	689
Voluntary bias training	4.95	1.59	689
Mandatory bias training	4.17	1.67	689
Mentorship	4.64	1.51	689

Formal hiring criteria	5.03	1.48	689
Diversity office/committee	4.84	1.50	689
Preferential treatment programs	3.88	1.47	689
Differential treatment programs	4.86	1.24	689
CoBRAS	3.32	0.66	689
NeoSexism scale	2.13	0.74	689

σ based on last imputed data set.

Second, we employ the CoBRAS and Neosexism scale to measure the respondents' racial and gender attitudes. While no gender-blind attitude scale has been developed in the same way as the CoBRAS, we found the Neosexism scale to be the closest in measuring the same underlying factors. More specifically, we prioritized that both scales measure the primary assumption that being color- and/or gender-blind means that individuals deny the existence of discrimination. In addition, both scales have been shown to be the best predictors of contemporary political attitudes about gender and race, especially affirmative action and other EO programs (Tougas et al., 1995). Below we provide more information on the main factors measured by both scales.

The CoBRAS: We used the short version of the CoBRAS measuring three factors: (1) unawareness of racial priv- ilege, (2) institutional discrimination, and (3) blatant racial issues. It is a 14-item scale and responses are recorded on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) Likert-type scale. Total CoBRAS scores range from 14 to 84 (Neville et al., 2000). The Cronbach alpha, to test the internal reliability, is 0.637.

The Neosexism scale: To measure gender attitudes, we have chosen the Neosexism scale which tests similar components as the COBRAS. The Neosexism scale *"measures whether respondents tend to* (a) *deny the existence of discrimination against women,* (b) *resent complaints about discrimination, and* (c) *resent special 'favors' for women"* (Swim & Cohen, 1997, p. 105). It is an 11-item scale and responses are recorded on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) Likert-type scale. The Cronbach alpha is 0.782.

A final independent variable concerns implemented EO policies at respondents' universities. We asked, "Which of these gender practices, actions, and/or policies are used within your institution?" to obtain an overview of the installment of EO measures at respondents' universities. We offered a list of the same practices listed above and provided space to specify other measures or policies. We are particularly interested in the association between implemented measures and the support for new EO measures. In our analysis, we will divide the EO measures into three variables: (1) differential treatment programs, (2) preferential treatment programs, and (3) no implemented EO programs.

We would like to indicate possible limitations of our methodology with the first relating to the potential bias in who participates in a survey on EO policies. Indicating one's support and preferences on issues such as equality and diversity remains sensitive. Second, the universality of the racial attitudes scale raises concerns. As Pettigrew et al. (1997) indicate, most attitude scales are rooted in the American context targeting a specific demographic group. Europe is a mixture of 'native ethnic' groups and ethnic minorities who are descendants of various migra- tion streams. The Neosexism scale has been used universally, but this does not apply to the CoBRAS. We follow Pettigrew's universality theory arguing that the psychological principles of outgroup prejudice are generalizable. His research also reveals consistencies across different outgroups, which is why we decided to replace African Americans in the CoBRAS with ethnic minorities in general, whilst still acknowledging Europe's diverse histories and cultures. Although the psychological mechanisms of prejudice and discrimination can be considered similar across Europe, the intensity and reasons for outgroup prejudices differ. We did not include cross-national analyses for two main reasons. First, our realized sample does not allow us to draw conclusions regarding cross-national differences. Second, with the commitment to forge a European Higher Education Area, we see a homogenizing trend in European HEI. As previ- ous research shows, the European Union has invested in a top-down strategy of convergence to create one European higher education region with the aim to compete against the rest of the world (Robertson, 2009). Therefore, national governments have, compared to the European government, little influence over policy practices within HEI. Espe- cially, with the increasing international mobility among scholars, we can expect a certain convergence of attitudes within HEI. Finally, our main objective is to provide a first exploration of the support for EO and its relationship with individual and organizational factors in Europe, without addressing specific differences amongst European countries. We, however, highly recommend future research to study national variations.

ANALYSIS

Respondents could decide which questions they completed and we used multiple imputation analysis to solve the missing values for each scale. We conducted a missing value analysis to explore patterns in the missing values. Using the Little's missing completely at random (MCAR) test for testing if missing values are randomly distributed, we found that the attitude-scales (Little's MCAR test: $\chi = 12.81$, DF = 2, sig. <0.05) and the dependent variable that measures the support for gender-targeted EO measures could

reject the null hypothesis. However, the dependent variable that measures the support for ethnic-targeted EO policies (Little's MCAR test: χ = 317.96, DF = 290, sig. > 0.05) could not reject the null hypothesis which indicates that the missing values are MCAR.

