

Promoting Gender Equality and Institutional Changes through EU-Funded Research

Booster Service 5.1



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European Commission

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Directorate D — People: Health and Society

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Proposed by the Booster Service 5.1

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Contents

1.	Introduction: A Strategic View on Gender Equality	6
1.1.	Gender Equality in the European Union	6
1.2.	Gender Equality in R&I: Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe	7
2.	Portfolio Analysis	9
2.1.	Methodology	9
3.	Statistics	10
3.1.	Results Distribution Across Categories	10
3.2.	Intersectionality	11
3.3.	Thematic areas	12
4.	Aspect 1: Women in R&I	13
4.1.	Introduction	13
4.2.	Key Challenges for Women in Research and Innovation	14
4.3.	Addressing the Challenges Women Face in R&I: Contributions from the Analysed Projects	15
4.3.1.	Gender Equality Plans in Universities and Research Performing Organisations.....	15
4.3.2.	Policy Frameworks and Strategic Recommendations	16
4.3.3.	Tools and Practical Instruments.....	17
4.3.4.	Knowledge Resources and Informative Reports.....	18
5.	Aspect 2: Work-Life Balance	19
5.1.	Introduction	19
5.2.	Women’s Challenge in Balancing Work with Family Life	19
5.3.	Consequences of Inadequate Work-Life Balance for Women.....	20
5.4.	Key Strategies and Actions to Address the Challenge: Contributions from the Analysed Projects	21
5.4.1.	Strategy and Actions (1): Encouraging Collaborative Environments	22
5.4.2.	Strategy and Action (2): Implementing Flexible Arrangements.....	22
5.4.3.	Strategy and Actions (3): Broaden the Offer of Caregiving Services.....	23
6.	Aspect 3: Pay Gap	24

6.1	Measures to Address the Gender Pay Gap	26
6.1.1.	Gender Pay Gap Monitoring and Transparency Measures	26
6.1.2.	Equality in Recruitment, Career Development, and Academic Positions	27
6.1.3.	Awareness, Education, and Addressing Bias	28
6.1.4.	Institutional Policies and Structural Support	28
6.1.4.1.	Horizon Europe eligibility criterion, the Gender Equality Plans	28
6.1.4.2.	Gender Quotas	28
6.1.4.3.	Inclusive Language and Communication	29
7.	Gender Based Violence.....	30
7.1.	Measures to Address Gender-Based Violence: Contributions from Projects' Results	31
7.1.1.	Raising Awareness on Gender-Based Violence	31
7.1.2.	Providing Safety and Assistance to Victims of Gender-Based Violence.....	32
7.1.3.	Ensuring Effectiveness in Reporting Instances of GBV	33
8.	Strengthening EU's Gender Equality: Intersectionality and Sustainability.....	34
8.1.	Intersectionality.....	34
8.1.1.	Intersectionality analysis and recommendations to EC	36
8.2	Sustainability	38
8.1.2.	Strategies	38
8.1.3.	Recommendations	40
9.	Observations and Conclusions	41
10.	Annex I: List of Analysed Projects.....	43
11.	Annex II: List of Deliverables on Datasets	44

List of Abbreviations

Table	Table
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CORDIS	Community Research and Development Information Service
CoP	Community of Practice
GE	Gender Equality
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EIGE	European Institute of Gender Equality
ERA	European Research Area
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GECS	Gender Equality Certification System
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
HR	Human Resources
ON	Ombudsman Network

Table	Table
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
R&I	Research & Innovation
RFO	Research Funding Organisation
RPO	Research Performing Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation
TCBL	Textile and Clothing Business Labs

1. Introduction: A Strategic View on Gender Equality

This report focuses on the importance of gender equality not only on moral grounds but also from an economic and a strategic point of view. It explains how the EU is working to strengthen gender equality, particularly in the research and innovation (R&I) sector, as part of its priorities, and examines the implications of the EU's commitment to achieving gender equality through the current Horizon Europe Framework Programme (2021-2027) and its predecessor, the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme (2014-2020).

It is important to remark that the harm posed by a lack of Gender Equality (GE) is now a generally recognised social issue, whose impact on people's lives is twofold: on an individual level, gender inequality limits opportunities and career choices; on the collective one, the economy also pays the price of the loss of human capital resulting from unfair discrimination of women on the job market, which leads to a reduction in operational efficiency in both business and institutional settings.

Over the course of the past years, numerous academic publications and institutional reports have found evidence supporting the idea that improvements in GE directly contribute to economic growth; among them, an exhaustive study conducted by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) in 2017 showed that compliance with relevant GE standards in business and institutional settings could have led to a projected increase of up to 10.5 million new jobs, of which 7.6 for women, by the year 2050¹. It was also predicted that, in case of a rapid improvement of GE in such settings, the EU's per-capita GDP would have grown by up to 9.6% within the same timeframe².

1.1. Gender Equality in the European Union

The European Union is strongly committed to support gender equality across all fields and sectors. In the Roadmap for Women's Rights, it has reaffirmed the idea that "advancing women's rights is not just a moral imperative but a strategic investment in the EU's economic growth and competitiveness"³.

Such a commitment is a long-lasting one, dating back to the time of the Union's foundation: in fact, the principle of equal pay between men and women was first stated in the Treaty of Rome (1957), and later ratified with the adoption of the first EU Directive on gender equality (75/117/EEC) in 1975. Many other Directives followed suit since then on issues such as equal access to employment (76/207/ECC), maternity leave (96/34/EC) or equal treatment in access to goods and services (2004/113/EC).

Thanks to its strategic approach to gender equality, the EU managed to establish its current position among the best performers in this area worldwide. However, the influence of new political factors, from the rise of populist waves to the need to redefine our investments in the light of today's global geopolitical tensions, is "increasing the pressure on hard-fought equality gains and social cohesion"⁴.

Indeed, EU officials recognise that the political objectives regarding gender equality are still far from being reached, and regard the progress made so far in this area as "steady, albeit modest"⁵. In fact, the most recent Gender Equality Index published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in 2024 shows that the EU, despite having achieved a collective score of 71 points out of 100, which is an excellent result for international standards, has been struggling to

¹ ["Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union - Overall economic impacts of gender equality", European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

² ["Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union - Overall economic impacts of gender equality", European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

³ ["A Roadmap for Women's Rights", European Commission](#)

⁴ ["Gender Equality Index 2024 – Sustaining momentum on a fragile path", European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

⁵ ["A Roadmap for Women's Rights", European Commission](#)

significantly increase its overall score throughout the years. For instance, there is only a positive 0.8-point difference compared to the one recorded in 2023, while the point-based increase since 2010, the furthest year with available data, amounts to a total of merely 7.9 points⁶.

Despite the challenging context and less-than-expected results, EU support for gender equality actions has remained. Moving forward, it has emphasised the need to intensify their efforts in this area. This is why in its political guidelines for 2024-2029, the Commission announced its intention to “propose a New Gender Equality Strategy for post-2025 [setting out a] plan to strengthen women’s rights across the board from the fight against gender-based violence to empowering women in politics and the labour market, across the EU, as well as across the EU institutions”⁷.

1.2. Gender Equality in R&I: Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe

This section will focus on the measures to foster gender equality in R&I, particularly focusing on the two latest EU framework programmes, the Horizon Europe Programme (2021-2027), and its predecessor Horizon 2020 (2014-2020).

Achieving gender equality in the R&I sector is crucial from a strategic perspective. In today’s fast-changing societies, innovation drives economic growth. However, the underrepresentation of women and the lack of gender dimension in research content not only leads to a loss of human capital and talent but also limits the ability of R&I to address the complex challenges facing society, such as health, sustainability, and social inequality.

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research have been prioritised by the European Research Area (ERA) since 2012, aiming to foster institutional change by means of prioritising: (1) gender balance in decision making, (2) gender equality in careers at all levels, and (3) a better integration of the gender dimension into R&I content. These priorities have been pursued also in the R&I Framework Programmes, with Horizon 2020 institutionalising gender equality as a cross-cutting issue⁸. Horizon 2020 became the first programme of its kind where to “consider gender equality in terms of human resources, gender balance in research teams, and content”⁹. This resulted into an increase in the share of projects including a gender dimension throughout the duration of the programme, passing from 1.7% in 2014 to 23% in 2020¹⁰.

With the new Horizon Europe Framework Programme, the European Commission has further strengthened the gender equality provisions. The integration of the gender dimension into R&I content is a requirement by default and assessed under the ‘Excellence award criterion’¹¹. At the same time, “the development of gender equality plans has become mandatory for research organisations applying for funding under the programme”¹². As of 2022, having a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) is a criterion for eligibility for public bodies, research organisations, and higher education establishments. GEPs promote gender equality through institutional and cultural change in research and innovation organisations applying for EU funding.

Moreover, it is worth noticing that, compared to Horizon 2020, gender equality in projects funded under Horizon Europe saw an overall increase in women’s presence in experts and advisory

⁶ [EIGE – Gender Equality Index](#)

⁷ ["Europe's Choice – Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029", European Commission](#)

⁸ ["Fostering gender equality – Key figures from Horizon Europe – R&I monitoring flash, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation](#)

⁹ ["Impact of gender equality plans across the European Research Area", Directorate General for Research and Innovation](#)

¹⁰ ["Framework for the integration and evaluation of inclusive gender analysis in research and innovation content", Directorate General for Research and Innovation](#)

¹¹ ["Framework for the integration and evaluation of inclusive gender analysis in research and innovation content", Directorate General for Research and Innovation](#)

¹² ["Impact of gender equality plans across the European Research Area", Directorate General for Research and Innovation](#)

groups (51% vs. 43%)¹³ as well as expert evaluators (45% vs. 42%)¹⁴ and project coordinators (31% vs. 24%)¹⁵, among other results. This responds to the Horizon Europe priority to increase gender balance throughout the programme, with a target of 50% women on Horizon Europe-related boards, expert groups, and evaluation committees, and considering gender balance among research teams (and as of Work Programme 2025 among lead researchers) as a criterion for ranking proposals with the same score.

Finally, the programme allocates specific funding to projects whose primary objective is to improve gender equality or projects for which gender equality may not be the primary objective, but is nonetheless considered to be an important one, so that “in total, EUR 5.056,7 million can be *directly* linked with gender equality-advancing efforts, corresponding to 11% of Horizon Europe commitments”¹⁶. Since the effective integration of the gender dimension in the R&I content cannot be determined *ex ante* before a project is closed, funds are granted only to those projects with clearly defined gender equality contributions from the beginning.

As shown by numerous studies based on both desk research and targeted surveys, these fundings have a positive impact on the advancement of gender equality in R&I across the EU, allowing for an improvement that has been consistently certified across the following areas of inquiry: (a) working conditions; (b) hiring, professional development, and leadership; (c) knowledge sharing, dissemination, and capacity building; (d) integration of the gender dimension into research and education content; (e) development and improvement of monitoring and data collection; (f) anti-discrimination, fight against sexual harassment, and inclusive language; (g) institutional and structural changes.

¹³ ["Fostering gender equality. Key figures from Horizon Europe", Directorate General for Research and Innovation](#)

¹⁴ ["Fostering gender equality. Key figures from Horizon Europe", Directorate General for Research and Innovation](#)

¹⁵ ["Fostering gender equality. Key figures from Horizon Europe", Directorate General for Research and Innovation](#)

¹⁶ ["Fostering gender equality. Key figures from Horizon Europe", Directorate General for Research and Innovation](#)

2. Portfolio Analysis

The present analysis on promoting gender equality in R&I focuses specifically on evaluating results from a set of selected EU-funded projects, with the aim of identifying **a repository of best strategies, practices, tools, methodologies, and policies for the promotion of gender equality in the field of R&I**. The requested analysis encompasses a total of 23 projects; all started between 2017 and 2023. Out of these projects, 17 have already been finalised, while the remaining 6 are still ongoing and scheduled to be closed by the 31st of October 2025 (cfr. **Annex I: List of Analysed Projects**).

2.1. Methodology

The analysis of the results of the selected projects was carried out by desk research, using open-source data from both institutional platforms (e.g., CORDIS) and web-based research (e.g., projects' websites). The analysis consists of data gathering and evaluation, thus also including comments and expert observations.

