

ERAC 1204/20

NOTE

From: ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation
To: ERAC delegations

Subject: Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation:
Position paper on the future gender equality priority in the European
Research Area 2020-2030

Delegations will find attached for information the "Position paper on the future gender equality priority in the European Research Area 2020-2030" approved by the Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation on 20 May 2020.

Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation**Position paper on the future gender equality priority
in the European Research Area 2020-2030**

Gender equality in research and innovation (R&I) is a powerful lever with which to truly ‘mobilise knowledge for a better and more sustainable future’¹ and to increase the effectiveness of research systems and ensure that the research produced is excellent, accessible, and open. Organisations that allow inequality to exist are not performing to their full potential.

In this position paper,² the Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (SWG GRI) outlines its recommendations for the future of gender equality in the European Research Area (ERA), which build on analyses of the current state of its implementation.³ This develops and supports the recently adopted the European Commission’s Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the ERAC Opinion on the Future of ERA published on 23 January 2020, exemplifying the relevance of gender aspects in the four ERA priorities proposed by ERAC.

Currently, She Figures 2018 reports that women make up almost one-half of all doctoral graduates (47.9% in 2016 compared to 45.9% in 2007) but only account for about one-third of researchers (33.4% in 2016 compared to 33% in 2012 and 30% in 2006). In most countries, the number of female PhD graduates grew at a lower rate than male graduates in various narrow STEM fields, and women make up only 21% of PhD graduates in information and communication technologies and 29% in engineering, manufacturing, and construction, whereas men constitute only 32% of PhDs in education. Furthermore, women continue to be severely under-represented in the Business Enterprise Sector, where they make up only 20.2%. At senior academic levels, women comprised only 23.7% of full professors in 2016, up from 19% in 2007. The rate of change, especially in senior and decision-making positions, is extremely slow.

¹ European University Association (2020).

² This position paper was drafted by the SWG GRI Task Force on gender in the future ERA, with Marcela Linková as rapporteur and Jacqueline Grech, Jennifer Casingena Harper, Marissa Herder, Heidi Holt Zachariassen, Gemma Irvine, Roberta Schaller-Steidl, and Angela Wroblewski as members.

³ See Wroblewski (2018; 2019).

The integration of the gender dimension in R&I is insufficient, too. This continues to compromise the full benefits that diverse groups of the population can glean from research, as the current COVID-19 outbreak has made amply visible.

Systematic barriers in the organisation and culture of research and innovation (R&I) continue to exist. This means that talent alone is not always enough to guarantee success. Numerous factors—conscious and unconscious, cultural and institutional (including measures of success being gendered)—cause women to face barriers to progression that are not experienced to the same degree by their male colleagues.⁴

We need more talent in the pipeline overall, so it is not about pushing men out but keeping women in, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) areas. It is critical that policy-makers and stakeholders in Europe are transparent and visible in the actions they take to address gender inequality, so that women are encouraged to remain in the R&I system and that the knowledge produced benefits all segments of society equally.

Equality and inclusiveness in research and innovation should be considered practices, not end goals. Recognising one's biases, unfortunately, does not make them go away. Rather, we all need to find ways to ensure that such biases have minimal impact on our behaviour, choices, and actions every day. A collaborative European approach is needed so that everyone can be empowered to engage and adopt equal and inclusive practices. This is particularly important for research and innovation, where **research career issues, institutional change, and the relevance of R&I to society** depend on being gender-aware and ensuring that the gender dimension is fully considered in order to achieve **transformative change**.

⁴ Irvine (2020).

Recommendations

The Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation has two overarching recommendations that build on the analyses of the implementation of the ERA Roadmap:

- 1. Gender equality conceptualised as intersecting with other factors, such as age, health status, disability, occupation, socioeconomic status, migratory status, and geographic location must remain a priority in the future European Research Area.** It underpins the success of achieving the objectives of Horizon Europe, the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025,⁵ and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG5. Furthermore, the ERAC Opinion on the Future of ERA identifies broad inclusiveness as a priority, where ensuring equal access to research careers for women and minority groups is a potential intervention area. This is very positive and opens the door to an intersectional approach. Policy coordination at the EU level is critical for ensuring that there is an integrated approach to fostering gender equality across Europe and that the gap that currently persists among European countries can be reduced.⁶ Achieving **transformative changes** in new areas (e.g. digitalisation, innovation, Green Deal) is essential to ensure that **R&I remains relevant to society**.
- 2. The institutional change approach must remain the core principle for reforming all ERA institutions** to achieve these policy objectives and priorities. Advanced institutional changes must be further developed to address new challenges, including research career issues identified by the SWG GRI below. Institutional change concerns, *inter alia*, the development and management of human resources, and should be better reflected in the **European Charter for Researchers and the European Code of Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research Award**.⁷

⁵ 'The strategy will be implemented using intersectionality – the combination of gender with other personal characteristics or identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination – as a crosscutting principle.' (European Commission 2020: 2)

⁶ Significant differences exist in the adoption of Gender Equality Plans as the instrument for achieving institutional change across EU Member States and Associated Countries as well as in the ERA Roadmap national policy frameworks adopted to further gender equality in R&I (Wroblewski 2019).