We conduct multiple imputation which is the most sophisticated method to deal with missing values for both missing at random and Missing not at random. We include both predictor and outcome variables so that we can conduct multiple imputations based on the missing at random assumption. We conducted the Fully Conditional Spec- ification method with a linear regression approach. We then executed a step-by-step Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis with the variables of support for EO as dependent variables. The two dependent variables are the support for differential programs and support for preferential programs and this separately for gender-targeted and ethnic-targeted programs. The first model contains gender and discipline as the independent variables, the second model includes the Neosexism scores for the dependent variables of support for gender-targeted policies or the CoBRAS scores for the dependent variable of support for ethnic-targeted policies. The third model includes imple- mented EO measures (no, differential, and preferential) as independent variables. In the appendix, we provide ordinal logistic regression analysis for the support for each gender-targeted and ethnic-targeted EO measure.

RESULTS

Descriptive analyses

Table two presents the means for each gender- and ethnic-targeted EO measure. A remarkable finding is that, with the exception of quota, most respondents on average agree with supporting all other EO measures. For the gender-targeted measures, findings show that quota receives the least support overall with a mean of 3.84 (σ = 1.70), followed by mandatory gender bias training with a mean of 4.03 (σ = 1.64). There is a mean difference of 0.73 between mandatory and voluntary gender bias training. The highest means were for what we might call the most meritocratic perceived option, which is formalizing the hiring process in terms of criteria for applicants (y = 5.16, σ = 1.54). Regarding ethnic-targeted measures, we see the same patterns of support. While quotas are

again the least preferred measure to implement as an EO program (y = 3.60, σ = 1.67), formalizing hiring criteria

is the most preferred (y = 5.03, σ = 1.48). Mandatory bias training is again right behind quota with a mean of 4.17 (σ = 1.67). There is a mean difference of 0.78 between mandatory and voluntary ethnic bias training. These descrip- tive findings are a first indication of supporting differential "meritocratic" EO measures over preferential treatment
programs (hypothesis 5).

Looking at the relative distributions of support for gender- and ethnic-targeted EO measures (Tables 3 and 4), we clearly see stark differences between preferential programs, like quotas and mandatory bias training, and differ- ential programs. For gender-targeted measures, 33%–40.6% (strongly) disagree with implementing quota or manda- tory bias training. Compared to the other 5 measures of which 40.8%–69.8% of the respondents (strongly) support. For ethnic-targeted measures, more than 42% of respondents (strongly) disagree with supporting quotas, followed by mandatory bias training, which 25.5% of respondents (strongly) disagree with. Between 12.4% and 17.9% of respondents (strongly) disagree with supporting differential EO programs.

Figure 1 illustrates the means of differential and preferential EO programs by gender. Both women and men are less supportive of preferential treatment programs compared to differential programs. In addition, men are less supportive of both differential and preferential programs compared to women. This is evident for both gender- and ethnic-targeted EO measures. Looking at the discipline (Figure 2), overall we can say that professors, regardless of discipline, are less supportive of preferential treatment programs compared to differential treatment programs. Furthermore, professors working in STEM fields are less supportive of both gender- and ethnic-targeted EO meas- ures compared to professors from non-STEM fields.

Before moving to the regression analyses, we present the correlations between the predictor variables (Table 5). Ethnic-targeted differential and gender-targeted differential EO measures are strongly correlated with a Spearman rank correlation coefficient of 0.85 ($p \leq 0.001$). In addition, ethnic- and gender-targeted preferential measures are moderately correlated (r_S = 0.58; $p \leq 0.001$). This suggests that measures targeting women and ethnic minorities are
similarly supported by professors.

TABLE 3 Relative distributions of the support for gender-targeted Equal Opportunity (EO) policies

	1 strongly disagree (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)	7 strongly agree (%)	NA (%)
1. Some higher education institutions make use of quota for women to apply for job openings.	11.0	7.5	22.1	15.1	21.8	7.0	5.5	9.1
2. Some higher education institutions implement policies to address gender inequality in the workplace.	4.4	2.6	8.7	8.4	30.3	19.3	20.2	6.1
3. Some higher education institutions offer voluntary gender bias training to their employees.	4.8	2.6	11.3	11.9	28.7	14.4	12.8	13.5
4. Some higher education institutions have mandatory gender bias training for all employees.	7.1	5.4	20.5	20.3	13.1	9.1	7.7	16.8
5. Some higher education institutions provide female employees with mentors who can assist them with job and career challenges.	7.1	4.1	15.1	18.9	20.6	10.6	9.6	14.1
6. Some higher education institutions try to reduce subjectivity regarding gender in their employment practices by relying on formal criteria for making decisions about hiring and promotion.	2.6	2.8	8.4	12.6	23.1	16.8	23.2	10.4
7. Some higher education institutions have a special office or committee that identifies barriers that women may encounter in the workplace.	4.5	3.3	9.3	14.2	23.1	13.9	17.6	14.1