The Excel template structuring the analysis includes all information gathered through desk research. All data are ordered by result, with reference to the project, while the columns of the Excel file contain the following information:

- **Columns A-E:** Specific details regarding the project (ID code, acronym, status, start and end date)
- **Columns F-H:** Specific details regarding the result generated by the project (its title, description, and type)
- **Column I:** Assessment of which intersectionality aspects are addressed by the projects' results. Intersectionality aspects are a set of relevant characteristics of a person that, in combination with each other, contribute to worsening instances of discrimination or inequality. The intersectionality aspects this analysis takes into consideration are: gender, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.
- **Column J:** Assessment of whether the result specifically addresses the issue of women in R&I
- **Column K:** Reproducibility of the result
- **Column L:** Sustainability of the result
- **Column M:** Thematic Areas related to the project results, including effectiveness of GEP, countering gender-based violence, scientific freedom and protection, promoting research careers among women, underrepresentation of women innovators, and data collection frameworks.
- **Column N:** Comments
- **Column O:** Link to the source from which the result has been taken

It is important to notice that the analysis is based solely on available documents found on open source, as no interaction with the projects was foreseen.

3. Statistics

This chapter presents a statistical analysis of the results from the 23 analysed projects, focusing on the distribution across various categories, including types of results, intersectionality factors, and key themes. A total of **285 results** were examined, and this chapter provides a statistical overview on the result distribution across categories, intersectionality factors, as well as the identified thematic areas.

3.1. Results Distribution Across Categories

The following section outlines the analysed results distributed across the following categories:

- **Policy:** 60 results
- **Informative Report:** 55 results
- **GEP (Gender Equality Plan):** 47 results
- **Tool:** 36 results
- **Methodology:** 33 results
- **Strategy:** 18 results
- **More than one category:** 36 results

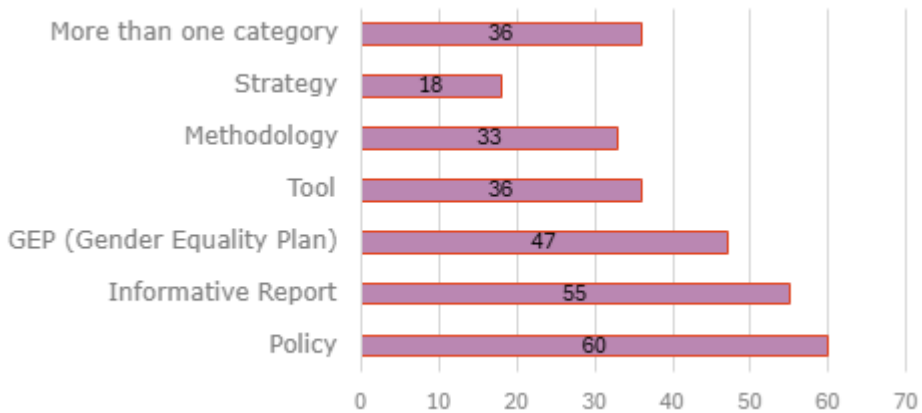


Figure 1: Category distribution among the results

3.2. Intersectionality

In the following section, data on intersectionality are presented. In this context, intersectionality refers to the combined influence of gender with factors such as age, socio-economic status, disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. A complete list of definitions and elaboration on the intersectionality factors can be found in Chapter 8 (**8.1.1 Intersectionality in the analysed projects**).

Among the total number of results, **54.7%** were found to fall into more than one factor.

The study reflected the following result distribution of intersectionality:

- **Gender:** 244 results
- **Socio-Economic Status:** 134 results
- **Ethnicity:** 55 results
- **Sexual Orientation:** 53 results
- **Age:** 48 results
- **Disability:** 47 results

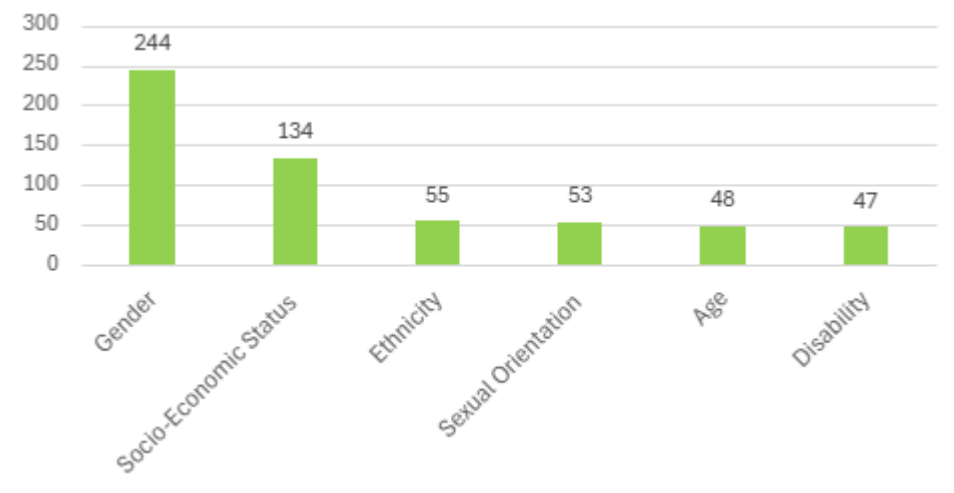


Figure 2: Intersectionality distribution among the results

For some results, it was not possible to assign any intersectionality factor, so they have been classified under the category:

Without categorisation/Blank: 41 results

3.3. Thematic areas

This section of the study presents data on the different thematic areas that have been explored. The key areas identified are: the effectiveness of GEPs, the promotion of research careers among women, data collection frameworks, countering gender-based violence, the underrepresentation of women innovators, and the safeguarding of scientific freedom and protection of researchers and innovators.

The data reflected the following thematic distribution:

- **Promote research careers among women:** 153 results
- **Effectiveness of GEP:** 139 results
- **Data collection frameworks:** 137 results
- **Countering gender-based violence:** 115 results
- **Underrepresentation of women innovators:** 94 results
- **Scientific Freedom and Protection:** 41 results

Additionally, 10 results could not be classified into any of the specified categories, and thus, they have been categorised as Blank.

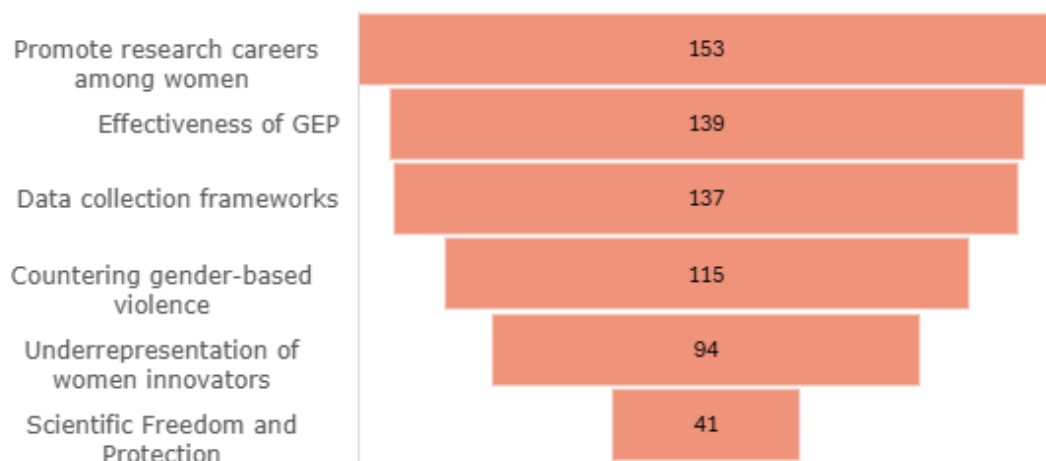


Figure 3: Thematic areas distribution among the results

4. Aspect 1: Women in R&I

4.1. Introduction

Promoting gender equality and increasing the participation of women in R&I has long been a priority within the European Research Area. As pointed out by She Figures 2024, while important progress has been made, significant challenges persist. Women remain underrepresented in senior academic and research positions, leadership roles, and across innovation ecosystems. Factors such as gender stereotypes, structural inequalities, and limited consideration of work-life balance continue to hinder equal participation.

In the past years, numerous EU-funded projects have sought to address these barriers from different angles – ranging from Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) to policy frameworks to practical instruments and knowledge resources. These efforts echo the need for a gender-responsive approach in research and innovation.

This chapter presents how the selected projects have addressed the participation of women in R&I, drawing attention to the various approaches developed to promote gender equality and mapping out the broader strategies and perspectives that underpin these initiatives. **Out of 285 analysed results, 209 (73.3% of total results) focused explicitly on women in R&I.**

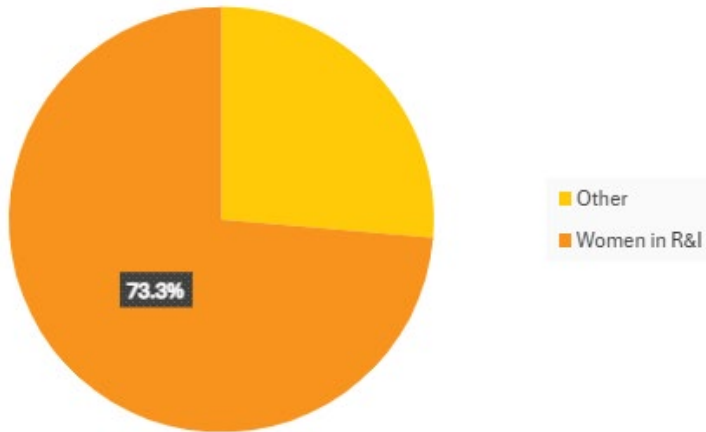


Figure 4: Women in R&I related results

4.2. Key Challenges for Women in Research and Innovation

Women's participation in research and innovation careers continues to be challenged by a range of structural and cultural barriers, particularly in relation to entry, retention, and advancement in the field. Several persistent challenges continue to affect women's trajectories in research and innovation, as highlighted in this section.

While gender parity has been achieved across the EU in terms of enrolment and graduation at the Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral levels, women's representation declines significantly as they progress in academic careers – particularly in senior and leadership roles. Across all disciplines, women account for only 30% of grade A (top-level) academic positions, equivalent to full professorships. This underrepresentation is notable even in fields with relatively higher female participation. For example, women hold just 38% of grade A positions in the Humanities and Arts, 35% in the Social Sciences, and 33% in Medical and Health Sciences. The disparity is even more pronounced in Science and Engineering, where women occupy only 20% of top academic roles¹⁷. All in all, at the EU level, only 34% of researchers are women¹⁸.

Leadership positions reflect a similar trend. Women constitute only 26% of heads of higher education institutions in the EU and just 22% of university presidencies, despite making up 39% of board members in academic and research institutions – a figure that still falls significantly short of parity with their male counterparts¹⁹.

Women in academia also experience the compounded strain of balancing professional responsibilities with unpaid care work. Institutional support structures, such as flexible work arrangements and accessible childcare, remain insufficiently implemented, placing additional burdens on working parents, and especially women, as it limits their ability to advance in research careers.

In addition to these workplace challenges, gender bias in funding and innovation ecosystems creates another layer of exclusion. Women are consistently under-represented among entrepreneurs and start-up founders, comprising just 10% of start-up founders and 19% of ICT entrepreneurs²⁰. This disparity is driven in part by biased investment practices and unequal access to financial support, limiting women's opportunities to participate in high-growth, innovation-intensive sectors. One contributing factor to this imbalance is women's under-representation itself, which reinforces investor bias – that is, male investors are more likely to perceive women-led ventures as riskier and continue to associate entrepreneurship predominantly with men²¹. Between 2018 and 2021, women accounted for only 9% of patent applicants, highlighting their persistent underrepresentation in inventorship – a figure that has seen little to no improvement over the past decade²².

A significant challenge lies in the retention of women in technology-related careers, especially between the ages of 30 and 44. During this period, many women leave the sector, often due to a lack of work-life balance and persistent male-dominated work cultures. Rigid working structures, long hours, and limited flexibility are all factors that disproportionately impact women, making it difficult for them to reconcile professional and personal responsibilities²³. Moreover, many R&I initiatives and policies still lack a gender perspective in their design, implementation, and

¹⁷ [SheFigures 2024](#)

¹⁸ [SheFigures 2024](#)

¹⁹ [SheFigures 2024](#)

²⁰ [Beijing Platform for Action +30 Impact driver: Marking milestones and opportunities for gender equality in the EU](#)

²¹ [Beijing Platform for Action +30 Impact driver: Marking milestones and opportunities for gender equality in the EU](#)

²² [SheFigures 2024](#)

²³ [Beijing Platform for Action +30 Impact driver: Marking milestones and opportunities for gender equality in the EU](#)

evaluation. This absence reduces the inclusivity, relevance, and effectiveness of research outcomes and further marginalises the experiences and needs of women.

