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Themed Section: Do Ideas Matter in Gender Equality Policy in Practice? An International Perspective

EDITORIAL

The practice of ideas in gender equality policy: comparative lessons from the field

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This thematic section seeks to contribute to emerging research on gender and policy that combines post-adoption and ideational approaches to address how and why ideas matter in gender equality policy implementation. In this article, the two research streams are first discussed. Next, the potential ingredients for gender transformation from current research are presented and then examined in the cases of post-adoption in Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, France and the Council of Europe in the four contributions to the thematic section. The concluding comparative assessment confirms what research has already found: the interplay between actors, ideas and institutions is crucial. Who comes forward and the ideas and political meanings those actors advance are what ultimately matter, dictated in certain policy sectors by the institutional micro-foundations of that domain. The article ends with the lessons learned from, and next steps that come out of, this thematic section.

Key words post-adoption • policy implementation • gender-transformative outcome • policy evaluation • critical frame analysis • gender equality policy in practice • path dependency

Key messages

- The interplay between ideas, actors and institutions matters in the post-adoption of successful gender equality policies.
- Combining critical frame analysis and the gender equality policy in practice approach is useful to understand the politics of post-adoption and the impact of gender equality policies.
- Processes of implementation and evaluation must both be studied to understand gender equality policies.
- Feminist mobilisation and gender equality machineries are crucial in achieving more gender-transformative policy outcomes.

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Introduction

This thematic section contributes to the convergence of two analytical strands in the field of gender and policy studies: a focus on ideas in the processes leading up to formal policy decisions; and the recent shift to what follows, that is, the implementation and evaluation of government action and its impact on gender equality. Its ultimate goal is to further develop what has been identified as 'the elusive recipe for successful gender equality policy' (Engeli and Mazur, 2018: 112). Drawing on four empirical analyses of highly complex and quite political 'post-adoption' policy processes in Spain, the UK, the Netherlands/France and the Council of Europe, this thematic section examines the following research question: how, why and to what end do ideas matter in the implementation, evaluation and outcomes of gender policies and their eventual pursuit of gender equality? Put simply, do ideas matter in the practice of policy?

Research that focuses on ideas places the analytical puzzle of how policy issues are framed and defined by actors at the centre of understanding how gender equality policy can be pursued, promoted and undermined. While the particular term used has varied – for example, 'problem definition' (Bacchi, 1999), 'frames' (Verloo, 2007), 'discourse' (Sauer, 2010), '*référentiels*' (Muller, 1990), 'paradigms' (Jenson, 1989) and 'narratives' (Lowndes, 2020) – a range of gender and policy scholars from different epistemological approaches and disciplinary vantage points have agreed that 'ideas matter' in the pursuit of the complex goals of gender equality.

In the mid-2000s, gender and policy researchers increasingly turned their attention to the post-adoption stages, asking the tough question of whether formal policy statements are put into action with meaningful outcomes for gender equality. In this turn towards policy implementation (Mazur, 2017), the complex unfolding of policy after its adoption is seen as an arena for struggle over the meaning of gender equality, which is 'not only debated during agenda-setting and decision making … [but] is also negotiated, adapted and contested in the practice of policy implementation' (Mazur and Engeli, 2020: 5).

This observation is echoed in one of the major lessons from the body of research on gender and policy studies more broadly speaking, where, according to Lombardo and Meier (2022: 102), gender equality policies are understood as a 'codification of power relations': 'gender equality policies fix particular interpretations of gender relations, defining what meaning gender equality should take and which gender roles are legitimate'.

For both ideational and post-adoption scholars, therefore, the way in which policies are framed and actors and groups come forward to participate and influence policy through 'policy empowerment' (Krizsán and Lombardo, 2013) is critical to achieving any 'transformative' potential of formal policies. The emerging policy implementation research argues that transformation can only be achieved in policy outcomes when government action actually promotes gender equality *and* breaks patterns of gender bias in the system produced by 'institutional micro foundations' (Lowndes, 2020) and 'gendered logics of appropriateness' (Chappell, 2006).

Researchers have only just begun to focus on the complex implementation puzzle in gender equality policy in terms of the struggle over meaning and frames. Much work needs to be done in identifying to what extent, how and why the framing of meaning and narratives about gender by actors and institutions in the actual practice of policy at the 'street level' (Lipsky, 1980) and front lines affects efforts to achieve

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gender equality and transformative outcomes. This thematic section seeks to move forward this emerging research agenda through bringing together two specific approaches from each of the streams – critical frame analysis (CFA) and the gender equality policy in practice (GEPP) approach – and five policy scholars to apply these two approaches in the analysis of specific instances of post-adoption. Table 1 presents the five cases covered by the thematic section's four articles.[1]

Together, the four contributions provide a rich comparative empirical laboratory for addressing how and why ideas matter in policy implementation. They outline policy processes unfolding over similar time periods, in different national contexts, at different levels of government and in different sectors (gender-based violence, prisons and welfare/social policy), as well as policies that target gender equality and those that do not. As this article shows in the closing comparative assessment, the findings from the four articles confirm what gender policy research has already found: the interplay between actors, ideas and institutions is crucial. Who comes forward and the ideas and political meanings those actors advance are what ultimately matter, dictated in certain policy sectors by the institutional micro-foundations/gendered logics of appropriateness of that domain. Given that the contributors were asked to engage with the two different approaches, this article also provides methodological insight into how to pursue the emerging research agenda of ideas in policy practice.

