



Report on available gender equity and diversity resources

COST CCA Working Group 4

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Report on Available Gender Equity and Diversity Resources

COST CCA Working Group 4: Gender Equity and Fostering Diversity

In this document, we review the major analyses and tools available in the field of gender equality as an entry point towards greater understanding of the context of equity and diversity in research, and their impact in the career development of researchers. The aim of this document is to provide a review and brief analysis of some recently published and policy-driven texts, facilitating a roadmap for the transition towards an intersectional approach to the concept of equity in the research community.

1. INTRODUCTION: FROM GENDER EQUALITY TO EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

An initial consideration of this report is the switch from the concept of “gender equality” towards more elaborate and encompassing terms of “equity” and “diversity”. This is based on the recognition that gender equality and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are deeply interconnected concepts that reinforce and support each other. EDI is an umbrella framework that aims to create fair, inclusive and diverse environments. Gender equality is one of the foundational pillars of this framework, alongside ethnicity, skin colour, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background. Gender equality is not separate from EDI: it is a vital part of it.

In this introductory section, we draw the fundamental and transformative connections between the career development of early career researchers (ECRs) and the principles of equity, inclusion, diversity and intersectionality, by examining how attention to gender equality can illuminate the barriers to, and the opportunities for, career progression for researchers from under-privileged and under-represented backgrounds.

Career development in research depends heavily on access to funding, mentorship, networking and publishing opportunities. Because the implementation of efforts towards gender equality means ensuring that people of all genders have equal access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power, it also reveals how structural inequalities and systemic barriers create obstacles for other under-represented groups. For example, if women are under-represented in academic leadership due to biased promotion practices, similar mechanisms may be at play for ethnic minorities or people with disabilities.

The distinction between gender equality and **gender equity** involves recognising that different genders may face different barriers and will need more tailored support to overcome them. If gender equality means treating everyone the same, with the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities, gender equity is about fairness and justice in treatment, which may involve treating people differently to achieve equal outcomes. For the first, for example, we may focus on strengthening equal salaries, while for the second, additional support or resources may be given to women in male-dominated fields (such as mentorship programmes for women researchers in STEM). A focus on gender equity reveals how

addressing systemic barriers needs to be addressed in identity-specific ways if we are to achieve equality.

In the practice of promoting gender equality in research careers, the need for **intersectional thinking** becomes even more evident because not all women researchers experience inequality the same way. The approach of intersectionality recognizes that gender does not exist in isolation: it intersects with ethnicity, origin, class, sexuality, disability, etc., to shape unique experiences. For example, the experiences of a white woman researcher in science may differ significantly from those of a woman of colour or a woman living with disability. EDI frameworks that incorporate intersectionality are better equipped to address the nuanced challenges faced by individuals at these intersections. For example, a woman researcher from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background can be provided with specific support that recognises not just the gender element to her disadvantage but also her lack of ease in accessing academic networks.

A focus on gender equality normalises **inclusion** as a core value, acting as a way to shift institutional culture and facilitating efforts for inclusion across other under-represented groups. Inclusion ensures that all identities feel respected, valued, and able to contribute fully. This includes addressing microaggressions and harassment, using inclusive language and facilities, and fostering a culture of respect and allyship. Attention to inclusion means fostering environments where all researchers feel valued, respected, and able to contribute fully. Inclusive labs and institutions improve retention, collaboration, and mental well-being, which are crucial for ECRs to navigate the pressures of life in research.

In a similar vein, attention to **diversity** includes efforts to ensure representation of diverse identities across all levels of an organisation, enabling broader perspectives in decision-making, with greater creativity, relevance and impact in research output. Support for a diverse pool of ECRs helps correct historical imbalances in academia, and ensures that research reflects the needs of a broader society. Diverse representation in early career stages is essential for building a more equitable academic pipeline.

Finally, the progress made in gender equality (such as through quotas, mentorship programmes, policy reform) offers strategies and tools that may be adaptable to support equity, inclusion and diversity in other areas.