Overall, the evidence shows that women in research and innovation continue to face persistent structural and cultural barriers that limit their full participation. From unequal career progression and underrepresentation in leadership to gender bias in funding, hostile work environments, and insufficient institutional support, these challenges undermine both individual careers and the inclusiveness of the R&I system as a whole. Addressing them requires systemic change to ensure that research and innovation in Europe can fully benefit from the talents and contributions of women.

4.3. Addressing the Challenges Women Face in R&I: Contributions from the Analysed Projects

Under Horizon Europe, the European Commission reinforced its commitment to gender equality by embedding it as a cross-cutting priority. The aim is to foster more inclusive research environments and ensure that integrating the gender dimension enhances both the quality and societal impact of research and innovation.

Building on this framework, the next sections explore how the projects selected for this study have responded to the challenges outlined above, each employing distinct approaches to address different aspects of gender inequality in R&I as listed below.

4.3.1. Gender Equality Plans in Universities and Research Performing Organisations

Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) within research organisations were found on open source for 7 of the 23 analysed projects (SUPPORTER, MINDtheGEPs, AGRIGEP, ATHENA, CALIPER, SUPERA, and RESET). As a part of these projects, university and research institution partners have developed GEPs to institutionalise gender equality as a strategic priority and to secure the long-term sustainability of related measures. These GEPs are tailored to the specific challenges faced by the participating institutions, defining objectives and concrete actions aimed at reducing inequalities. Common areas of focus include:

- Training on sexual harassment prevention,
- Work-life balance policies to make research careers more accessible to women,
- Gender-sensitive recruitment practices,
- Inclusive governance structures,
- Inclusive communication strategies.

For example, through AGRIGEP project a report was developed to assess GEPs across multiple agriculture and life science universities, highlighting both best practices and common challenges.²⁴ A GEP network for agricultural universities was also established within the project, providing a framework for knowledge exchange and collaboration.²⁵

²⁴ [AGRIGEP – Assessment and implementation of Agriculture and Life Science Universities GEPs in widening countries](#)

²⁵ [AGRIGEP – GEP-network of Agriculture and Life Science specific Universities](#)

In the case of SUPPORTER, recommendations²⁶ were developed to support universities and sport faculties in strengthening gender equality through practical steps for implementing inclusive Gender Equality Plans.

Other projects such as GENDERACTIONplus, SUPERA and GEARING ROLES have also **developed GEPs supporting tools, including guidelines/ methodologies that support the design of GEPs and benchmarking analysis of GEP requirements.** MINDtheGEPs and ATHENA have also produced guidelines to strengthen and implement GEPs in research organisations, while TARGETED-MPI developed policy briefs with recommendations that aim to support GEP implementation.

These resources are intended to help universities and research institutions systematically embed GEPs into their structures and practices, thereby fostering a more effective approach to institutional change.

4.3.2. Policy Frameworks and Strategic Recommendations

Through the analysis, 17 of the 23 projects have been identified to be contributing directly to policy development, directly related to women in R&I, at both the European and national levels: AGRIGEP, GILL, MINDtheGEPs, GENDERACTIONplus, ATHENA, NEXUS, TARGETED-MPI, CALIPER, GRANTeD, GENDER NET PLUS, SUPERA, SheMakes.eu, CASPER, UniSAFE, EQUALS-EU, GE ACADEMY, and RESET. Through outputs such as policy briefs, recommendations, and white papers, their recommendations aim at influencing regulatory frameworks and supporting the alignment of both the wider research landscape and their institutions' internal practices with gender equality objectives.

Some recommendations are geared towards implementation at a supranational level, such as the CASPER project, which developed policy recommendations for the design and implementation of a European Gender Equality Certification System (GECS)²⁷. More specifically, this is a framework that embeds gender equality into institutional governance and enables universities to track their progress. GE ACADEMY produced a position paper²⁸ with similar recommendations.

Some projects also propose a field-focused approach, which enables an evidence-based approach tailored to specific domains. In this regard, SheMakes.eu developed a policy brief²⁹ that aims to address the gap between women's strong presence in the textile workforce and their limited roles in leadership and innovation, while proposing recommendations such as fostering practice-based learning and promoting collaborative, network-driven business models in order to tackle the issue.

Other projects make recommendations at the institutional level, through results like MINDtheGEPs' policy brief³⁰, which underscores the importance of reliable data as the foundation for effective Gender Equality Plans in research-performing organisations, stressing that meaningful policy change cannot be achieved without solid evidence.

In the case of SUPERA, a number of institutional policies and guidelines³¹ were developed to advance gender equality within research-performing organisations. One example is the "New regulation on students' parental rights", introduced by the University of Coimbra (UC), which strengthens and clarifies the rights of pregnant students and student parents. This framework ensures they receive equal treatment to their peers who are benefiting from special statuses such

²⁶ [SUPPORTER - Recommendations for universities and faculties of sport](#)

²⁷ [CASPER - Policy recommendations on the certification/award system](#)

²⁸ [GE Academy – Position Paper on the Certification System](#)

²⁹ [SheMakes.eu – Policy Brief](#)

³⁰ [MINDtheGEPs – No data: No policies! The MINDtheGEPs approach to evidence-based policies for GEPs](#)

³¹ [SUPERA – Guidelines and Best Practices for RPOs](#)

as high-performing athletes. A comparable policy was adopted by the Central European University (CEU), which was participating in this project. Other important measures introduced through SUPERA include UC's "minimum threshold of 33-40% representation of women and men in selection and examination boards" and CEU's policy on "increasing the representation of women faculty."

GENDERACTIONplus has produced a series of policy briefs on gender equality, including "ERA of Inclusive Gender Equality", "A New ERA of Inclusive Gender Equality", "A New ERA of Inclusion and Intersectionality", "A New ERA for GEPs: An Active Role for the European Commission", and "Gender-Based Violence in the ERA". Together, these policy briefs offer recommendations to explore the future of gender equality within the European Research Area (ERA) and highlight the role of EU institutions in driving systemic change. An example of these recommendations would be the observation that comprehensive EU-level monitoring can foster coherent national monitoring systems, encourage policy learning, and motivate countries to use monitoring as a tool for policy development. At the same time, the focus on GEPs should integrate – rather than overshadow – other key gender equality priorities, such as strengthening the gender dimension in research and innovation and adopting a more intersectional approach by including additional equality dimensions in both national and Research Funding Organisation (RFO) policies.³² Recognising inclusiveness as essential to removing barriers and ensuring equal opportunities for all, GENDERACTIONplus also produced the policy brief "Research Careers: The Ground for Gender+ Inclusion"³³, which promotes inclusive research careers by emphasising gender equality and diversity. It recommends, at national level, creating observatories to monitor researchers' careers with a focus on gender equality and inclusiveness, in collaboration with RFOs, RPOs and other stakeholders, and investigating the opportunity costs of PhDs – particularly young women – dropping out of research careers. At European level, it calls for closer interaction between the ERA and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to strengthen the cultural acceptance and uptake of gender+ inclusiveness in higher education, research and policymaking.

4.3.3. Tools and Practical Instruments

The analysis revealed that 18 of the 23 projects created tools and practical materials with the aim to enhance equality and fairness in research and innovation (AGRIGEP, GILL, AEQUITAS, SUPPORTER, MINDtheGEPs, MAMMOth, GENDERACTIONplus, CALIPER, TARGETED-MPI, Gender STI, EQUALS-EU, GEARING ROLES, UniSAFE, SUPERA, SheMakes.eu, CASPER, GE ACADEMY, ACT, RESET). These projects produced diverse outputs, ranging from digital platforms and software solutions to guidelines, databases, and collaborative networks. Together, they aim at making gender equality more practical, measurable, and actionable within institutions and innovation ecosystems.

Some projects have focused on proposing methodologies for collecting institutional resources and monitoring tools. For example, ACT developed the Gender Equality Audit & Monitoring (GEAM) tool³⁴, an integrated survey-based instrument that enables institutions to collect and analyse gender equality data systematically across organisational levels. This resource, as well as other instruments, will be updated through a service funded by the European Commission, the EU Gender Equality Competence Facility, which is planned to kick off in 2026³⁵. MINDtheGEPs produced guidelines for recruitment, helping organisations apply gender-sensitive approaches in hiring and promotion. The project also developed guidelines³⁶ on actions to empower women in decision-making processes, including training design to help junior women researchers overcome structural and cultural barriers to career advancement.

³² [GENDERACTIONplus – ERA of Inclusive Gender Equality](#)

³³ [GENDERACTIONplus – Research Careers: The Ground for Gender+ Inclusion](#)

³⁴ [ACT – Gender Equality Audit & Monitoring \(GEAM\) tool](#)

³⁵ [EU Gender Equality Competence Facility, EU Funding & Tenders Portal, 2025](#)

³⁶ [MINDtheGEPs - Guidelines on planned actions to empower women in decision-making processes](#)

The AEQUITAS project has developed technical solutions such as the Fairness-by-Design Engine³⁷ and an architecture design to reduce bias in AI systems. In addition, it has delivered diagnostic tools for detecting bias, educational resources to raise awareness of social biases, and a prototype software framework that organisations can use to test and adopt fairness-by-design approaches. Similarly, MAMMOth introduced Bias Mitigation Software to address structural and algorithmic inequalities in AI workflows.

Projects have also invested in collaborative and knowledge-sharing infrastructures. ACT launched a Knowledge Sharing Hub, providing a digital space for institutions to exchange methodologies and good practices.³⁸ This initiative is currently continuing through the ongoing EU-funded INSPIRE.³⁹ Regarding international cooperation, **Gender STI** set up the European Observatory on Gender in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), a platform to track international progress in gender equality within science, technology, and innovation.⁴⁰

As they are combining digital innovations with practical instruments, these projects provide universities, research organisations, and innovation actors with the means to embed, monitor, and scale up gender equality measures.

4.3.4. Knowledge Resources and Informative Reports

Regarding informative reports and knowledge source, 16 of the analysed projects – including AGRIGEP, AEQUITAS, SUPPORTER, GENDERACTIONplus, MINDtheGEPs, ATHENA, CALIPER, GRANTeD, UniSAFE, CASPER, ACT, NEXUS, GEARING ROLES, RESET, EQUALS-EU, and GE ACADEMY – have produced analyses that map the state of the art, provide landscape overviews, and document existing practices and gaps in gender equality within research and innovation. These outputs compile evidence, assess current conditions, and highlight persistent challenges, creating valuable resources for both policymakers and institutions. These resources offer evidence on issues such as career progression, representation in leadership, gender-based violence, and participation in innovation ecosystems, while also assessing the implementation and impact of Gender Equality Plans.

³⁷ [AEQUITAS – Fairness by Design Engine](#)

³⁸ [ACT – Knowledge Sharing Hub Specification and Description of Services](#)

³⁹ [INSPIRE - European Centre of Excellence on Inclusive Gender Equality in Research & Innovation: Creating Knowledge & Engaging in Collaborative Action](#)

⁴⁰ [GenderSTI - European Observatory on Gender in STI](#)

5. Aspect 2: Work-Life Balance

5.1. Introduction

Work-life balance is based on the principle of ensuring personal well-being through the harmonisation of professional tasks with leisure activities. The assumption is that no one should entirely reduce their life to their own job, but make sure to dedicate an adequate amount of time to the cultivation of interests and passions that would allow them to better develop on a personal level. However, the word “life” here can be used to refer to whatever set of activities outside of professional tasks, and its specific meaning depends on the context in which the idea of work-life balance is being applied.

From a gender equality perspective, work-life balance may be intended more narrowly as work-life balance for parents and carers, or simply as work-family life balance⁴¹: in this sense, the term refers to the ability to meet professional obligations and family responsibilities at the same time, and therefore to ensure more equal opportunities between women and men in the workplace and at home. This is the reason why this concept is very often linked to a gender equality perspective, so much so that numerous projects have decided to adopt it and to use it consistently in their own publications.