In the rest of this article, the first two parts take a closer look at the origins and development of the post-adoption and ideational streams, as well as the specific approaches from each stream used by the four contributors. In the following part, the ingredients found to be important in the 'elusive recipe of gender equality policy' by current research on implementation are presented. Next, the five empirical cases from the field are summarised in terms of the GEPP and CFA approaches, as well as these potential ingredients. The article ends with the larger theoretical, methodological and practical lessons drawn from the thematic section, as well as an agenda for future research.

The turn towards post-adoption and the GEPP approach

Until the 1970s, public policy literature largely overlooked what happened in post-adoption phases, assuming that the implementation of designed public policies was mainly an automatic and technical endeavour, with no political implications. In this purview, implementation is supposed to occur when policymakers have already adopted a set of solutions to the issues that have successfully made it on to the public policy agenda. Since the 1970s, reflecting the pessimism generated by the economic

Table 1: Cases of policy implementation covered in the thematic section

National-level policies in action
Case 1: Prison reform in gender equality plans in Spain (2008–14)*
Case 2: Welfare reform – Universal Credit in the UK (2012)
Case 3a: Never minimise street violence campaign (Paris) (2018)*
Case 3b: Street harassment not OK campaign (Amsterdam) (2017)
International-level policies in action
Case 4: Council of Europe Istanbul Convention (2011)*

Notes: Dates indicate when each policy decision was adopted.
* The content of the original policy explicitly targets gender equality.

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crisis, implementation scholars started to question the assumptions of such a rationally ordered and well-organised policymaking process. Indeed, the interaction between different policy phases means that policymaking continues into implementation and subsequent phases (Hill and Hupe, 2009: 8). Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) study is widely cited as the starting point for a distinct approach to implementation studies.

Since then, the phases of putting into action public policy became increasingly seen as a complex and political phenomenon, during which 'much can go wrong' (Hill and Hupe, 2009: 7), and hence as key for understanding policy ineffectiveness, as well as the disconnect between policy outcomes and expectations. This second generation of studies conceptualised implementation as a non-linear, bottom-up, messy and even impossibly imperfect process, relying principally on the actions and agency of implementing actors, often in different parts of an organisation, engaging in ongoing processes of negotiation, policy mediation and modification (Lipsky, 1980; Barrett and Fudge, 1981). A third generation emerged, synthesising analytical frameworks and utilising more complex and scientifically rigorous research designs and methods (Saertren, 2014). All of this work on policy implementation, however, blatantly ignored issues of gender despite the emergence and institutionalisation of gender policy studies starting in the 1990s (Mazur, 2017).

The 'turn towards gender policy implementation' in the 2000s was a reaction to the challenges of the implementation of a gender-mainstreaming approach in policy (see, among others, Mazey, 2002; Rees, 2005) and growing concern about whether the relatively new policies that explicitly promoted gender equality actually make a difference in men's and women's lives on the ground (Mazur, 2017). Much of this new feminist research also lamented the gender silence of 'malestream' policy implementation studies.

Today, for both gender and non-gender scholars alike, while there remains no overarching formula for successful policy implementation, it is widely recognised as an inherently political, complex and dynamic process, and as key to determining the effectiveness of any given policy. Implementation, thus, involves multiple, interacting actors, or networks of actors, who may or may not have been present in the (pre-) adoption stages, with diverse competencies, ideas and competing interests and preferences. These actors, who may be in favour of the change the policy seeks to make or opposed to it, operate in institutions with specific organisational arrangements and legacies, within multi-level contemporary political and economic contexts (Carey et al, 2019), as well as the 'institutional micro-foundations' and informal institutions at the 'street level' that often block transformative policies (Waylen, 2017; Lowndes, 2020; Gaines and Lowndes, 2022).

The shift to post-adoption includes all of the complex processes of policy implementation and administration, including the processes of evaluating policies. Policy evaluation creates reality (Dahler-Larsen, 2011), as what gets evaluated and measured is what gets valued. Policies and ideas are shaped through the criteria used for evaluation, and also through when, how and for what goals policies are evaluated. Therefore, meta-evaluation – the assessment of the processes of evaluation – is an especially illustrative methodology for studying how ideas shape policies. This new 'program theory' (Weiss, 1998) approach, often using discursive CFA, focuses on the empirical use of 'theories of change' by the actors themselves. Minto et al (2020) show that the formal evaluation of gender equality policies tends to be a product of the particular frames of the evaluators in charge, which are often gender biased.