To conclude, this introductory section highlights how the evolution from gender equality towards equity, diversity, and inclusion creates a more comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing barriers in research careers. Building on these conceptual foundations, the next section reviews key EU policy documents and guidelines that address the position of minorities and disadvantaged groups within the European Research Area. The aim is to summarise the main insights they provide, compare their recommendations, identify existing gaps, and formulate evidence-based proposals for advancing equity in research.

2. REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF UN AND EU DOCUMENTS AND TOOLS FOR FOSTERING GENDER EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

This first section provides a review of key documents and tools with the potential to influence the career development of young researchers, many of which focus on gender equality.

2.1. Evidence-based Texts

Two central documents compiled by UN and EU institutions provide an overview of the current situation with regard to gender disparity in research careers.

2.1.1. THE GENDER GAP IN SCIENCE: STATUS AND TRENDS

Source: UNESCO, February 2024

Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388805.locale=en>

This global report provides a comprehensive overview of the gender gap in science, covering 130 countries, with data stretching from 2012 to 2021. It underscores that women represent only around one-third of the global research workforce, with marginal improvements in representation over the past decade.

2.1.1.1. Key findings

- Under-representation of women in research:
 - As of 2021, women account for 31.7% of researchers globally.
- High regional variation:
 - Women are over-represented in the research workforce in Guatemala (62.8%) and Myanmar (75.1%), but extremely low in Chad (3.4%) and Japan (17.8%).
- East/West distinctions in Europe:
 - On average, Eastern Europe (38.7%) performs better than Western Europe (33.9%) in terms of representation of women in the research community.
 - The gender gap is particularly stark in countries like the Czech Republic (27.1%), Hungary (29.3%), and Germany (29.4%).
- Improvements are marginal and slow to take place:
 - In the period under review, in Central and Eastern Europe the representation of women researchers dropped from 40.5% to 38.7%, a drop of 1.8% counterbalanced by a rise in Western Europe of 2.1% (from 31.8% to 33.9%).

2.1.1.2. Challenges

- Limited availability and use of national data in policymaking.

- Lack of systematic gender-disaggregated data in many countries.

2.1.2. SHE FIGURES 2024: GENDER IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION – STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

Source: European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2025

Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/592260>

She Figures is the EU's most comprehensive data source on gender disparities in research and innovation (R&I). Its focus covers education, employment, working conditions, research outputs, and leadership (as career advancement and decision-making).

2.1.2.1. Key Findings

- Education:
 - Women make up 48% of doctoral graduates but are underrepresented in ICT and engineering (under 40%).
- Employment:
 - 34% of researchers in the EU are women, with lower representation in the business enterprise sector (22%).
- Working conditions:
 - Women are more likely to work part-time (20%) and less likely to be internationally mobile.
- Decision-making:
 - Women remain under-represented in senior academic positions (Grade A), with only 26% serving as heads of institutions.
- Research output:
 - In terms of research funding, women have a slightly lower success rate than men overall (29% versus 32%). Differences vary however, and in some fields, women have been marginally more successful, for example in Engineering and Technology (33% for women against 30% for men).
 - Women are underrepresented in authorship and patent applications.
 - Only 9% of patent applications come from women, with no observable increase in the last decade.

2.1.3. CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In these two key texts, we note the lack of disaggregated data by ethnicity, class, and other intersectional identities that could serve to better highlight how gender disparities arise. The group also notes a binary assumption to the monitoring of gender inequalities, which ignores

the impact on non-binary and LGBTQ+ identities. Finally, data is most visible for the public sector, and business sector support for women researchers and entrepreneurs is not systematically tracked.

Moving forward, we recommend:

- Strengthened capacity for national statistical reporting.
- Improved focus on data collection based on ethnicity, socioeconomic background and other identities which have been linked to disparities in researcher career development.
- The incorporation of gender data into science policy frameworks.
- The development of regional and national strategies for gender inclusion.