5.2. Women’s Challenge in Balancing Work with Family Life

To address women’s underrepresentation in the labour market, it is important to consider work life balance of working parents as well as policies supporting an adequate balance. In the EU, 58 % of all informal carers of children are women. Overall, 56 % of women compared to 51 % of men are involved in caring for or educating their children and/or grandchildren at least several times a week.⁴² As well, most informal carers for older persons and/or persons with disabilities in the EU are women (62 %).⁴³ These inequalities also lie in social expectation and role traditionally assigned to women. A 2017 report by Eurobarometer signalled the difficulty of shifting from this kind of mindset, reporting that 44% of respondents across the EU “believe the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family, with 17% in total agreement”.⁴⁴ Despite the fact that such a viewpoint proved to be a minority among all surveyed people, and that responses varied widely on a per-country basis, from Bulgaria’s 81% overall approval rate to Sweden’s 11%, this figure demonstrates the persistence of social stereotypes about women’s role in society.

In addition, the early stages of a woman's career often coincide with family planning decisions, exacerbating the difficulty of balancing maternity and work. Without sufficient work-life balance policies in place, women, particularly those at the start of their careers, are forced to choose between family and professional aspirations. According to a 2018 report published by the European Social Fund (ESF) Transnational Platform on behalf of the European Commission, it was found that women with children under 6 years old had an employment rate that was 9% lower than that of women with no children; that “more than 19% of inactive women in the EU [were] inactive because of care responsibilities”;⁴⁵ and that women were more likely to resort to part-time working compared to men (30% vs. 8%) due to caregiving responsibilities. The author also warns about misconceptions that are generally associated with women’s attempt to balance professional

⁴¹ [Work-life balance - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)

⁴² [EU | Informal caring for children and childcare services | Work-life balance | Thematic Focus | Gender Equality Index, European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

⁴³ [EU | Informal caring for older persons and persons with disabilities and long-term care services | Work-life balance | Thematic Focus | Gender Equality Index | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

⁴⁴ ["Special Eurobarometer 456. Gender Equality 2017". European Commission](#)

⁴⁵ ["Female \(Un\)employment and Work-Life Balance. A discussion paper from the Employment Thematic Network". ESF Transnational Platform](#)

and caregiving responsibilities, pointing out that “shorter working hours, in particular part-time, are frequently presented as a ‘choice’ by women”⁴⁶, while “this ‘choice’ [actually] reflects the everyday process of making decisions within constraints and does not exclude discrimination, since society imposes constraints inconsistent with its commitment to equality”,⁴⁷ such as a lack of available caring facilities, the poor quality of their services, their inaccessibility in terms of price, location, opening hours, and flexibility.

Further studies proved the consistency of these findings. For instance, a comprehensive report published by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) in 2022 shows that “in the EU [...] about 56% of women with children under 12 years old spend at least 5 hours per day on childcare, compared to 26% of men”.⁴⁸ The study also points out an unequal repartition of the burden of childcare between men and women, if childcare is thought of as including a set of leisure and non-leisure activities. When this distinction is made, it has been found that “men who provide childcare spend more time on leisure activities, with 38% of men spending between 1 and 3 hours a day on leisure activities, compared to 29% of women.”⁴⁹ Therefore, compared to men, women are also more likely to be involved in non-leisure childcare activities that are much more psychologically demanding. This disproportion becomes even wider if we consider that “around 50% of women and just 6% of men in partnerships are primarily responsible for their children’s personal and physical care, such as bathing, feeding, or changing diapers.”⁵⁰ Finally, the percentage of women with childcare responsibilities and working in paid employment has been found to fall short of 14 percentage points compared to men (70% vs. 84%) and of 19 percentage points when it comes to part-time working, with 38% of women being likely to work part-time compared to 19% of men. Most strikingly, “women caring for children are more likely to be stay-at-home parents as their main occupation, with 11% of women in this role compared to only 1% of men.”⁵¹

5.3. Consequences of Inadequate Work-Life Balance for Women

Such an imbalance has impact on women’s mental health, which in turn affects their performance at work. According to a study published by the FEMM committee in 2025, common consequences of gender gaps and men-centred ways of working on women’s mental health are: (a) disturbed and non-restorative sleep, namely “difficulty in falling asleep, unsatisfactory awakening and persistent tiredness throughout the day”⁵²; (b) absenteeism, with “women [being] more likely to experience temporary absences from work”⁵³ after the birth of the first child, as well as “to transition into lower-paid positions, contributing to increased uncertainty in their employment trajectories”⁵⁴; (c) presenteeism, as women often feel “the pressure to remain at work during periods of physical or emotional strain”⁵⁵, despite experiencing anxiety, depression, or exhaustion; (d) labour market exit, which “not only removes [women’s] skills and experience from the workplace, but also deepens existing gender disparities”⁵⁶.

In addition to this very last point, it is important to stress the fact that women, in addition to being more vulnerable to an involuntary exit from the labour market, “already tend to have more career

⁴⁶ [“Female \(Un\)employment and Work-Life Balance. A discussion paper from the Employment Thematic Network”, ESF Transnational Platform](#)

⁴⁷ [“Female \(Un\)employment and Work-Life Balance. A discussion paper from the Employment Thematic Network”, ESF Transnational Platform](#)

⁴⁸ [“A Better Work-Life Balance: Bridging the gender care gap”, EIGE](#)

⁴⁹ [“A Better Work-Life Balance: Bridging the gender care gap”, EIGE](#)

⁵⁰ [“A Better Work-Life Balance: Bridging the gender care gap”, EIGE](#)

⁵¹ [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Regions on the European care strategy](#)

⁵² [The effect of gender pay gap and pension gaps and new ways of working on women's mental health](#)

⁵³ [The effect of gender pay gap and pension gaps and new ways of working on women's mental health](#)

⁵⁴ [The effect of gender pay gap and pension gaps and new ways of working on women's mental health](#)

⁵⁵ [The effect of gender pay gap and pension gaps and new ways of working on women's mental health](#)

⁵⁶ [The effect of gender pay gap and pension gaps and new ways of working on women's mental health](#)

breaks (often for the informal care of children, older people or people with disabilities)⁵⁷, in addition to resorting to part-time work more frequently, as shown in the previous paragraph. This disadvantage has significant long-term implications, as women seeking to achieve a work-family life balance often have to give up some of their career goals in order to prioritise caregiving obligations, which also accounts for the huge gender disparity in leadership roles for the R&I sector (as elaborated in **Chapter 4, Aspect 1: Women in R&I**).

To conclude, if we look at work-life balance as closely connected with the issue of gender equality, we should also consider that women, being more likely to carry the burden of family life responsibilities than men, will perform a significant amount of unpaid work, very frequently on top of their job. Therefore, it is easy to see how a lack of work-family life balance due to an unequal distribution of expectations between household members, as well as a lack of public support for women with caregiving obligations, and especially young mothers at the beginning of their career, may give rise to instances of social injustice from a gender equality perspective.

5.4. Key Strategies and Actions to Address the Challenge: Contributions from the Analysed Projects

Many projects among those that have been examined took into account the issue of work-family life imbalance for women working in R&I and developed effective strategies to address its prevalence. Overall, **103** out of a total of **285** results from the projects have been found to directly address this issue with a dedicated solution, corresponding to a **36%** share of all projects' results.

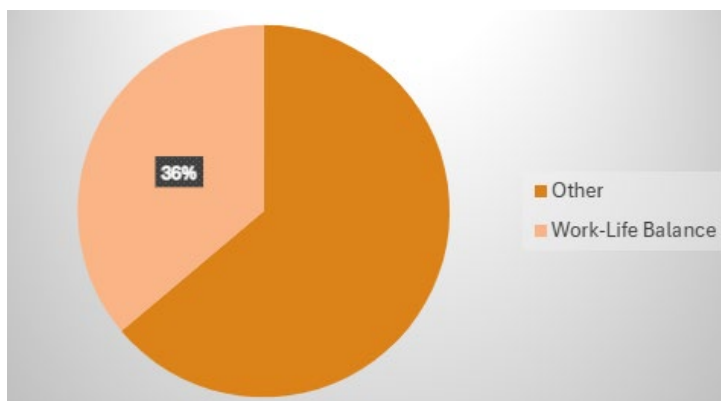


Figure 5: Work-life Balance related results

In the following sub-paragraphs, the three major strategies proposed will be outlined. For each strategy, a corresponding set of actions will be included and commented based on an overview of projects' results and recommendations, following a comparative approach.

⁵⁷ [The effect of gender pay gap and pension gaps and new ways of working on women's mental health](#)

5.4.1. Strategy and Actions (1): Encouraging Collaborative Environments

Actions conceived to create a more collaborative culture – both within the household and between families on one hand and institutions on the other – are analysed and gathered in this section. A more collaborative culture within the household implies an equal repartition of tasks and responsibilities between men and women, including those related to caregiving (i.e. looking after small children and/or elderly people in need of assistance). More specifically, a greater involvement of men in such domestic tasks is expected to reduce the burden of family life on women.

This objective can be reasonably met by raising awareness on the importance of an equal distribution of tasks in the household for women to progress in their career path, and it is profoundly linked to the need to challenge gender stereotypes and normative ideals related to the traditional roles of men and women in society. Institutions such as those participating in the GILL project particularly emphasise this aspect in their roadmap for gender-responsive smart innovation and entrepreneurship (GRSIE), stressing the need to adopt a feminist approach to the issue of work-life balance: in fact, part of the project members' strategy relies on deconstructing family roles, addressing "the need to normalise the model of women combining paid work and caring, as well as men providing care"⁵⁸ through awareness-raising activities and campaigns, among other initiatives.

On the other hand, something that can also be done from the part of such institutions is to actively encourage connections among employees and their families. This kind of approach seeks to blur the distinction between work and family life rather than looking at these two terms as if they were necessarily in opposition with one another. For instance, among the initiatives outlined by the University of the Republic of Moldova in its GEP, the organisation of dedicated social programmes to encourage such meetings outside the workplace is foreseen with the aim of fostering connections between employees' families and ultimately creating a collective supportive environment among them⁵⁹.

These two approaches can be seen as complementary, as the adoption of one particular strategy does not necessarily contrast with the other. In fact, institutions such as the University of Banja Luka in Bosnia-Herzegovina (SUPPORTER project), have decided to use these two kinds of strategies at once, by "encouraging shared responsibilities in both private and professional life, and fostering a culture of cooperation and understanding within institutions"⁶⁰, once again, through raising awareness activities.

5.4.2. Strategy and Action (2): Implementing Flexible Arrangements

Another key strategy adopted by most GEPs is to ensure more flexibility in the workplace to facilitate employees' parenting needs and other caregiving obligations. These policies aim to have a particular attention to women employees to limit negative impact their career progression. In the case of many results, special arrangements have been granted for those returning from parental leave or long-term caregiving.

It is worth noting that flexible arrangements are sometimes granted for issues that are technically distinct from caregiving but are in some way connected to it, such as individual well-being. For instance, since young parents are reportedly more likely to experience burnout at work as a consequence of work-family life imbalance, the possibility for them to benefit from particular holiday arrangements has been envisaged by some institutions willing to provide them with extra leisure time for themselves and their children.

⁵⁸ [GILL – D.1.1 Roadmap for GRSIE](#)

⁵⁹ [SUPPORTER – IEFIS Gender Equality Plan 2025-2027, Moldova State University](#)

⁶⁰ [SUPPORTER – Gender equality plan at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport for the period 2025-2027](#)

For example, the University of Gdańsk in Poland (MINDtheGEPs project), planned to grant holidays and trips as part of parental care rights, alongside other solutions, while the University of Bucharest in Romania (ATHENA project) declared the intention to modify its attendance policy in order to avoid that students with care obligations, and especially young mothers, are penalised in their academic path.

The implementation of smart working, either entirely or in a hybrid form, is also widely regarded as an effective solution to guarantee better work-family life balance standards. While these types of arrangement are usually set up for employees only, there may be instances where they are also directed at students: this is once again the case of the University of Gdańsk, which took steps “towards the implementation of hybrid work solutions”⁶¹ as well as “hybrid study solutions due to family-related and/or personal circumstances”⁶².

Another crucial aspect is the strengthening of labour conditions, particularly in reducing precarity among early-career researchers⁶³. National and institutional frameworks can play a decisive role in improving contract stability, especially for women and parents. While some countries, such as Bulgaria, have piloted measures that encourage more flexible job designs to support gender equality, broader adoption of such approaches remains limited⁶⁴.