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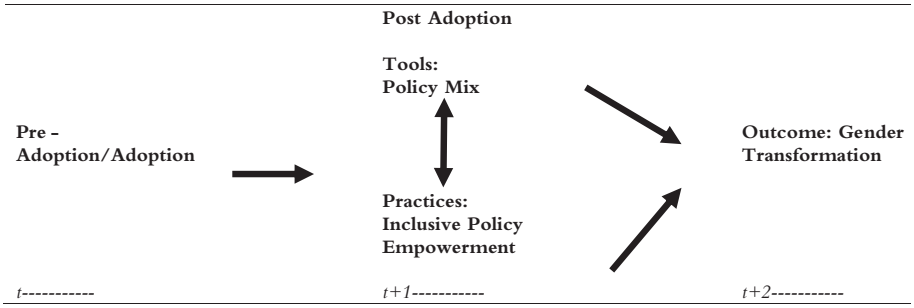
Thus, in the study of the key post-adoption process of evaluation, ideas and their analysis are a crucial object of analysis.

The GEPP approach – first elaborated by Engeli and Mazur (2018) and then applied by researchers in national case analyses that comparatively studied care policies (Ciccia and Lombardo, 2019), political representation (Lange et al, 2023), corporate gender equality (Engeli and Mazur, 2022) and five different policy sectors in France (Mazur and Engeli, 2020) – provides a roadmap for researchers to study the micro-politics of post-adoption. As the GEPP framework presented in Figure 1 indicates, the actual tools that are used by implementation actors that come out of a given formal policy decision produced in the pre-adoption and adoption stages tend to be a mix of instruments, and the 'practice' of policy implementation and evaluation (Montoya, 2013) is what is actually done. This dynamic process necessarily occurs over time, launched and starting from the 'pre-adoption/adoption' processes – agenda-setting, problem definition and policy adoption – that produce a formal policy decision.

When the *practice* of post-adoption is identified, this means policies have gone beyond a 'symbolic reform' (Mazur, 1995). Then, the fate of the policy put into action is open to the complex struggle over meaning and content of gender equality by state and society stakeholders involved in, and/or emerging from, the process. On the one hand, the approach/frames of the implementing and evaluation actors dictate what happens. On the other, when non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives, gender equality experts and other advocates for gender equality get involved in implementation, either formally as stakeholders or by coming forward to protect women's interests, policy implementation can be more effective and successful in terms of promoting gender equality goals. 'Inclusive policy empowerment' (Engeli and Mazur, 2018) – both descriptive and substantive – is an important part of successful implementation. The ability of the actors who come to speak for and include the full intersectional range of gender interests in these complex policy processes is an essential ingredient for policy success. The GEPP approach also asks researchers to identify three different levels of outcomes, both direct ('Was the problem solved?') and indirect ('Did the frames of the policy implementors change in the process of implementation to take on board gender equality?' and 'Did societal attitudes change with regards to that particular policy area?'). With these three levels of outcomes, the overall measurement of outcomes is made in terms of the extent of 'gender transformation' achieved, with four potential

Figure 1: The GEPP framework



Note: *t* = time.
Source: Engeli and Mazur (2018).

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outcomes: 'gender rowback', 'gender neutral', 'gender accommodation' and 'simple or complex gender transformation'. Thus, the GEPP framework fully embraces the lessons from ideational research on policy and applies them systematically in the analysis of post-adoption.

Ideational research and CFA

Frames, discourses and ideas, and their role in public policies, started to capture the interest of policy scholars outside of any feminist purview in the early 1980s, starting with Majone's understanding of public policies as a set of discourses and arguments beyond objectives, decisions and actions. Rather than rational approaches to problem solving, he argues that the policy process should be seen in terms of argumentation and intersubjective interpretation, where ideas and how they are represented by policy analysts and other actors shape that process (Majone, 1978; 1989). This focus on language, discourses and arguments was the starting point of the 'argumentative turn' in policy analysis, which conceptualises policymaking as a constant discursive struggle over argumentation, as well as the framing of problems and ideas that guide the creation of meanings (Stone, 1988; Fischer and Forester, 1993). Similar to the shifts in the malestream approaches to policy implementation, this early research was also completely gender-blind.

Gender and policy researchers also highlighted the importance of discursive politics in exploring processes of continuous contestation and attribution of meanings to political concepts like gender equality (Bacchi, 1999; Ferree et al, 2002; Kantola, 2006; Verloo, 2007). As these researchers showed, the definition and representation of gender equality is particularly contested and questioned because it is a concept whose meaning is discursively constructed in political disputes among different actors, replete with gendered power imbalances. As Lombardo, Meier and Verloo (2009: 3) assert, the meaning of gender equality can be 'stretched', 'shrunk' or 'bent' in different directions, and gender equality can be filled with a variety of meanings that arise from different political histories, contexts, struggles and debates. That is to say, gender equality is a concept open to interpretation and contestation by different actors. Scholarly disappointment with the implementation of gender-mainstreaming policies across Europe was at the heart of an interest in the ways in which 'gender equality' was conceptualised and understood – the central focus of the Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Europe (MAGEEQ) (2003–05) and Quality in Gender Equality Policies (QUING) (2006–11) comparative research projects. Developing and using a CFA approach, these projects found gender equality to be represented, that is, 'framed', in diverse ways in policy discourse across European nations. The classic example is that Dutch policy conceives prostitution as regular paid work, while in Sweden, it is a crime (Outshoorn, 2004).