2.2. Policy Implementation Tools

2.2.1. GEAR TOOL (GENDER EQUALITY IN ACADEMIA AND RESEARCH)

Source: European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in cooperation with the European Commission

Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear>

Last updated: Ongoing; active since 2016

The GEAR Tool is an online, step-by-step toolkit to guide research institutions through the creation and implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), particularly in line with Horizon Europe eligibility requirements. GEPs are defined as “commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through a process of structural change.”

2.2.1.1. Objectives

The main objectives of the GEAR Tool are:

- to support sustainable transformation of organisational structures, processes and cultures in research institutions, from the establishment of GEPs to their evaluation
- to promote gender equality in research and innovation, aligning with EU priorities such as Horizon Europe
- to encourage intersectionality and diversity, ensuring that gender equality efforts are inclusive and context-sensitive
- to foster stakeholder engagement, helping institutions involve relevant actors in the process
- to provide resources, such as the GEAR action toolbox, to help overcome resistance to gender equality initiatives.

2.2.1.2. Key features

The minimum requirements for implementation of a GEP are:

1. Public document endorsed by leadership
2. Dedicated resources
3. Data collection and monitoring
4. Awareness-raising and training.

Implementation of a GEP is structured through six stages:

1. Getting started
2. Analysing the institution
3. Setting up the plan
4. Implementing actions
5. Monitoring and evaluation
6. Sustaining change.

2.2.1.3. Contribution to gender equity and diversity

The GEAR Tool is central in promoting compliance with gender equality obligations in EU-funded research. It explicitly links intersectionality with gender equality, noting that the European Commission will implement its gender equality strategy for 2020-2025 by using intersectionality (combining gender with other experiences of discrimination) as a cross-cutting principle. It notes that “addressing other inequalities that intersect with gender may provide efficient leverage for change and can also inspire comprehensive measures and strategies.”

2.2.2. EUROPEAN CHARTER & CODE FOR RESEARCHERS

Source: European Commission, 2005

Available at:

<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/hrexcellenceaward/european-charter-researchers>

Commonly known as the “Charter & Code”, the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers are foundational framework documents that define the roles and responsibilities of researchers, employers, and funders.

2.2.2.1. Objectives

The Charter & Code aims to promote attractive research careers by:

- Enhancing and harmonising working conditions, ethical conduct, and career development across EU research institutions and at all career stages.
- Ensuring transparent and merit-based recruitment practices to reduce bias or discrimination.
- Building a dynamic research community through the encouragement of mobility and knowledge exchange within and beyond Europe.

2.2.2.2. Key features

- Target audience: Researchers, employers, funders, policymakers.
- Framework pillars:
 1. Ethics, Integrity, Gender, and Open Science
 2. Recruitment and Career Progression
 3. Working Conditions
 4. Talent Development.

Endorsing institutions may apply for the HR Excellence in Research Award, which recognizes compliance with the Charter & Code.

2.2.2.3. Contribution to gender equity and diversity

The Charter & Code embeds fairness, inclusivity and transparency within research careers by promoting fair and inclusive recruitment, work-life balance and career development, the recognition of career breaks, the promotion of diversity in research teams, and through its alignment with broader European values such as the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

While implementation of the Charter & Code remains voluntary, they are adopted by many institutions to demonstrate their commitment to equity and to qualify for the HR Excellence in Research award that encourages progressive, inclusive research environments.

2.2.3. ROADMAP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS: A COMMITMENT TO GREATER GENDER EQUALITY

Source: European Commission, 2025

Available at:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0097>

Published as part of preparations for a post-2025 Gender Equality Strategy, this policy roadmap outlines the EU's vision for strengthening women's rights and achieving gender equality as a core value and economic imperative.

2.2.3.1. Vision

The roadmap's vision is to advance gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in all EU and Member State policies. It builds on the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 to respond to

persistent inequalities and emerging challenges and guide the next Gender Equality Strategy (post-2025).

2.2.3.2. *Key principles and goals*

1. Freedom from gender-based violence
2. Highest attainable health standards
3. Equal pay and economic empowerment
4. Work-life balance and care
5. Equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions
6. Quality and inclusive education
7. Political participation and equal representations
8. Institutional mechanisms to uphold and deliver women's rights.