⁷ Currently, a task force with representatives of three ERAC Standing Working Groups on Human Resources and Mobility, Gender in Research and Innovation, and Open Science and Open Innovation is working to present a proposal for a revision of the Charter and Code.

To this end, the SWG GRI makes the following additional specific recommendations:

3. An integrated approach to effective framework conditions for gender equality in research and innovation must be enhanced.

Adopting an integrated approach to effective framework conditions is a core principle of the European Research Area. The current ERA Roadmap Priority 4, which defines goals and actions for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research, has been a catalyst for policy and measures in many EU countries, especially in the countries where such policies did not exist.⁸ Crucially, with actions at the EU and national level, the ERA Roadmap has allowed for **contextualised measures to be adopted while maintaining a coordinated policy framework and goals**. Many EU Member States and Associated Countries have developed robust policy frameworks as well as concrete actions to advance gender equality in R&I at the national level. A mapping carried out by the SWG GRI in May 2020 indicates that there is strong momentum, and MS and AC are ready to take their actions further, with the new ERA Communication from the Commission as an important policy framework. To continue to reduce the gap among European countries, a **synchronised policy co-evolution process afforded by the ERA Roadmap across the national and EU levels must be maintained**. This will enhance the **inclusiveness** of the EU R&I ecosystem, where there is a need to bridge the gap not only in R&I performance but also in gender equality through the **synchronised co-evolution of the R&I system**. The three current gender equality objectives for the ERA⁹ are robust and should orient gender equality work while being further refined to incorporate newly emergent issues (see below).

⁸ Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (2018).

⁹ Abolishing structural barriers to women's careers in research through institutional changes, gender balance in decision-making, and integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation.

4. The structures for gender equality in R&I at the national and EU level must continue and be reinforced.

The continued existence of an EU policy platform (such as the current Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation) must be ensured, for mutual learning, policy exchange, and capacity-building among Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission, with a view to ensuring the synchronised policy co-evolution discussed above. Furthermore, a robust and adequately placed gender structure in the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation is vital to give support to and ensure the professional monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of Horizon Europe from a gender perspective. Similarly, Member States and Associated Countries should have a gender equality structure in place to develop, monitor, and evaluate their gender equality policy in R&I and to engage in the EU policy platform.

5. Responsible national authorities must be held accountable.

National authorities in the MS and AC must play an active role in order to support gender equality effectively and to exploit the innovative potential of the ERA fully. R&I is a field characterised by common standards internationally and a high degree of mobility. Hence, it would be counterproductive for the Member States and Associated Countries not to participate in and contribute to European efforts to strengthen gender equality. **National stakeholders in R&I policy must develop a national, evidence-based, and process-oriented gender equality policy** that is targeted to respond to national needs/contexts and is embedded in national R&I strategies. This policy should be embedded in the ERA framework and supported by the Standing Working Group on Research and Innovation or a Europe-wide successor structure.

6. The policy design, monitoring and evaluation system must be revised and reinforced.

Research¹⁰ shows that ex-post and ex-ante evaluations of gender equality policy in research and innovation do not ‘feed’ each other; that recommendations are not taken up; that gender-specific evaluation-related exercises remain isolated from mainstream policy evaluations; and that gender as a crosscutting issue is not mainstreamed to other policy priorities. This is also in line with the lessons identified in the ERAC Opinion from past experience. Both the ERAC Opinion and the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 highlight the importance of the European Semester for monitoring; specifically as of the 2019-2020 Semester cycle, the Semester country reports shall contribute to the monitoring of the SDGs, including on gender equality (SDG5). The European Semester is also to be used to monitor progress toward a fully functioning ERA. **Therefore, the European Semester cycle should be revised to address specifically gender equality in R&I.**

Recognising the shortcomings of the current headline indicator (the proportion of women in Grade A) in ERA Priority 4,¹¹ the SWG GRI underscores the vital **need to introduce multi-dimensional monitoring**, addressing all three objectives of the ERA, including institutional changes.

7. Equality should be linked with funding.

The European Commission’s new Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 proposes the possibility of requiring gender equality plans from applicants to Horizon Europe funding. This is a strong signal that tackling gender equality at the institutional level is essential and that prioritising gender equality is regarded as an important marker of excellence that considered when making funding decisions. Member States and Associated Countries are strongly encouraged to adopt a similar approach at the national level.

¹⁰ Mergaert (2012); Mergaert and Demuynck (2011); Mergaert and Lombardo (2014); Mergaert and Minto (2015); Pollack and Hafner-Burton (2000).

¹¹ See Wroblewski (2019).