Frames themselves have also been the analytical focus due to the normative meaning that they express about issues (Bacchi, 1999; Verloo, 2007; Lombardo et al, 2009). Here, frames are seen not only as intentional, conscious efforts to alter the perception of policy problems and to influence preferences, but also as unintentional, driven by deep cultural and institutional meanings, which affects the extent to which policy actors can step outside existing hegemonic discourses and intentionally shape frames to strategically achieve a certain goal (Bacchi, 2009). The MAGEEQ and QUING

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projects placed this institutional dynamic at the centre of their research agenda, that is, how gender policies change in their framing and representation of what gender inequality is and of the strategies regarding how to 'solve it'. In this discursive arena, the way to break hegemonic discourses is through alternative frames that sneak in and may take less or more time to prevail.

Discursive approaches have also drawn on social movement research (Snow et al, 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988; 1992; Ferree et al, 2002) to map how social movement actors mobilise followers to their cause and discourage opponents. Here, strategic framing is seen when actors intentionally intervene to 'consciously' and 'strategically' shape reality in an intended direction (McAdam et al, 1996: 6). Research on gender equality mechanisms applies this strategic framing as well; both the machineries and gender movements develop their own strategic frames and form alliances based on those frames to achieve their objectives through 'state feminism' (McBride and Mazur, 2010).

Given that the starting point of MAGEEQ and QUING was that gender equality is a dynamic, contested concept that takes on different meanings in different spatiotemporal contexts (Dombos et al, 2012), the CFA methodology enables researchers to make the interpretative and normative content of policy documents – four types in the project – more explicit by identifying such dimensions as the diagnosis of the problem, the proposed solutions, the roles assigned to the actors, the gender and intersectional dimensions of texts, and the norms and mechanisms involved in the construction of a particular policy issue (Verloo, 2007). A policy frame on gender equality is defined as a configuration of positions on the dimensions of *diagnosis* (What is the problem?) and *prognosis* (What is the solution?), including positions on voice and roles (whose voices are present and which roles they play), and role attribution (who has responsibility for causing the problem, who the problem holders are, who should [or not] do what and who is acted upon). The methodology includes a guide for selecting the texts to analyse through the construction of a timeline around the issue under research (Verloo, 2005; 2007; Dombos et al, 2012) and is thus quite similar to the temporal process-tracing approach of GEPP.

Although CFA stemmed from the difficulties of gender-mainstreaming implementation, the analysis applied in the MAGEEQ and QUING projects covered mostly pre-adoption phases, despite a great potential to allow for the analysis of the same discursive processes in post-adoption. Still, scholars that use CFA have been aware of the highly complex and political nature of the processes of post-adoption. As Verloo (2005: 18) stated as early as 2005:

> unlike other approaches, frame analysis starts from the assumption of multiple interpretations in policymaking, and addresses problems of dominance and exclusion connected to policymaking. Implementation of policies is seen as a political process, subject to all mechanisms of political processes. Under conditions of multilevel governance, implementation is a complex process of transfer and translation: unitary concepts or frames, as presented in political decisions and policies at (sub) national and supranational levels contrast with a dynamic reality of multiple frames at national levels.

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The potential ingredients for policy success and gender transformation

Empirically rich comparative and qualitative research on gender policy has begun the tough task of tracing the complex post-adoption processes, how ideas and frames affect policy outcome, and what the potential list of ingredients are that lead to policy success and gender transformation. Five major propositions in this emerging research are raised in this section, examined in the cases analyses and returned to in the comparative case assessment in the conclusion.

Connections between actors, institutions and ideas

First and foremost, taking lessons from feminist institutionalists and discourse analysis, ideas about gender equality are forwarded during implementation by individual actors that operate within a certain set of informal and formal rules – 'institutional micro-foundations' (Waylen, 2017; Lowndes, 2020; Gains and Lowndes, 2022). In policy implementation, gatekeepers and implementers may hang on to established gender norms and block the transformative potential of policies in large part due to the absence of significant pressure or incentives to change their views. For example, in the implementation of policies that target gender equality on corporate boards, business gatekeepers have clung on to dominant gender norms due to the absence of strong feminist voices to promote gender equality in business (Engeli and Mazur, 2022). Implementers can be more supportive of change in standard gender norms, as in the case of police governance and gender-based violence at the local level in the UK, where 'motivated, knowledgeable and reflexive actors facilitated gender policy change' (Gains and Lowndes, 2022: 394). In the case of promoting intersectional approaches in Madrid City Council, La Barbera et al (2022) show that the different interpretations and multiple meanings of intersectionality are an obstacle to its effective implementation. In addition, the UniSAFE project has developed a framework based on the combination of ideas, actors and institutions for studying the implementation of institutional responses to gender-based violence and sexual harassment by universities and research centres in a range of countries.[2] In the study's analytical framework, based on Lombardo and Bustelo's (2022) work, the three components are intertwined, with ideas cutting across the other two. Ideas are held by actors and diffused through institutions, especially informal norms, as feminist institutionalists have pointed out (see, for example, Waylen, 2017).