In addition to promoting gender equality in recruitment and retention, the University of Łódź's plan focuses on family-friendly policies, supporting work-life balance. These policies, such as flexible working hours and parental leave, contribute to reducing gender-based pay disparities by creating a more inclusive work environment for all employees.

5.4.3. Strategy and Actions (3): Broaden the Offer of Caregiving Services

An additional most common strategy across projects' results to tackle the issue of work-family life imbalance is to provide additional services directly and/or through the stipulation of partnerships with external service providers, such as childcare facilities, both public and private.

This approach has been adopted, among others, by the University of Turin in Italy (MINDtheGEPs project), with the aim of setting up dedicated agreements with daycare centres, such as nurseries, for employees' children; this initiative is also extended to renew or stipulate agreements with camps and summer centres⁶⁵.

Perhaps the most detailed set of initiatives in this area has been outlined in the GEP produced by the Italian National Research Council (MINDtheGEPs project), whose idea was to “rethink the current welfare system, mostly oriented towards complementary activities (summer/winter holidays for employees' children, language and theatre courses for employees' children, summer camps) towards a more inclusive model”⁶⁶. The measures envisaged extend the range of beneficiaries to include non-permanent staff, and provide substantial support for families with caregiving obligations, by stipulating partnerships “with local nurseries and nearby kindergartens, agreements for social and health care for elderly or vulnerable people”⁶⁷.

⁶¹ [MINDtheGEPs Gender Equality Plan for the University of Gdańsk – Equality measure for the years 2022-2023](#)

⁶² [MINDtheGEPs Gender Equality Plan for the University of Gdańsk – Equality measure for the years 2022-2023](#)

⁶³ [AGRIGEP – Fact sheet #4 Women & Precarity](#)

⁶⁴ [SUPPORTER – I-GEP National Sports Academy - Bulgaria](#)

⁶⁵ [MINDtheGEPs Gender Equality Plan 2023, University of Turin](#)

⁶⁶ [MINDtheGEPs Piano per la Parità di Genere 2022-2024, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche](#)

⁶⁷ [MINDtheGEPs Piano per la Parità di Genere 2022-2024, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche](#)

6. Aspect 3: Pay Gap

The gender pay gap remains a significant marker of inequality in the European Union. Despite sustained policy efforts, women’s gross hourly earnings continue to fall behind men’s. In 2023, women in the EU, earned on average 12% less per hour than men, though this figure varies considerably across Member States⁶⁸. According to EUROSTAT, in more than half of the EU countries, the gap exceeds this average. This persistent imbalance reflects not only wage disparities but also structural inequalities in career opportunities, working conditions, and social recognition.

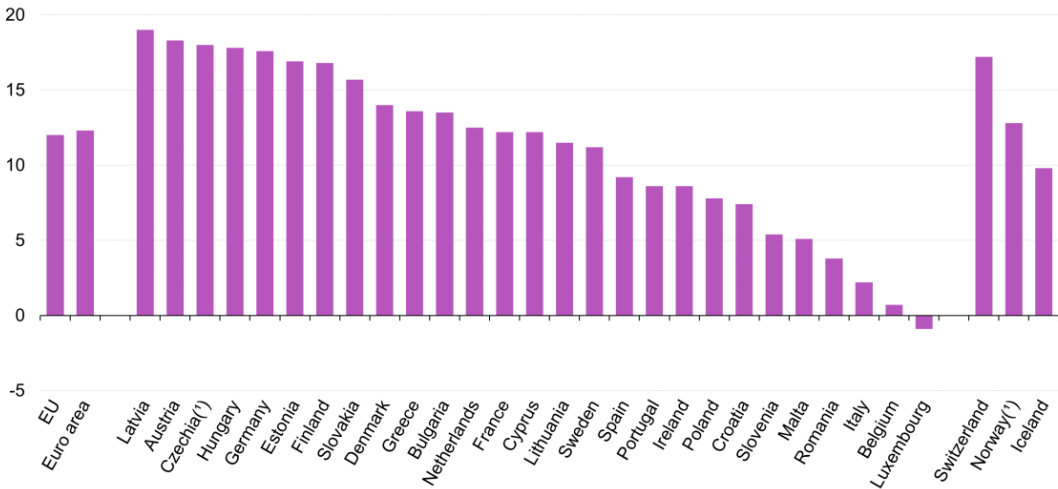


Figure 6: The unadjusted gender pay gap, 2023 (difference between average gross hourly earnings of male and female employees as % of male gross earnings)

The gender pay gap is shaped by a complex interplay of national employment structures, institutional practices, and cultural norms⁶⁹. Across Europe, notable disparities emerge between countries. Employment rates and education levels also play a role, as gaps appear smaller when only highly educated women participate in the labour market, masking inequalities by excluding lower-paid groups⁷⁰.

The research and academic sectors illustrate these inequalities particularly sharply. Women researchers, and especially mothers, face systemic disadvantages that hinder career advancement. Although performance indicators are formally considered objective, they often function in discriminatory ways. According to the latest She Figures report, women are disproportionately employed on precarious contracts, which reinforces their disadvantaged position⁷¹. Others source show that in European higher education, 9% of women academics are employed on contracts of one year or less — or without contracts at all — compared to 7.7% of men⁷². Among early-career researchers, the problem is even more pronounced: 40% of women versus 31.8% of men hold precarious contracts. While men see a rapid improvement in contract

⁶⁸ [EUROSTAT – Gender pay gap statistics](#)

⁶⁹ [EIGE – Tackling the gender pay gap: not without a better work-life balance](#)

⁷⁰ [GILL – Roadmap for Gender Responsive Smart Innovation and Entrepreneurship \(GRSIE\)](#)

⁷¹ [SHE FIGURES 2024 – Chapter 5: Working Conditions of Researchers](#)

⁷² [AGRIGEP – Fact sheet #5 Gender and Precarity in Academia](#)

security as their careers progress, with precariousness falling to 5.5% at the next stage, the proportion of women in insecure positions remains high at 28.3%. Such disparities are particularly damaging for women balancing family responsibilities, often without adequate access to maternity benefits or flexible working conditions⁷³.

Country-specific data further illustrate the persistence of inequalities. In Slovakia, the gender pay gap stands at 9.2% overall, with differences across career stages⁷⁴. In Spain, women earn €21,012 on average annually compared to €26,738 for men, meaning that women would require a 27% increase to reach parity⁷⁵. Serbia records a gap of 8.8% even when qualifications and tasks are equivalent, while Italy's general gap of 5–6% masks a much higher disparity among entrepreneurs, where women earn nearly 45% less than men⁷⁶. Norway, by contrast, offers an example of more systematic monitoring: employers in both the public and private sectors are required to collect equal pay data every two years as part of gender equality reporting⁷⁷. Significant differences in the proportion of women on precarious contracts also appear across countries, with Hungary, Spain, and Switzerland registering some of the highest levels.

At the institutional level, responses vary by country and region. Within the RESET project, the University of Bordeaux⁷⁸ identified a 25% pay gap among permanent staff in 2021, largely explained by professional segregation, and has set objectives to calculate and publish pay gap figures annually. The Slovak Academy of Sciences⁷⁹ and the ATHENA project have similarly recommended salary audits and systematic monitoring to uncover sources of inequality. Under the ATHENA project, the University of Gdańsk⁸⁰ highlighted imbalances across both academic and administrative staff, while under the CALIPER project, the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing⁸¹ considered equal pay guaranteed by law and chose to focus instead on recruitment and career development initiatives. These differences underline the uneven recognition of, and response to, pay disparities across Europe. Out of the 285 analysed results, **45** specifically focused on the gender pay gap, reflecting the central importance of this issue across the examined projects.

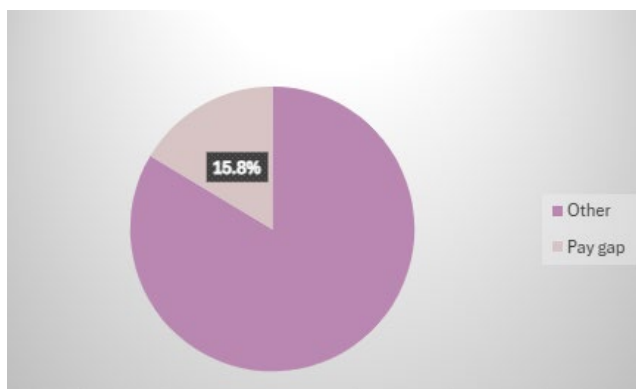


Figure 6: Pay Gap related results

⁷³ [GILL – Entrepreneurship during the pandemic and crisis in the context of gender inequalities](#)

⁷⁴ [ATHENA – Gender Equality Plan of the Slovak Academy of Sciences](#)

⁷⁵ [MINDtheGEPs – Gender Imbalances at the Macro-Level: A Comparative Analysis of Partners' Legal and Policy Contexts](#)

⁷⁶ [MINDtheGEPs – Italy's National Research Council Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

⁷⁷ [GENDERACTIONPLUS – Benchmarking report on Gender Based Violence \(GBV\) and Sexual Harassment \(SH\) targeting national authorities and RFOs](#)

⁷⁸ [RESET – University of Bordeaux: Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

⁷⁹ [ATHENA – Gender Equality Plan of the Slovak Academy of Sciences](#)

⁸⁰ [MINDtheGEPs – University of Gdańsk 2022-2023](#)

⁸¹ [CALIPER – University of Zagreb- Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing: Gender Equality Plan](#)

In addition to the direct wage disparities, the gender pay gap is deeply influenced by horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market.⁸² Women are often overrepresented in lower-paid fields such as education, healthcare, and retail, including R&I, while men dominate higher-paying sectors like engineering, technology, and finance.⁸³ This occupational segregation results in women's work being undervalued and underpaid compared to male-dominated industries, perpetuating the gender pay gap.

Vertical segregation involves the unequal distribution of men and women across various levels of responsibility within organisations. In general, gender segregation in the labour market and in business is reinforced by socialisation, gender stereotypes, women's isolation in the workplace (if they are in a male-dominated fields), and an absence of women's networks and their access to men's clubs⁸⁴. While women may hold a significant proportion of lower-tier positions, men are more likely to occupy decision-making and leadership roles. This unequal representation at higher levels of authority exacerbates wage gaps, as those in top roles tend to receive significantly higher compensation.

The gender pay gap has significant implications not only for women's financial security but also for their mental health⁸⁵. Women are more likely to occupy lower-paid, emotionally demanding roles, such as those in healthcare, education, and social care, where the work is undervalued and career progression is often limited. These sectors also expose women to higher levels of psychosocial risks, including burnout and emotional exhaustion, which contribute to anxiety and depression. Additionally, women's responsibility for unpaid care work compounds these stressors, limiting their career opportunities and contributing to ongoing mental health challenges. The cumulative effect of lower wages, career interruptions due to caregiving, and the psychological toll of being undervalued in the workplace leads to poorer mental health outcomes, with women reporting higher levels of chronic stress, depression, and burnout compared to their male counterparts. Addressing the gender pay gap must, therefore, include measures to reduce workplace inequalities and ensure that women have access to the support they need to mitigate these mental health impacts. In this respect, the strategies outlined in Section **5.3.3 Strategy and Actions (3): Broaden the Offer of Caregiving Services** on broadening the offer of caregiving services — including more accessible childcare and long-term care solutions — are essential, as they help to ease the unpaid care burden on women, support their well-being, and enable more continuous and secure participation in paid employment.

6.1 Measures to Address the Gender Pay Gap

A variety of initiatives have been introduced at EU, national, and institutional levels to address the gender pay gap, though their implementation varies across regions and organisations⁸⁶. The measures developed by the analysed projects are diverse and tackle the gender pay gap from multiple perspectives, focusing on areas such as transparency, recruitment, career development, work-life balance, and awareness. These efforts aim to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for all genders by addressing the root causes of pay disparities and promoting structural change.

6.1.1. Gender Pay Gap Monitoring and Transparency Measures

A critical focus in many GEPs is the promotion of transparent pay structures. These efforts ensure that compensation is equitable for equivalent work across genders. Institutions are actively working

⁸² [RESET – University of Bordeaux: Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

⁸³ [SHE FIGURES 2024 – Chapter 6: Career Advancement and Participation in decision-making](#)

⁸⁴ [GILL – Roadmap for Gender Responsive Smart Innovation and Entrepreneurship \(GRSIE\)](#)

⁸⁵ [The effect of gender pay and pension gaps and new ways of working on women's mental health](#)

⁸⁶ [EIGE – Tackling the gender pay gap: not without a better work-life balance](#)

to implement gender-neutral wage classification systems and unbiased job grading, aiming to prevent any gender-based pay disparities.