Some countries are already doing this. In France, a new Act on the Transformation of Public Services was passed in 2019 that also includes Higher Education Institutions. It contains numerous measures on equality and the fight against gender-based violence and harassment. One of the most important requirements placed on French higher education institutions is the creation and implementation of an action plan dedicated to equality. These action plans must include several issues on equality and imply that each public employer needs to collect gender-based data and make them available. If they do not comply with this requirement by the end of 2020, they will have to pay a fine. Ireland, too, has linked funding to working for gender equality. The three largest Research Funding Organisations in Ireland require Higher Education Institutions to have Athena SWAN Gender Equality Accreditation to be eligible for research funding.

8. Gender must be mainstreamed in all future priorities of the ERA.

In line with the European Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025,¹² all ERA priorities should include an intersectional gender perspective. The reference to developing a European framework for career evaluation in the ERAC Opinion where gender equality is linked to Open Science and Open Innovation principles is a good example of gender mainstreaming and is highly supported. Other areas where a gender dimension is relevant and should be mainstreamed are, for example, human resources, climate change, innovation, and digital transformation.

¹² The Commission will enhance gender mainstreaming by systematically including a gender perspective in all stages of policy design in all EU policy areas, internal and external.

9. Research Funding Organisations should require applicants to demonstrate that they have fully considered potential biological sex and socio-cultural gender dimensions as key analytical and explanatory variables in their research.

Building on the fast-growing body of research evidence that sex and gender matter in R&I, and on the concrete work of EC-funded Gendered Innovations Expert Groups I and II, SWG GRI highlights the importance of the gender dimension for the twin imperatives of research excellence and research and innovation responsible to all segments of society. The inclusion of the gender dimension at all stages of research and innovation has the enormous potential to enrich results by making them relevant to women as well as men. If relevant sex/gender issues are ignored or poorly addressed, research results and recommendations may potentially be biased or invalid. However, the integration of the gender dimension in R&I content is arguably one of the objectives where the least progress has been made. It does not help that the gender dimension does not seem to be a dimension that is well understood and it can often be confused with gender balance in research teams.¹³ It is in the interest of research teams to ensure that their results are relevant to a wider range of stakeholders, more so if the innovation is targeted to eventual commercialisation. If Research Funding Organisations were to ensure that integration of the gender dimension in R&I is a default requirement, it will serve as a vital awareness-raising exercise on the benefits of the gender dimension as well as strengthening the quality of R&I outputs.

This is especially true for **innovation, digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence, and climate change, as these are some of the research priorities where the integration of the gender dimension is crucial.** As stated in the new Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, algorithms and related machine-learning, if not transparent and robust enough, risk repeating, amplifying, or contributing to gender biases that programmers may not be aware of or that are the result of specific data selection. Reducing gender bias will not be possible if women only represent 17% of people in ICT.¹⁴

Women continue to be severely under-represented in innovation and patenting activities in the EU and beyond. In the SWG GRI policy brief on gender and innovation,¹⁵ we emphasised that industries and sectors with higher proportions of women and those addressing life situations specific to women are often not recognised as sources of innovation.

¹³ European Commission (2017).

¹⁴ European Commission (2016).

¹⁵ Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (2019).

The 2020 update of the Commission’s work programme will contain more details on the Green Deal call. This call will focus on ‘innovative solutions and demonstrations’. Gender is a core crosscutting issue in innovation, which is why we would welcome specific mention of the gender dimension in this new call. In innovation, gender aspects intersect with other axes of economic and social inequality, and the development of robust innovative solutions, particularly as regards climate change, requires a comprehensive approach.

The proposed areas offer very interesting opportunities for applying the gender lens, such as **access to clean energy, the circular economy, smart mobility, and empowering citizens in the transition to a sustainable Europe.** This transition will not look the same for everyone. Thus, various strategies are needed, taking into account the needs and choices of different groups of people.

10. Gender-based violence and sexual harassment in higher education and research must be considered in all gender equality actions.

Existing studies and surveys indicate high levels of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment in higher education and research. This is compounded by structural features such as the hierarchical organisation of higher education and research and the dependence of early-career researchers, precarious working conditions, the increased vulnerability of mobile researchers in foreign contexts and without support networks, and the importance of fieldwork in some disciplines. **Eradicating gender-based violence must be an integral part of the work for gender equality in R&I. Actions and measures need to be included in Gender Equality Plans as well as human resource management such as the Human Resources Excellence in Research Award.** Funding and evaluations of Research Performing Organisations must include the existence of provisions, measures, and structures to combat gender-based violence, including sexual harassment. Furthermore, a European framework for protection against gender-based violence should be adopted and required from Research Performing Organisations applying for EU funding for R&I.¹⁶

¹⁶ For additional recommendations aimed at the various stakeholders including the European Commission, Member States and Associated Countries, RFOs and RPOs see the SWG GRI Policy Brief ‘Mobilising to eradicate gender-based violence and sexual harassment: A new impetus for gender equality in the European Research Area’ and the report ‘Sexual Harassment in the Research and Higher Education Sector. National Policies and Measures in EU Member States and Associated Countries’.

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