Resistance

Studies have also focused explicitly on resistance to gender change as an object of study given the degree to which the hegemonic practices, norms or values of an institution are directly challenged by gender equality actions and efforts to mainstream gender into organisations (Benschop and Verloo, 2006; Mergaert and Lombardo, 2014). Resistance is defined as 'a form of opposition or refusal that emerges during processes of change … that is aimed at maintaining the status quo and opposing change' (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013: 299). Resistance can be individual or institutional, implicit or explicit, and specific to gender or not, and it can take a variety of different forms (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013; FESTA, 2016). Resistance

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can also generate counter-resistances by gender equality actors in the post-adoption process of a given policy that has the potential to lead to improved outcomes for gender equality (Tildesley et al, 2021).

Intersectional issues

Gender, policy and politics scholars (Mügge and Montoya, 2018; Lombardo and Meier, 2022) have been resolute in highlighting the need to study and account for the complex intersections between gender, sexual identity/orientation, class, race, ethnicity and other vectors of inequality. As research has shown, women are not a monolithic group; rather, their interests and mobilisation are driven by who they are and where they are in society. For the study of ideas and post-adoption, this means that researchers must be on the lookout for all of the different groups and actors who speak for women in framing and inclusive policy empowerment in implementation and evaluation practice.

Similarly, it is just as important to determine which group interests are being addressed in the content, practice and outcomes of policy implementation. Indeed, for the GEPP approach, 'complex gender transformation' can only be achieved if implementer and evaluator frames and public attitudes reflect improvement for all groups of women and not just women elites. Thus far, while there is movement towards policy outcomes that reach the level of complex gender transformation in the pursuit of corporate gender equality and in the five different sectors of policy implementation in France (Mazur and Engeli, 2020), only simple gender transformation has been achieved in a limited number of instances, for example, in the implementation of gender quotas in the upper civil service in France, and in Norway, in the implementation of corporate board policy (Engeli and Mazur, 2022). In France, white male upper-level civil servants changed their frames about dominant gender norms to implement a punitive policy on quotas that focused primarily on upper-class elite woman – the same target of corporate board gender equality across the 17 countries analysed (Jacquemart et al, 2020).

Sectoral trends

Comparative gender equality policy research has shown that patterns in policy success and failures often correspond with specific policy sectors more so than country settings, with some arenas having a 'gendered logic of appropriateness' (Chappell, 2006) that can block gender equality more than others. Htun and Weldon's (2018) global study of gender equality policies, for example, shows that different types of policies bring forward different dynamics and different constellations of state and society actors.

Implementation policy research more generally suggests the salience of sectoral dynamics and path dependencies for some, but not all, cases. In the comparative study of corporate board equality policy, there was an across-the-board resistance to gender norm transformation in corporate board gender equality and the absence of any regional patterns in implementation success and failure. Research on implementation policy in France shows some sectoral differences as well. LeDoux and Dussuet (2020) specifically show the trend towards gender-blind framing in the area of the financing of eldercare policy at the national and local levels, with only a slight gendering of

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statistics about eldercare – a highly gendered issue – at the national level and the absence of any feminist voices or actors at both the national and departmental levels for the introduction of change, despite the presence of women's policy agencies at the national, regional, departmental and even municipal levels. This reflects more general findings that the social and family policy arenas are particularly prone to resistance to gender norm change and closed to feminist influence (Daley, 2020) – a trend echoed in the case of the implementation of unemployment benefits in the UK by Richards-Gray (2023) in the thematic section. The cases included in this thematic section, with their coverage of three different policy areas – gender-based violence, welfare policy and prisons – in four different countries, allow for a closer examination of the saliency of sectoral trends for the effective pursuit of gender equality.

Multi-level issues

By definition, implementation politics is a multi-level affair. National-level policies are implemented at the national, regional and local levels through 'street-level bureaucrats', including, for instance, police, social workers and employees of battered women shelters. Policies that focus on law enforcement involve the court system at different jurisdictional levels and a whole different set of actors. Multi-level issues come into play when looking at federal systems, for example, childcare policy in Canada (Grace, 2011), or intersectionality when looking at the implementation of international/supranational policies at the national and subnational levels (La Barbera et al, 2022). Zwingel (2016) and others have also shown that the transposition of gender norms from the international to the national level is highly complex and driven by quite different factors than national-level policies. The contributions to this thematic section furnish an opportunity to assess the importance of multi-level politics from the international, to the national, to the subnational level, for example: in a federal system through feminist penal policy in Spain; in the context of the implementation of national-level policy in more local arenas in unemployment benefits in the UK; even more locally in the anti-street harassment campaigns in Paris and Amsterdam; and, finally, from the international to the national and subnational levels in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

Do ideas matter? Findings from the field

Prison reform in gender equality plans in federalised Spain (2008–14)

Conducting a CFA for three gender equality plans that included measures on promoting gender equality, Ballesteros-Pena and Bustelo (2023) identify four frames that had little to do with gender equality. In the qualitative analysis of three different programmes in three state-level prisons, including a CFA of key policy documents and of interviews conducted with prison authorities and practitioners, the authors find *a remarkable continuity in the highly non-feminist policy frames and the closed process that produced those frames*. Whereas the Parliamentary Committee of Women's Rights and Equality under the socialist government was the first actor to place women's rights in prison on the agenda, it was the General Secretariat of the Penitentiary Institutions that oversaw the discussion, elaboration and adoption of the gender equality measures for all subsequent policy discussions at the national level, including evaluation.