2.2.3.3. *Sectoral integration*

The roadmap emphasizes gender-sensitive approaches in EU initiatives like AI Strategy, Democracy Shield, Startup Strategy, and external humanitarian aid.

2.2.4. CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION OF DOCUMENTS

The findings of [the 2024 Report on Gender Equality in the EU](#) show that significant challenges remain, among them work, education and knowledge, power and institutional mechanisms. Without reinforced action, it would take another 60 years to achieve full gender equality in the EU.

Some findings and challenges that are relevant to career development are:

- Progress in narrowing pay gaps and gender employment is slow and structural barriers remain, while progress made by women in key areas, such as education, is not fully reflected in women's positions on the labour market and in decision-making bodies.
- Women are overrepresented in low-paid and undervalued (though essential) jobs and face higher risks of threats and violence, limiting their participation in public life.
- On average, women in the EU are more time-poor compared to men due to disproportionate household and care responsibilities. This is exacerbated by low uptake of family leave by fathers and limited access to quality care.
- Women are under-represented in STEM fields, while men are under-represented in sectors like education, health, and welfare.

2.3. Conclusion

The documents and tools analysed in this deliverable provide a solid policy and practical foundation for advancing equity in academia and research in Europe. Each offers a different but complementary lens, whether statistical, procedural, ethical, or strategic, on the same core challenge: dismantling systemic barriers that hinder women and other under-represented groups from advancing in scientific careers.

2.3.1. KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

- **UNESCO and She Figures** offer robust evidence on disparities and trends.
- **GEAR Tool** supports practical institutional transformation.
- **Charter & Code** provides ethical and procedural standards.
- **Roadmap for Women's Rights** sets a comprehensive, future-oriented agenda.

3. CRITICAL REFLECTION

While the texts and tools provide substantial evidence and strategies for progress, significant gaps remain:

- Intersectionality is not fully addressed:
 - Most data do not consider the aspects and impact of ethnicity, class, and LGBTQ+ identities, whether alone or in combination.
- Neither chronological nor academic age seem to be a distinct factor of analysis in these core texts and tools. Young women researchers are insufficiently distinguished in most datasets.
- Data on HR recruitment policies related to age and nationalities of applicants are missing.
- Access to opportunities can vary significantly across European countries: chronological age limits operate very differently in terms of funding or tenure track, and at formal or informal levels.
- Language can be a powerful discriminatory tool, especially for researchers with minoritised or racialised identities. Tools that address bias awareness or support for academic language proficiency are lacking.
- Non-academic sectors, particularly industry and entrepreneurship, receive less attention.
- Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for implementation are weak or inconsistent.
- The notion of merit is increasingly being challenged in the broader push for equity and inclusion. The challenge covers narrow definitions of merit (overemphasis on metrics, neglect of collaborative and interdisciplinary work), structural inequities in both access to resources and bias in peer review and funding, as well as historical exclusion and systemic bias linked to colonial legacies and marginalised groups, especially from the Global South.

3.1. Recommendations

To make equity and diversity in research a lived reality, future actions must:

- Enhance data granularity to capture distinct and intersecting inequalities experienced by under-represented groups.
- Address specific needs of early-career women researchers.
- Include non-binary and LGBTQ+ identities in gender policies.
- Strengthen accountability for institutions receiving EU research funding.

Together, these documents offer a roadmap, but it is up to national systems, institutions, and initiatives to push for consistent and inclusive implementation.

The following documents and award information were not included in this review due to limited time and resources and since their focus was outside the scope of this report. However, for further information, we recommend exploring them, along with previously linked and discussed resources on the topic of EDI in the European research community.

1. [Words Matter: EIGE Guide on Supporting Gender Equality Through Language and Communication](#)
2. [Fostering gender equality – Key figures from Horizon Europe: R&I monitoring flash](#)
3. [EU Award for gender equality champions](#)
4. [Tips for creating a Gender Equality Plan: the COST Action perspective](#)