TABLE 4 Relative distributions of the support for ethnic-targeted Equal Opportunity (EO) policies

	1 strongly disagree (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)	7 strongly agree (%)	NA (%)

1. Some higher education institutions make use of quota for racial minorities to apply for job openings.	12.9	7.8	21.6	16.1	17.4	3.0	3.6	17.4
2. Some higher education institutions implement policies to address racial inequality in the workplace.	7.0	2.5	8.4	9.4	29.5	14.9	17.4	10.9
3. Some higher education institutions offer voluntary diversity training to their employees.	2.9	2.2	7.3	11.3	31.5	16.4	15.2	13.2
4. Some higher education institutions have mandatory diversity training for all employees.	6.1	4.6	14.5	16.8	23.1	8.3	9.1	17.4
5. Some higher education institutions provide ethnic minority employees	4.4	2.6	10.7	15.5	27.7	12.8	8.9	17.4
6. Some higher education institutions try to reduce subjectivity regarding ethnicity in their employment practices by relying on formal criteria for making decisions about hiring and promotion.	2.5	1.9	9.1	12.0	25.0	17.9	17.4	14.2
7. Some higher education institutions have a special office or committee that identifies barriers that racial minorities may encounter in the workplace.	3.5	3.3	9.4	11.2	26.7	15.1	13.5	17.3

REGRESSION ANALYSES

Our first set of hypotheses (H1a-b) address the question whether women professors are more supportive of gender- as well as ethnic-targeted measures compared to their men counterparts. Following the chronological order of our hypotheses, Tables 6 and 7 present the dependent variable of the support for gender- and ethnic-targeted policies respectively. The first model include gender and discipline as independent variables with women professors as the reference category. The findings show support for hypothesis 1a, as men are less supportive of gender-targeted measures than their women counterparts. More specifically, men are less supportive of preferential treatment programs than women. When we look at the measures separately, we find that men professors are less supportive of gender-targeted measures than their women counterparts on all but one measure (see appendix Table a). The lowest support among men relative to women is for quotas with odd ratios of 0.69 ($p \leq 0.01$) while the greatest support is for mentoring with odd ratios of 1.02 (n.s.). The largest significant differences between men and women professors are for quotas (OR: 0.69, $p \leq 0.01$), mandatory bias training (OR: 0.74; n.s.), and hiring practices (OR: 0.79; n.s.). This indicates support for hypothesis 5, which states that preferential programs are less supported than non-preferential programs. Regarding the support for ethnic-targeted policies, no major differences are visible between men and women in the support for differential and preferential treatment programs. However, looking at each measure sepa- rately, results again show that women professors support EO measures more than men professors with the largest significant differences for, mentoring (OR: 0.67, $p \leq 0.01$), voluntary (OR: 0.75; $p \leq 0.05$) and mandatory bias training (OR: 0.75; $p \leq 0.05$) (see appendix Table b). Thus, based on the underdog-thesis, we could say women tend to be more supportive of other out-groups. These findings support hypothesis 1b.

For our second set of hypotheses (H2a-b), we consider discipline as an independent variable. For gender-targeted measures (Table 6, model 1), findings show that the effect of discipline is statistically significant for differential EO programs but not preferential EO programs, partially supporting hypothesis 2a. The largest differences are shown for gender policies (OR:0.62; $p \leq 0.001$), while the smallest difference is for mandatory bias training (OR: 0.87; n.s.), followed by quotas (OR:0.79, n.s.) (see appendix Table a). This may indicate that hard measures are still less accepted by a larger public than soft measures, regardless of the discipline in which they work. This contrasts to the soft and relatively established gender equality policies, where professors from the humanities and social sciences are more

convinced of their potential than those from STEM. The results for the support of ethnic-targeted measures shows that non-STEM professors are more supportive of differential and preferential EO programs. The largest difference between professors from the social sciences and humanities and professors from STEM disciplines is for diversity policies (OR: 0.59; $p \leq 0.001$). Also for ethnic-targeted quota, stark differences exist between non-STEM and STEM faculty (OR: 0.74; $p \leq 0.05$). They agree the most on mentoring programs (OR: 1.01; n.s.), which we could indicate as one of the weakest equality measure for ethnic minorities (see appendix Table b).

Next, in model 2 we added the attitude scales as an additional independent variable to test whether gender-blind and color-blind attitudes would lead to lower support for EO-programs. The findings show support for both hypoth- esis 3a and 3b. In Table 6 we included the Neosexism scale to test its role in supporting gender-targeted measures. The results support hypothesis 3a that the higher professors score on the Neosexism scale the lower their support for EO-programs. Gender and discipline no longer play a significant role in estimating one's support indicating that

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Women and ethnic minorities remain underrepresented as staff in European HEI. Simultaneously, academic institu- tions pride themselves on being the epitome of meritocracy requiring no EO programs. The aim of this research was to investigate the support for EO policies in European HEI. By offering a range of EO measures and linking these to gender and racial attitudes, we were able to look into the different 'types' of support.