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Women's NGOs neither were invited in, nor came forward to participate, and the Women's Institute also remained absent from any policy deliberations. Although a technical commission was supposed to evaluate the implementation of the various programmes set up by the measures in the equality plans, the authors found that no formal evaluations were conducted – a sign of the overall lack of interest in the policy. The commission also recommended that programmes should be developed for women migrants, drug users and Roma women, but they were never carried out. Due to a closed and non-porous setting, where only a few actors could actually participate in policy implementation and with virtually no input from feminist policy actors inside and outside of the state, this same fixed symbolic dynamic and gender-biased framing continued through the life of these policies and trickled down to the state prison level, arguably getting even worse, thus warranting the authors' assessment of *gender-neutral* outcomes, if not *gender accommodation*.

Welfare reform – Universal Credit in the UK (2012)

Examining a social policy that is outside of an explicit gender equality purview, Richards-Gray conducts CFA of parliamentary debates, focus group interviews with local practitioners (2023) and recipients, and evaluation documents to show that the highly gender-biased 'workless' frame first introduced in the 1990s drove the implementation, evaluation and outcomes of Universal Credit (UC). UC had been introduced by a Conservative government in 2012 in a comprehensive welfare reform to streamline unemployment benefits. The frame of gender-blind worklessness was forwarded by the Conservative Party based on research findings which supported that position. Worklessness was meant to replace the notion of unemployment and implied that people chose to be unemployed by not working. Thus, unemployment benefits were retooled into UC – a monthly payment given to registered claimants by households, rather than individuals, linked to job seeking and pay for work.

British feminist researchers, as Richards-Gray asserts, had shown the devastating effect of the workless frame and UC on women, which went counter to the dual-breadwinner model on which it had been seated by privileging, for example, households where women stayed home and men worked. In addition, the workless frame and its implementation in UC did not count caring obligations as a part of what was considered work, which was particularly damaging to lone mothers. This outcome of *gender rowback* was a product of the highly gender-blind nature of the workless frame, which made no mention of the actual sex, family roles or gender division of labour in the home in any of the formal policy discussions or documents. No women's movement actors or women's commission from the Labour Party came forward in gender discussions around implementation or evaluation either. To be sure, some women-friendly actors and NGOs did mobilise around efforts to help women claimants who were clearly suffering at the local level, but little effort was made to challenge the frame of worklessness, which makes it difficult to address the structural problems of the original policy for gender equality.

The divergent approaches to street harassment campaigns in Paris and Amsterdam

Dekker (2023) studies the same type of anti-street harassment campaign rolled out in the capitals of France and the Netherlands during 2017–18, based on apprehension

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about stereotyping men of colour, with highly divergent approaches to the problem of street harassment. The Paris-based 'never minimise street harassment' campaign was framed in terms of an effort to reduce violence against women, spearheaded by the national Women's Rights Ministry from the early 2000s. The actors who designed and implemented the campaign – posters throughout Paris, including public transit – were in a coalition of mostly feminist actors from the national ministry, the city council and the active women's shelter movement in France. The shelter movement had received funding from the Women's Rights Ministry over the years from governments of both the Right and the Left. One notable non-feminist actor participated: SOS Racisme – a civil rights group for minority ethnic groups in France. The aim of the campaign was to increase public awareness about the serious nature of street harassment, which was framed in terms of the mostly male perpetrators and primarily women victims, and intended to promote more citizen involvement in preventing street harassment. The 'perpetrators' were portrayed as sharks and the victims were women. As Dekker explains, this use of an animal instead of a human reflected the concern to avoid ethnic stereotyping. This approach was reflected in a series of anti-street harassment campaigns across the country, as well as videos put out by the Women's Ministry.

The 'Street Harassment. Not OK' campaign in Amsterdam, spearheaded by a coalition of local groups, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) advocates, made no mention of violence against women. In fact, researchers recommended downplaying the fact that 80 per cent of street harassment happened to women so as not to give ideas to young men. Neither victims nor perpetrators were highlighted in the discussions around the campaign either. Rather, the target audience was primarily young men, both gay and straight. The campaign was uniquely online and a popular website for teens was used to distribute it. Dekker asserts that concern over stigmatising men of colour was expressed through the 'soft approach' of the campaign. Its aim was to initiate a discussion about appropriate behaviour and acceptable boundaries, not to make moral judgements, in contrast to the 'hard approach' of the French campaigns, which took a more punitive approach, without any reference to LGBTQI issues.