The University of Bordeaux⁸⁷ (RESET project) aims to calculate and publicly disclose gender pay gaps, with the ultimate goal of reducing these disparities through increased transparency. They use tools to track, and address pay gaps and career progression inequalities across the institution.⁸⁸

One important measure is the promotion of pay transparency through salary audits. For example, the ATHENA Best Practices Compendium⁸⁹ has emphasised the value of such audits in identifying pay disparities and their causes, thereby providing a sound basis for corrective action. Institutions such as the University of Bordeaux have gone further by committing to publish annual analyses of pay gaps as a tool for accountability and cultural change.⁹⁰

These guidelines emphasise the importance of monitoring progress in gender equality through SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) indicators. Institutions are encouraged to track gender pay disparities, using clear and actionable metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of their GEPs in addressing the gender pay gap.⁹¹

6.1.2. Equality in Recruitment, Career Development, and Academic Positions

The University of Porto's GEP developed under the RESET project focuses on promoting equal opportunities in recruitment processes, with an emphasis on ensuring gender balance and equality throughout the university. The plan includes specific actions to reduce the gender pay gap by fostering inclusive recruitment practices⁹².

This university's plan addresses gender equality in both recruitment and retention. It also focuses on addressing gender biases that contribute to pay gaps and includes family-friendly policies to create a more supportive environment for employees, thus promoting gender equality in career development⁹³.

Within the ATHENA project, the University of Ruse's GEP works towards the elimination of gender differences in pay and promotes equal access to academic roles and decision-making processes. Their focus on career progression ensures that all genders have equal opportunities to advance and be compensated fairly⁹⁴.

The GEP at Jan Kochanowski University (ATHENA Project) aims to ensure gender balance in recruitment and career development processes. The GEP promotes equal access to career advancement opportunities for women and men, which is a key factor in reducing pay disparities over time⁹⁵.

The University of Gdańsk's GEP (ATHENA Project) includes measures to ensure gender balance in recruitment and career development. This contributes to reducing gender-based pay disparities by creating equal opportunities for all genders within the university. Key initiatives include online training on gender equality, mentoring programmes for women in academic careers, career support for administrative staff, salary adjustments, and efforts to balance gender representation in male- and female-dominated fields. Additionally, there is a focus on reducing gender disparities

⁸⁷ [RESET – University of Bordeaux: Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

⁸⁸ [RESET – University of Bordeaux: Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

⁸⁹ [ATHENA-D4.1 – GEPs best practices compendium](#)

⁹⁰ [RESET – University of Bordeaux: Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

⁹¹ [MINDtheGEPs – Guidelines for GEPs Implementation](#)

⁹² [RESET – UP Equality Gender Equality Plan of the University of Porto 2022-2024](#)

⁹³ [RESET – University of Lodz: Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

⁹⁴ [ATHENA – University of Ruse Angel Kanchev: Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

⁹⁵ [ATHENA – Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce 2022](#)

in senior academic positions through targeted interventions⁹⁶. The AGRIGEP project has developed policies such as gender quotas for hiring at all levels, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles, ensuring that gender balance is maintained across the academic and research sectors⁹⁷.

6.1.3. Awareness, Education, and Addressing Bias

Many institutions such as the Universities of Porto⁹⁸, Łódź⁹⁹, and the University of Jan Kochanowski in Kielce¹⁰⁰ conduct workshops and training sessions to raise awareness about gender biases. These programs aim at educating staff and stakeholders on unconscious gender biases in recruitment, performance evaluations, and career progression. By addressing these biases, institutions seek to reduce the gender pay gap and improve equality in the workplace.

The ATHENA project's programme focuses on the development and implementation of GEPs. While not exclusively focused on the pay gap, the training encourages actions to address gender inequalities in all areas, including promoting equal pay and career progression opportunities for all genders¹⁰¹.

6.1.4. Institutional Policies and Structural Support

Embedding gender equality into policy frameworks is a key measure¹⁰² to address the gender pay gap. Gender budgeting and the mainstreaming of equality principles into human resources processes — from recruitment and assignments to staff welfare and project funding — help ensure that attention to pay equality becomes an integral part of organisational practice¹⁰³. These institutional efforts can be reinforced by national frameworks, such as Norway's biannual equal pay reporting requirement. At the European level, initiatives including GENDERACTIONplus have further highlighted the gender pay gap as a central indicator of cultural change within higher education institutions.

6.1.4.1. Horizon Europe eligibility criterion, the Gender Equality Plans

Public bodies (such as research funding bodies, national ministries or other public authorities, including public-for-profit organisations), higher education establishments (public and private), and research organisations (public and private) from EU countries and non-EU countries associated to Horizon Europe, are now required to develop and implement a GEP as part of funding eligibility criteria. These plans ensure that gender equality measures are embedded within institutional policies, including actions aimed at addressing the gender pay gap¹⁰⁴. Properly updated and implemented GEPs can become a changing force for gender equality¹⁰⁵.

6.1.4.2. Gender Quotas

To reduce gender imbalances, including pay disparities, gender quotas are being introduced in recruitment processes, especially for leadership and decision-making roles¹⁰⁶. These quotas help

⁹⁶ [MINDtheGEPs– University of Gdańsk 2022-2023](#)

⁹⁷ [AGRIGEP – Implementing Gender Equality Plans in Higher Education and Research in Widening Countries: The case of Agriculture & Life Sciences](#)

⁹⁸ [RESET – UP Equality Gender Equality Plan of the University of Porto 2022-2024](#)

⁹⁹ [RESET – University of Lodz: Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

¹⁰⁰ [ATHENA – Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce 2022](#)

¹⁰¹ [ATHENA – Programme and material of the training for GEPI Committees](#)

¹⁰² [MINDtheGEPs – Italy's National Research Council Gender Equality Plan 2022-2024](#)

¹⁰³ [CALIPER – University of Zagreb- Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing: Gender Equality Plan](#)

¹⁰⁴ [SHE FIGURES 2024 – Gender Equality Plans in research organisations and higher education institutions as a catalyst for transformative and sustainable change](#)

¹⁰⁵ [CALIPER – ULB's Gender Equality Plan for the STEM](#)

¹⁰⁶ [ATHENA – Guidelines on monitoring and evaluation](#)

ensure a gender-balanced workforce, particularly at higher levels of the organisation, where gender disparities are often most pronounced.

6.1.4.3. Inclusive Language and Communication

To foster an inclusive environment, many institutions are promoting the use of gender-neutral language in professional and academic settings. This initiative helps create an atmosphere where everyone regardless their gender, age, or background feel represented and valued, which can ultimately contribute to reducing gender-based disparities, including in pay¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁷ [SHE FIGURES 2024](#)

7. Gender Based Violence

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to harm inflicted upon individuals based on their gender identity or gender expression, encompasses a spectrum of behaviours that result in physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm, with serious consequences for individuals, communities, organisations and the whole society. Particularly in academic and research settings, GBV manifests itself through various forms such as sexual harassment, gender-based bullying, and online abuse. These environments, with their hierarchical power structures, exacerbate the vulnerability of certain groups, especially women and gender diverse individuals, making them prone to various forms of violence¹⁰⁸.

The EU has recognised the pervasive nature of GBV in academic institutions and the research sector, acknowledging that gender-based violence is not only an individual issue but also a systemic problem influenced by organisational cultures. EU funded research and surveys have revealed alarming rates of GBV across European universities and research institutions, highlighting the urgency for comprehensive action. The findings emphasise that, while GBV disproportionately affects women, non-binary and trans individuals are also at heightened risk, underlining the importance of intersectional approaches to tackling this issue¹⁰⁹.

For instance, according to the survey conducted by the UniSAFE project in 2022, nearly two in three of over 42.000 staff and student respondents reported experiencing some form of GBV within their institutions. This included physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and online violence. Women and non-binary individuals were disproportionately affected, with 66% and 74%, respectively, reporting such experiences. These hostile environments not only pose direct risks to safety but also impact the victims' professional development and career continuity. Prevention measures in educational and research settings remain insufficient, leaving gaps in protection and institutional accountability¹¹⁰.

To address the high prevalence of GBV, the European Commission has published the Zero tolerance code of conduct, written in collaboration with the ERA subgroup on strengthening inclusive gender equality¹¹¹. This voluntary based code sets clear expectations for institutions to implement robust policies, reporting mechanisms, and support systems for victims. It aims to guide Member States and other stakeholder and individuals to foster a culture of safety, inclusivity, and respect, ensuring that all forms of GBV are actively prevented and addressed. Through the ERA policies, a focus is now settled to addressing this issue. First, through the GEPs, measures to combat GBV, including sexual harassment, are among the suggested thematic areas to be covered, in order to be eligible for accessing EU research funding¹¹². Then, with the adoption of the ERA policy agenda 2025-2027, a dedicated action will focus on the implementation of the Zero tolerance code of conduct¹¹³.

¹⁰⁸ [Addressing Gender-Based Violence through the ERA Policy Framework: A Systemic Solution to Dilemmas and Contestations for Institutions](#)

¹⁰⁹ [Intersectionality and Gender-Based Violence: An Empirical Multi-Level Examination of Prevalence and Frequency in Universities and Research Organizations](#)

¹¹⁰ [Zero-tolerance code of conduct: Counteracting gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in the EU research and innovation system](#)

¹¹¹ [Zero-tolerance code of conduct: Counteracting gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in the EU research and innovation system](#)

¹¹² [Impact of gender equality plans across the European Research Area](#)

¹¹³ [ERA Structural Policies \(2025-2027\) | European Research Area Platform](#)

7.1. Measures to Address Gender-Based Violence: Contributions from Projects' Results

Most of the analysed projects directly addressing the issue of GBV do so through the adoption of three main strategies: raising awareness on GBV, providing safety and assistance to victims of GBV, and ensuring effectiveness and in denouncing and monitoring GBV.

7.1.1. Raising Awareness on Gender-Based Violence

Raising awareness about GBV is crucial within R&I institutions, where academics, students, and staff may be affected by or witness cases of GBV. However, individuals may not always be aware of which behaviours or actions constitute GBV or may be hesitant to report incidents due to cultural and social norms, and the absence of clear policies, reporting mechanisms, and protective infrastructure designed to protect victims and informants of GBV. To address this, institutions should provide comprehensive information and support to help individuals understand GBV, recognise its signs, and report incidents in a safe and confidential manner.

Raising-awareness activities can be carried out in several different ways, the most common being publicly sharing information regarding the official definition of GBV recognised by the organisation itself, normally according to EU and/or national legislation, the set of possible manifestations of such kind of violence, and its implications on the victims' life. This can be effectively done through the setting up of info sessions, conferences, and dedicated teaching modules.

For instance, the University of Salento (CALIPER project) decided to move on with the organisation of "seminars on gender stereotypes at least once a year and with different target groups (students, researchers, administrative staff)"¹¹⁴, setting up "courses, workshops, seminars, exhibitions aimed at internal and external audiences"¹¹⁵. In their intentions, this will also go hand in hand with the "provision of a compulsory training on the topic of discrimination and gender-based violence, harassment (sexual and non-sexual) in the study and work environment"¹¹⁶.

Other institutions, like the University of Timișoara (SUPPORTER project)¹¹⁷ go in the same direction, by deciding to provide "training courses [and] workshops for teachers and coaches, focusing on inclusiveness and anti-discrimination intervention"¹¹⁷. Likewise, Charles University (SUPPORTER project) took the decision to expand already existing training modules to include a real-life-scenario training on GBV, which will be compulsory for all faculty and staff members. This initiative is particularly insightful as, on one hand "the training will incorporate intersectional scenarios that reflect diverse experiences based on gender, age, ethnicity, and disability"¹¹⁸, an aspect that is not covered by similar initiatives from other projects), while, on the other, it "integrates bystander intervention strategies into coaching education, enabling both students and staff to respond constructively and promptly to incidents of harassment or misconduct"¹¹⁹.