Following Blumer's theory, we showed that, overall, women professors are more supportive of gender-targeted policies than their men counterparts. We can say that women professors are among those who need EO policies for both individual and group interest while men professors may consider these policies as threatening to their own privileged position. Before including racial and gender attitudes, only two soft measures (gender-targeted mentor- ing and ethnic-targeted diversity policies) received more support from men professors compared to their women peers. For gender-targeted measures, it is remarkable that mentoring programs received more support from men than women as these programs are often enforcing same-gender mentorships in which experienced women profes- sors are expected to advice women early career researchers. This might indicate that soft measures that are less time- and labour-consuming are supported more by faculty of the dominant group, that is, men. In addition, the underdog-thesis applied to the gender-differences in terms of supporting ethnic-targeted EO measures. Based on the findings, we could suggest that women's underprivileged social position increases the likelihood that they support ethnic-targeted EO measures compared to their men counterparts.

Not only gender, but also the discipline in which professors work is indicative of their support for EO measures. Professors from the social sciences and humanities differ significantly in their support for EO programs compared to STEM-professors. As previously discussed, perceptions of equality depend on the socialization of academics within disciplinary fields. Within STEM, the emphasis on merit is more significant than in non-STEM disciplines (García-González et al., 2019; Handley et al., 2015). However, the role of disciplines disappears when introducing gender and racial attitudes. Having color- and/or gender-blind attitudes has a strong negative effect on the support for EO measures.

Besides individual factors, we also investigated one contextual factor. More particularly, we were interested in whether already implemented EO measures at universities may be positively associated with supporting new and other EO measures.

This is relevant to see if initial resistance diminishes as EO measures are slowly implemented. Having no measures implemented is negatively correlated with support for new EO measures. However, we found a similar relationship for differential EO measures compared to preferential programs. Increasing dissatisfaction with existing diversity policies, which in European HEI are mostly soft policies, could explain this particular finding (e.g. Bourabain & Verhaeghe, 2021). A final compelling finding is that the implemented EO measures did not have the same effect for ethnic-targeted and gender-targeted policies (additional analyses see Tables g and h in appendix). We see, for example, that mentoring is strongly associated with supporting new women-targeted EO measures, while this is the opposite for policies that target ethnic minorities. This is a critical contribution to the field of EO in higher education, as it shows that the acceptability of implementing EO measures depends on the target group. 'Diversity' policies that are popular in European HEI today and that encompass all underrepresented staff without differentia- tion may, therefore, be detrimental and inefficient.

For our final hypothesis, we were interested in possible differences between programs in terms of their meri- tocratic aim. Although we do not find stark differences between differential treatment programs and preferential treatments programs, strong differences emerge when we look at specific EO measures. Especially quota is strongly disliked by about half of the professors compared to general diversity policies. What is innovative about the results goes beyond the difference in meritocratic expectations. The differences between voluntary and mandatory bias training reveal an important nuance. Although they have exactly the same goal of reducing bias among faculty, we see that the support for mandatory bias training is lower than if it were voluntary. These results yield that not only is there a difference between differential and preferential treatment programs, but that the expected commitment that goes with it influences their support. Consistent with scholars (e.g. Ahmed, 2012) who point to resistance at the highest levels of the university, future research should more closely examine the ways in which EO programs are presented to faculty.

This research is the first to explore the support for EO programs at European HEI institutions. Our realized sample size was too small at the level of individual countries to allow cross-national comparisons. Therefore, future research is required to study country-specific variation. Although Pettigrew indicates how prejudices can be generalized across a variety of geographic locations and target-groups, it would be of great relevance to examine the role of national cultures in terms of meritocratic ideals, women-friendly

values, and attitudes toward migrants/ethnic minorities. In addition, we asked respondents to rate their support for policies toward ethnic minority staff, which we distinguished from international staff. We, however, recognize that international staff experience barriers in European higher education due to language, academic affiliation, and prestige, among other factors (Bilecen & Van Mol, 2017; Morley et al., 2018). It is, therefore, of interest to also study the support for EO measures for international staff to avoid invisibilizing the role of nationality as a potential driver of discrimination. Furthermore, about half of our respondents had a managerial role with decision-making power to support an equitable work environment at their institution. Quantitative research should be complemented with qualitative research to understand the possible 'unwillingness' of management in enhancing an inclusive climate (Ahmed, 2012). This would provide a better understanding of their perceptions of equality at HEI and create opportunities to better engage with transformative policy.