The highly divergent approaches of the two campaigns were due, in part, to the absence of gender equality machinery in the Netherlands (which had been dismantled), a weak women's movement and the progressive defunding of women's movements by right-wing governments, which was the opposite in France. Thus, more than the policy subsystem being closed to feminist actors and voices that spoke for women in the Netherlands, there were *no significant feminist actors to come forward*.

Setting the research agenda for studying the implementation of the Istanbul Convention

Giesen's (2023) extension of CFA with a discourse network analysis of the adoption of Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence brings the arena for studying ideas and implementation to a different type of multi-level setting through the implementation of international policy in European Union member states. He unpacks the elaboration of the convention by examining the frames forwarded by the various actors within the Council of Europe, including the European Justice Minister Conference, the European Committee of Crime Problems, the European Committee on Legal

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Cooperation, the Intergovernmental Committee on Equality between Men and Women, the Parliamentary Assembly, and the task forces of NGOs that emerged early in the campaign. While non-gendered frames were forwarded, the more feminist and gender equality frames clearly prevailed, reflecting the influence of the explicitly feminist actors over the actors that supported a criminal-law frame.

Experts, practitioners and observers agree that the Istanbul Convention takes a quite feminist approach to fighting violence against women, including chapters on monitoring and reporting, as well as a section on defining the complex and controversial concept of gender. While the story of the adoption of the Istanbul Convention was one of feminist success, the messiness of the national- and local-level ratification and implementation had the potential to undermine the convention's feminist goals. Krizsán and Roggeband (2021), for example, show the significant pushback in Central and Eastern Europe, specifically in Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia, providing fuel for the anti-gender movement. Most recently, Turkey, the host country for the signing of the convention and the first state to sign, withdrew from the convention in 2020.

Giesen suggests a way forward for studying implementation at the national member-state level through a focus on the domestic participants in the various Council of Europe committees that participated in elaboration, including three different – but all important – 'routes' through parliament: the ministerial and administrative committees and the NGO-based ad hoc group. Researchers should follow the actors who participated at the Council of Europe level back to their home countries to see if and how they contributed to framing discussions around implementing and complying with the reporting and monitoring processes of the original convention. Their frames would then come out of not only their institutional positions in their own countries, but also what they did at the Council of Europe level in the elaboration process. As Giesen (2023: 13) states: 'Institutional actors can be active on both levels or might be influenced by existing framing discourse to translate and apply policies in their respective field of work.'

Conclusions: Lessons learned and steps forward

Taken together, the empirical case analyses suggest some interesting lessons about what, how, why and to what end ideas matter in post-adoption. Above all, it is clear that there is no one-size-fits-all pattern for how and why ideas matter across the cases, with local-level complexity and variation by both country and sector. Despite this complexity, given the range of policy cases under study here – by country, sector and level – these lessons can serve as solid foundations for future studies and policy action.

Together, the cases show the importance of the *interplay between actors, institutions and ideas*. In different complex and nuanced ways, the findings from the field show how important the presence of feminist actors is for framing and channelling transformative change. In the Spain and UK cases, where practice and outcomes were observed, the frames remained unchanged throughout the process – due to the *institutional micro-foundations of the policy sector* – which translated into disappointing outcomes for gender equality and women's rights. Even in Spain, where there were significant feminist actors in both the state and society, the gender-biased path dependency prevailed due to the closed nature of the subsystem and the lack of feminist interest

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in prison issues. The two cases also indicate that frames can remain fixed in both gender equality policies and non-gendered policies.

More than the *dominant frame from the sectoral arena*, in the case of anti-street harassment campaigns, the absence of feminist actors and groups was clearly what explained the gender-blind framing in the Netherlands and in Spain. In the Paris campaign, feminist actors were not only present, unlike in Spain, but also highly active in the campaign, linking street harassment to violence against women. Thus, feminist actors must be present and be able to enter the implementation arena.

When actors who gain access to post-adoption speak for typically excluded groups, this enhances *inclusive policy empowerment*, often through an *intersectional* approach. In the case of the Parisian anti-harassment campaign, the issue of race was raised by the inclusion of SOS Racisme. Similarly in the Amsterdam campaign, some of the most active groups were focused on LGBTQI issues. In Spain too, despite the highly gender-blind frame, there was at least mention of the need for programmes for migrant and Roma women prisoners. An additional lesson to draw from these empirical analyses is that taking appropriate account of intersectionality is as much about recounting what is not said by the actors who come forward in post-adoption – the silences on race, ethnicity, sexual identity and so on – as what is actually said.

The contributions on the Istanbul Convention and Spanish feminist penal policy also show the importance of the frames of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) for laying the 'institutional micro-foundations' (Lowndes, 2020) for limited outcomes, especially with regards to unwritten 'informal norms' (Waylen, 2017). Giesen analyses the importance of country representatives and public administrators involved in the process of the transposition of the Istanbul Convention into national-level member-state norms. Ballesteros-Pena and Bustelo also highlight the importance of the essentialist interpretations of prison officials.