Other types of information regarding the incidence of GBV within the organisation may also be disclosed. For instance, the UniSAFE project provided a toolkit with a set of recommendations on how to spread awareness on GBV in an effective way; among them, the idea to publish results from anonymous surveys conducted internally, not just through reports, but "using social media cards and posts [featuring] key statistics or impactful quotes that highlight the prevalence of gender-based violence"¹²⁰: this will help institutions "reach a wider audience and build a sense of urgency to address these issues"¹²¹.

¹¹⁴ [CALIPER – Gender Equality Plan 2022-2025, Salento University](#)

¹¹⁵ [CALIPER – Gender Equality Plan 2022-2025, Salento University](#)

¹¹⁶ [CALIPER – Gender Equality Plan 2022-2025, Salento University](#)

¹¹⁷ [SUPPORTER – 4I-GEPs: Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara \(UVT\), Romania](#)

¹¹⁸ [SUPPORTER – GEP Charles University \(CU\), Czechia](#)

¹¹⁹ [SUPPORTER – GEP Charles University \(CU\), Czechia](#)

¹²⁰ [UniSAFE – UniSAFE Toolkit](#)

¹²¹ [UniSAFE – UniSAFE Toolkit](#)

Among the institutions that managed to produce relevant results in this area is the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium (CALIPER project), which outlined a set of measures to spread information on GBV in its GEP. Particularly, the organisation showed the intention to create a website including all information on sexual harassment and sexism, such as legal definitions and consequences, how to deal with it, whom to turn to in case of experiencing sexual harassment, and how to start a procedure. In addition to that, a permanent poster campaign has been set up, with the aim to “inform in a very concrete and simplified way about available university services and protocols to deal with potential cases of sexism and harassment”¹²². This initiative is expected to be particularly effective, as “it emphasises at the same time that a faculty free of those behaviours is as important an element of well-being as physical safety measures”¹²³.

7.1.2. Providing Safety and Assistance to Victims of Gender-Based Violence

Another way to counter GBV is to ensure appropriate safety and support measures, so that victims feel protected and know whom to refer to in case they need to ask for any help.

As recommended by the UNISAFE Toolkit, “a specific contact point/person (for example, a designated person in each faculty for students)”¹²⁴ should be identified to provide protection. In the absence of such a figure, a dedicated service, such as an “HR officer for staff [and/or] an emergency warden or security officer providing immediate protection as first responder”¹²⁵ should be present to ensure that the victim of GBV is out of the reach of the perpetrator.

Most projects envisaged the implementation of this kind of measures. Among them, project members like the University of Turin in Italy (MINDtheGEPs project) are willing to create a confidential councillor, namely “a person institutionally in charge of providing free information, counselling, and assistance to members of the university community (employees, students) who experienced discrimination, harassment, and injury to dignity or bullying”¹²⁶.

In addition, the University of Belgrade (MINDtheGEPs project) has adopted a regulation specifically designed to prevent and protect against sexual harassment, ensuring a safe environment for all its members. This regulation mandates the establishment of a dedicated contact person to assist those affected by sexual harassment, provides strict confidentiality and privacy protection during the reporting and investigation process, and ensures continuous training for all staff and students. These measures are echoing the EU's zero-tolerance approach to GBV and strengthen the university's commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive academic environment¹²⁷.

As recommended through the UniSAFE Toolkit, two aspects are of particular importance to allow for a more effective service implementation and immediate support. To start with, “a centralised unit within the institution [should be responsible] for overseeing the services offered”¹²⁸: this measure will avoid overlapping between tasks and responsibilities in case these were assigned to multiple people at different levels in the organisation. Secondly, a diverse support system should be put in place, ensuring that victims of GBV can outline their experience to somebody who is best able to understand them. This helps create an environment of trust and openness, making victims

¹²² [CALIPER – GEP Université Libre de Bruxelles \(Sexual Harassment\)](#)

¹²³ [CALIPER – GEP Université Libre de Bruxelles \(Sexual Harassment\)](#)

¹²⁴ [UniSAFE – UniSAFE Toolkit](#)

¹²⁵ [UniSAFE – UniSAFE Toolkit](#)

¹²⁶ [MINDtheGEPs – Gender Equality Plan 2023 of University of Turin \(Preventing and Combating Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying\)](#)

¹²⁷ [MINDtheGEPs – Rulebook \(2021\) on prevention and protection from sexual harassment at the University of Belgrade](#)

¹²⁸ [UniSAFE – UniSAFE Toolkit](#)

feel more comfortable: for instance, “a person of colour or member of the LGBTQIA+ community may feel more at ease when speaking to someone they can relate to”¹²⁹.

7.1.3. Ensuring Effectiveness in Reporting Instances of GBV

Finally, much attention has also been given to the importance of reporting instances of GBV. Some progress has been achieved in the digitalisation and streamlining of GBV reporting methods, which allows to improve data collection and ensure the privacy of victims and informants.

For instance, as part of their recommendations to Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), SUPERA’s project members suggest improving the efficiency of reporting instances of GBV through the development of a dedicated smartphone app, intended to work as a “tool for monitoring patterns of problematic behaviour inside the community”¹³⁰. The aim is to allow victims and witnesses of GBV to report harassment incidents anonymously, so that “when three or more anonymous disclosures against the same person enter the system, the ON [i.e., the Ombudspersons Network] will be automatically notified”¹³¹.

Traditionally RPOs have relied on help desks with dedicated counsellors or points of contact, without ensuring that complaints are analysed and processed by an IT system. This may cause a loss of precision in the collection and analysis of such complaints, and, ultimately, of the overall efficiency in tackling GBV.

In addition, a preliminary gender equality baseline assessment carried out by SUPERA project partners demonstrated that there was “an absolute lack of records of previously handled cases and their outcomes [...] In addition, there were too many people mandated to take complaints (all heads of unit and departments, plus Dean of Students, Provost, and Rector), who had received no training on the matter”¹³².

¹²⁹ [UniSAFE – UniSAFE Toolkit](#)

¹³⁰ [SUPERA – Guidelines and Best Practices for RPOs, “CEU – Policy innovations to tackle \(sexual\) harassment”](#)

¹³¹ [SUPERA – Guidelines and Best Practices for RPOs, “CEU – Policy innovations to tackle \(sexual\) harassment”](#)

¹³² [SUPERA – Guidelines and Best Practices for RPOs, “CEU – Policy innovations to tackle \(sexual\) harassment”](#)

8. Strengthening EU's Gender Equality: Intersectionality and Sustainability

8.1. Intersectionality

To strengthen the EU's gender equality efforts, the concept of intersectionality has become crucial in addressing the complex and multifaceted nature of discrimination and inequality. Intersectionality recognises that individuals may experience multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination, such as those related to gender, race or ethnic origin, socio-economic status, disability, age, and sexual orientation. Intersectionality moves beyond a singular focus on gender to understand how these intersecting identities shape people's experiences and social opportunities, particularly within the context of gender equality initiatives.

In the framework of gender equality R&I, intersectionality offers a more nuanced approach to the barriers that are faced, acknowledging that challenges such as career progression, work-life balance, and unequal access to opportunities are compounded by personal characteristics/identities. This perspective calls for a holistic strategy that does not treat gender as an isolated category but examines how various social identities and systemic inequalities interact. The incorporation of intersectionality within EU-funded R&I projects ensures that policies and actions are more inclusive and effective, as they consider the diverse realities of individuals facing multiple forms of discrimination. By understanding the intersections of gender with other social categories, the EU can promote a more equitable and impactful approach to gender equality in R&I.

The analysis has been conducted according to the identification and classification of several intersectionality factors.

The table below lists these aspects and their definitions.

Intersectionality factors	Definitions
Gender ¹³³	Gender refers to the social, cultural, and behavioural characteristics, roles, and identities that societies attribute to individuals based on their perceived sex or sex assigned at birth. These identities can include categories such as male, female, both, neither, or something else entirely, and can be fluid over time. Gender is influenced by societal norms, expectations, and individual experiences. It often involves aspects like gender roles (the behaviours and responsibilities society expects of people based on their gender), gender expression (how individuals present their gender through clothing, behaviour, etc.), and gender identity (an individual's internal sense of their gender, which may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth).
Disability ¹³⁴	Disability is an umbrella term that includes impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, shaped by the interaction between a person's health condition and contextual factors. Different statistical and operational definitions of disability are used in Europe, measuring limitations in activities, difficulties with basic tasks, and work limitations due to health problems.

¹³³ [Gender | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

¹³⁴ [Glossary: Disability - Statistics Explained - Eurostat](#)

Ethnicity ¹³⁵	A social category that identifies individuals or groups based on shared cultural practices, language, traditions, or geographical origin. Ethnicity focuses on cultural identity and intersects with other factors like gender or socio-economic status, influencing experiences of discrimination and marginalization.
Age ¹³⁶	A lifelong, dynamic characteristic that spans the entire life course and reflects the diversity of people's situations and capacities. It is a ground for equality and non-discrimination and must never be used to diminish anyone's human rights, dignity, or participation in society at any stage of life.
Sexual Orientation ¹³⁷	Each individual's ability to experience deep emotional, affectionate, and sexual attraction to, as well as form intimate and sexual relationships with, people of a different gender, the same gender, or multiple genders.
Socio-Economic Status ¹³⁸	Socioeconomic status refers to the social position or class of an individual or group, typically assessed through a combination of education, income, and occupation.

Table 1: List of Intersectionality factors identified

¹³⁵ [The meaning of racial or ethnic origin in EU law](#)

¹³⁶ [A Society for ALL Ages AGE Strategy 2022-2025](#)

¹³⁷ [Sexual orientation | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

¹³⁸ [EU Commission | Knowledge to policy – Socio-Economic Status](#)

8.1.1. Intersectionality analysis and recommendations to EC

In the analysis based on the 23 projects, a total of 28 results were found to directly elaborate on the intersectionality aspect.

Focusing on the *Gender* factor, it was investigated how many results presented gender intersecting with other factors (listed in Table 1 page 35). In particular, the projects that elaborated most of the results related to different intersectionality aspects are: SUPPORTER, MINDtheGEPs, and RESET, with at least four results identified as relevant to intersectionality.

The identified results with the most factors intersecting with *Gender* are:

- The SUPPORTER Webinar¹³⁹. It explored essential concepts including gender, gender+, intersectionality, and gender equality. It addressed crucial topics such as vertical segregation and gender bias in academia, emphasising the need to advance gender equality for a greater institutional impact. A significant focus was placed on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), with discussions on its prevalence, its effects on students, and its impact on institutional trust.
- A policy brief produced by MINDtheGEPs¹⁴⁰. The brief addressed several aspects of intersectionality, particularly in the context of research. The document stresses the importance of considering age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, family roles, socio-economic status, and other social characteristics when analysing gendered experiences in research. This policy brief highlights the need to integrate variables that reflect diversity among women and men, as well as viewing gender as a spectrum, not limited to binary male/female categories. Also, it is of relevance as it advises adopting intersectional approaches in both qualitative and quantitative research, ensuring that gender is examined alongside other factors like ethnicity, health, and career chances.
- The RESET toolbox¹⁴¹. It examines the intersectionality of career development in higher education, focusing on the interconnected factors that impact individuals' experiences. In particular, the intersection of gender and socioeconomic status is a central theme. The toolbox highlights how these individuals experience structural barriers in academia that hinder their progress and calls for systemic change. It also emphasises how women from ethnic minorities face additional barriers not only related to gender but also due to ethnic discrimination, which is not always addressed by gender-focused initiatives. It advocates for an inclusive approach that also considers sexual orientation in addition to gender, addressing how academic environments can better support diversity in both gender and sexual orientation. The importance of recognising multiple, overlapping identities (such as gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) is stressed as a factor that shapes the experiences and opportunities available to early-career researchers. It is therefore recognised a need for more inclusive and intersectional strategies in career development within academia.

It was observed through the analysis that the intersectional factors of sexual orientation and gender diversity are underrepresented compared to other dimensions. This underrepresentation reflects

¹³⁹[SUPPORTER, Advancing gender equality and addressing gender-based violence in academia key concepts and challenges](#)

¹⁴⁰[Research through a gender lens: Tools for gender-conscious research across various fields & organisations](#)

¹⁴¹[RESET Toolbox Mentoring via International Networks](#)

the need for a broader and more inclusive approach to intersectionality in R&I, considering the complexity of lived experiences among marginalised groups, particularly those at the intersection of multiple axes of identity.