The salience of cultural contexts and belief systems operating in implementation and evaluation processes are especially illustrative in Dekker's comparative case analysis of street-level anti-harassment campaigns. Ideas do not matter in similar ways in the implementation of quite similar policies, suggesting that other contextual factors are more important than *sectoral dynamics*, at least for this policy arena. Similarly, *gendered logics of appropriateness* operated equally in two quite different policy sectors: the dictatorial path-dependent Spanish prison system and the gender-blind welfare sector in the UK.

Any continuity between frames in policy adoption and policy implementation is seriously reduced when *different policy or governmental levels* intervene in the implementation. For the Istanbul Convention, the feminist frames and content of the convention actually set off a backlash in Central and Eastern Europe and Turkey. Thus, frames are less sticky in multi-level settings that include an international or supranational level due to the complex nature of the transposition process and the importance of local-level contexts. As the research agenda for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention indicates, actors that bridge the international world from where the policy came and the domestic context need to be present to transmit feminist policies through what Keck and Sikkink (1998) and others have identified as the 'boomerang effect'.

In terms of *methodological lessons*, the ideational overlap between the GEPP and CFA approaches has proven to be quite analytically fruitful, providing for more focused discussion of how ideas matter in the nitty-gritty of street-level implementation

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and in producing transformative outcomes. The GEPP framework supplies a road map to trace the complex unfolding of the post-adoption process in relation to pre-adoption. It does this by asking researchers to unpack the mix of policy instruments used, implementation and evaluation, the empowerment of groups, and the outcomes in terms of gender transformation and solving policy problems. With the GEPP framework in mind, researchers who seek to conduct a CFA of official documents can better pinpoint which documents need to be examined in terms of the actual policy instruments identified for implementation and evaluation. Moreover, each case analysis provides a window into how to combine the two approaches. Ballesteros-Pena and Bustelo use CFA to analyse the content of both interviews and policy documents. Richards-Gray use the outputs from a different study, including interviews, surveys and focus groups, as source materials.

The *analytical double-burden of multi-level contexts* was clearly illustrated with authors needing to invest a great deal of time researching the frames and processes at all government levels where policies are made, implemented and evaluated. For policies coming out of international governing organisations like the Council of Europe, the European Union and the United Nations that are diffused to, and/or implemented in, member states, going first to that national and then to subnational levels, this research burden is particularly pronounced.

How to analyse *frames and practice in evaluation* as a separate process was also brought out in the Spanish and UK cases. The analysis of evaluation documents proved to be well suited for CFA. However, not all cases counted on evaluation processes and reports, so the focus was necessarily on the implementation phase, rather than on outcomes or effects as measured by policymakers. Certainly, while implementation processes are more than likely to occur in one way or another, evaluation does not always take place and is, thus, simply not available to assess. The importance of meta-evaluative analyses for studying ideas about *theories of change* and how success and failure are measured – what it is ultimately valued from a policy or intervention – is also highlighted in the empirical analyses.

Finally, this thematic section suggests more *practical lessons* for policy practitioners and advocates. It appears to be important to work with gender equality machineries at all levels of government in the effective pursuit of gender equality. Not only do these mechanisms often have the power and position to forward more feminist frames, but they also have the staffing capacity to offer training programmes for government officials to sensitise them to gender issues. The dissemination of gender expertise on, and education and training about, the complex issues of gender equality, for instance, when taking concrete intersectional approaches, is crucial, often preventing inadvertent frames that have gender-biased spillover effects from undermining efforts to pursue gender equality.

To close, future research can build from these findings in a variety of ways. The case analyses in this special issue need to be completed in terms of examining whether the policy implementation resulted in long-term gender-transformative outcomes. To do this, local-level data need to be obtained for more fine-grained analyses of both processes and outcomes. Gender and policy scholars should conduct more systematically the highly complex and time-consuming research on how ideas/frames/narratives are used by stakeholders and actors in specific instances of policy implementation and evaluation practice at the 'street level', as well as on the impact of those practices on gender equality at all of the multiple levels where those processes

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and outcomes take place. As all of the articles from this thematic section have shown, combining CFA and GEPP approaches provides a way to realise this crucial research agenda more effectively. This effort also needs to extend across the entire globe and to address the empirical gaps and silences regarding the Global South (Medie and Kang, 2018) – a focus this thematic section has unfortunately neglected. Intersectionality also needs to be placed at the centre of these analyses, rather than as an afterthought.

In the final analysis, this thematic section has suggested a way forward for the more systematic, yet fine-grained, study of ideas in post-adoption processes and outcomes. It has also contributed to developing the 'elusive recipe for successful gender equality policy' (Mazur and Engeli, 2020: 113) by homing in on a specific combination of 'ingredients' in the complex recipes for successful policy in practice. While the particular combination of ingredients is context specific and shifts from one case of policy implementation to another, the findings suggest a crucial anchor: the interconnections between institutions, actors and ideas. In doing so, this collection of articles has hopefully strengthened emerging empirically based comparative theory on the pursuit of gender equality through government action across the globe.

Notes

[1] Although Michael Giesen's article is a methodological essay on how to study the implementation of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention at the national level, it still provides important insight into the complex multi-level post-adoption processes of international/supranational policy directives at the national and subnational levels.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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