In conclusion, below are elaborated some recommendations that could strengthen future efforts in terms of including intersectionality in EU-funded projects and, in the long-term, ensure the impact of results contributing to more informed Gender Equality policymaking:

1. Require explicit intersectionality statements for each result, ensuring that all relevant axes of inequality are captured when relevant. Also, standardised definitions of aspects to take into account could help in aligning the understanding of intersectionality factors.
2. Promoting the importance of intersectionality for EU funded project focused on Gender Equality
3. Take into account the experiences and needs of underrepresented groups (such as gender diverse individuals and those with different sexual orientations) by encouraging the collection of more comprehensive data on these intersectional dimensions.

8.2 Sustainability

The long-term impact of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), tools, strategies, methodologies, and policies is a key focus for institutions and projects aiming for lasting structural change. The analysis of 23 EU-funded projects reveals a range of sustainability activities embedded within their documentation. These activities provide valuable insights into how such initiatives can continue to evolve and maintain their impact in the long term. However, in-depth evaluations of the sustainability could not be conducted, as the assessment was based on publicly available documents, which did not include sensitive or proprietary information. Despite this limitation, the available documentation offers a deeper understanding of the plans outlined for several projects, shedding light on the strategies in place to secure their continued success and impact. The sustainability efforts observed across these projects highlight the importance of integrating gender equality into institutional frameworks, ensuring that these efforts are institutionalised for continued effectiveness.

8.1.2. Strategies

The sustainability of tools is crucial for ensuring the long-term impact of initiatives, and several EU-funded projects have developed strategies for maintaining and updating these tools beyond their initial implementation phases.

In the case of the GILL Hub¹⁴², sustainability is driven by continuous stakeholder engagement and the development of a robust network that promotes ongoing learning and collaboration.¹⁴³ The GILL Hub aims for self-sustainability within five years, leveraging the ENoLL network¹⁴⁴ to maintain its relevance well beyond the project's lifecycle. By integrating with other networks and platforms, it ensures continuous growth and adaptability. Similarly, the GILL toolkit¹⁴⁵ will be regularly maintained and updated through partnerships with local and regional innovation ecosystems, ensuring its integration into ongoing training programs and continuous use within open innovation ecosystems.¹⁴⁶ The ACT project's Community of Practice Co-Creation Toolkit¹⁴⁷ emphasises the integration of gender equality measures into regular organisational routines, policies, and procedures. By advocating for the adoption of strategies that promote the revisitation, updating, and institutionalisation of gender equality actions, the toolkit ensures that these measures continue to be effective even after the initial phase of implementation, securing long-term sustainability. The RESET project focuses on ensuring the sustainability of its Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) guidelines¹⁴⁸ as an institutional and operational function. The project outlines a tailored protocol for universities, supported by the GIA Community of Practice (CoP), which defines the necessary structures, processes, resources, and tools for effective GIA implementation. This approach mainstreams gender into research practices, ensuring its continued integration and long-term sustainability within institutional frameworks.

Similarly, tools developed by the SUPERA project, such as the Guidelines and Best Practices for RPO's - Gender Mainstreaming Monitoring Structure (GMMS)¹⁴⁹, are designed for long-term sustainability by embedding them into the university's governance structure. By making gender-sensitive data collection, analysis, and reporting a regular part of strategic management, the GMMS ensures that gender equality practices remain a core component of the university's

¹⁴² [GILL Hub](#)

¹⁴³ [D4.1 Dissemination, Exploitation and Communication Plan](#)

¹⁴⁴ [European Network of Living Labs \(ENoLL\)](#)

¹⁴⁵ [GILL Toolbox](#)

¹⁴⁶ [D4.1 Dissemination, Exploitation and Communication Plan](#)

¹⁴⁷ [ACT – Community of Practice Co-creation Toolkit](#)

¹⁴⁸ [Gender Impact Assessment \(GIA\) guidelines](#)

¹⁴⁹ [Guidelines and Best Practices for RPOs](#)

operations. Its alignment with the SDGs and the institution's strategic values further enhances its legitimacy and long-term continuity.

Several projects have developed comprehensive strategies to ensure long-term impact and sustainability. For example, the GENDER STI project outlines a Policy Recommendations Action Plan¹⁵⁰ which provides a strategic roadmap for translating selected gender equality recommendations in Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) into actionable steps. This plan includes clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, anticipated impacts, and the involvement of third parties, ensuring that the actions are both feasible and sustainable in the long term.

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of GEPs and related institutional changes is a key challenge for EU-funded projects in widening countries, as highlighted by the AGRIGEP project. Its policy document¹⁵¹ identifies the limitations imposed by inadequately allocated financial resources, which hinder the effective implementation of GEPs on the long term. The brief stresses that, despite the limited budgets of current EU-funded projects, securing adequate financial support is essential for sustaining successful GEPs. This financial backing is crucial for driving structural change, improving work culture, and enhancing working conditions, while also encouraging member states to strengthen their domestic policy frameworks for GEP implementation. This approach fosters environments conducive to effective institutional change.

Several universities and institutions have developed robust strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of their Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). For instance, in the SUPPORTER project, the University of Banja Luka has committed to a long-term action plan through 2027 with its 4I-GEPs initiative¹⁵². The GEP has been formally adopted by the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport of the University of Banja Luka, signalling institutional commitment to sustaining these efforts beyond the project's duration. Similarly, the University of Ljubljana¹⁵³ has adopted its GEP, though it is still awaiting formal signature. Nevertheless, the GEP has already been formally recognised at the university level, laying the groundwork for its ongoing implementation and impact.

Charles University in Czechia¹⁵⁴ has also outlined its GEP with a timeline from 2025 to 2027, detailing key actions for gender equality within the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport. While the plan has not been formally signed, its public availability on the university's website demonstrates institutional transparency and commitment.

Meanwhile, the National Sports Academy (Bulgaria)¹⁵⁵ adopted its GEP in 2022, ensuring sustainability by embedding gender equality within the institution's governance structures. Both Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara¹⁵⁶ (Romania) and the Moldovan State University of Physical Education and Sport¹⁵⁷ (Moldova) have similarly established timelines for their GEPs, with key actions published on their websites and communicated across faculties, ensuring broad institutional support for gender equality. The GSTUPES¹⁵⁸ (Georgia) GEP, signed by the Rector and published on the official website, further demonstrates the institution's dedication to embedding gender equality into its organisational culture.

The University of Turin's Gender Equality Plan and the University of Gdańsk's Gender Equality Plan¹⁵⁹ from the MindtheGEPs project further emphasise sustainability by establishing dedicated councils to oversee GEP implementation and secure diversified funding sources.

¹⁵⁰ [Action plan for policy recommendations on gender equality in STI dialogues](#)

¹⁵¹ [Implementing Gender Equality Plans \(GEPs\) in Higher Education and Research in Widening Countries: The case of Agriculture & Life Sciences](#)

¹⁵² [SUPPORTER 4I-GEPs: University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport \(UNIBL\) - Bosnia & Herzegovina](#)

¹⁵³ [SUPPORTER 4I-GEPs: University of Ljubljana, Faculty of sport \(UL\) - Slovenia](#)

¹⁵⁴ [SUPPORTER 4I-GEPs: Charles University \(CU\) - Czechia](#)

¹⁵⁵ [SUPPORTER 4I-GEPs: National Sports Academy \(NSA\) - Bulgaria](#)

¹⁵⁶ [SUPPORTER 4I-GEPs: Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara \(UVT\) - Romania](#)

¹⁵⁷ [SUPPORTER 4I-GEPs: The Moldovan State University of Physical Education and Sport \(FEFS\) - Moldova](#)

¹⁵⁸ [SUPPORTER 4I-GEPs: Georgian State Teaching University of Physical Education and Sport \(GSTUPES\) - Georgia](#)

¹⁵⁹ [MindtheGEPs – Gender Equality Plan University of Gdansk](#)

The University of Gdańsk plans for diversified funding sources, including allocating its own resources (such as the working time of involved employees), utilising available resources from the MindtheGEPs project, and seeking additional financing. This commitment aims to secure long-term financial support for gender equality initiatives, ensuring the continuity and sustainability of the GEP. The CALIPER project also contributes to sustainability by developing nine individual strategies for each partner institution¹⁶⁰. These strategies outline how each institution will continue to advance gender equality beyond the project's lifecycle, demonstrating a strong commitment to institutionalising gender equality measures for long-term impact. This document can serve as a valuable resource for other higher education and research institutions seeking to foster or sustain structural change for gender equality.

8.1.3. Recommendations

These results underscore that, to ensure their sustainability, a holistic and integrated approach is required, combining adequate resources, structured tools, institutional commitment, and continuous evaluation.

In conclusion, below are recommended some actions, that could strengthen the sustainability of gender equality initiatives developed in EU-funded projects and, in the long term, ensure their continued impact:

1. EU institutions should require the development of explicit sustainability measures for key project results (such as GEPs, tools, and policy briefs), indicating long-term responsibilities, governance arrangements, and required resources.
2. The European Commission, national level authorities, RFOs, and R&I organisations should embed gender equality structures, tools, and monitoring mechanisms into permanent institutional frameworks and routines, rather than treating them as time-limited activities.
3. The European Commission, national level authorities, RFOs, and R&I organisations should ensure diversified and long-term funding for gender equality initiatives, combining internal institutional resources with external funding opportunities to support regular updating, implementation, and evaluation.

¹⁶⁰ [CALIPER Sustainability and Expansion Plan](#)

9. Observations and Conclusions

The study examines the key dimensions of Gender Equality—specifically Women in Research and Innovation (R&I), Work-Life Balance, Gender Pay Gap, and Gender-Based Violence—and how these are addressed in the outputs of the selected projects. This chapter provides an overview of the study by summarising the main observations and conclusions drawn from this analysis.

The findings, derived from comprehensive desk research on open-source materials, demonstrate how these projects develop and propose potential strategies for enhancing the conditions of individuals within the research and innovation sector. Additionally, the study identifies the strengthening of EU Gender Equality Policies through an intersectional and sustainable approach, which adoption should be encouraged among EU-funded projects.

Although significant progress has been made in gender equality across Europe in recent years, different challenges persist. The primary challenges surrounding gender equality in Europe continue to centre around issues such as Gender-based Violence, the Gender Pay Gap, and the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields. Despite progress made in more novel reporting systems for GBV, information or methodologies on monitoring remain scarce. While Europe has made notable progress in advancing gender equality, there is still much work to be done to address the persistent disparities and achieve full equality for all.

Despite progress in reducing the gender pay gap in the EU—where the average gap is smaller today than a decade ago—inequalities are still deeply ingrained in both structural and cultural practices. Addressing these requires a comprehensive, multi-level approach. Key actions include pay transparency, more systematic data collection, offering more secure contracts, and embedding gender considerations into budgeting and human resources policies. To drive meaningful progress, Member States and their R&I institutions must commit to long-term action, robust monitoring, and accountability to tackle these disparities.

A key factor in addressing these issues is indeed the systematic collection of data. Establishing the appropriate resources would enable consistent tracking of disparities across different Member States and sectors. Collecting gender-disaggregated data is fundamental to monitoring advancements in gender equality, and institutions should rely on this data to evaluate the effectiveness of their gender equality policies.

Across these dimensions, the study also identifies two elements that strengthen EU gender equality policies: intersectionality and sustainability. As discussed in Chapter 8 (Strengthening EU's Gender Equality: Intersectionality and Sustainability), these dimensions play a central role in the design and implementation of gender equality initiatives, especially in projects that focus on core aspects of gender equality. This approach highlights how gender intersects with other social factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. However, it is worth noting that issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression remain underrepresented in intersectionality elaborations.

Intersectionality results are essential in providing a comprehensive approach to gender equality, particularly in research and innovation (R&I) environments. However, there is a noticeable gap in the representation of certain intersectional categories, notably those related to sexual orientation and gender diversity. Addressing this gap is crucial to ensuring inclusion, and implementing actions will help foster more equitable and diverse environments.

In terms of sustainability, some of the selected EU-funded projects have developed comprehensive strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of their Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) through institutional commitment, continuous stakeholder engagement, and the integration of gender equality into governance structures. The sustainability of tools and strategies is supported by

regular updates, partnerships with innovation ecosystems, and the embedding of gender-sensitive practices within organisational routines.

A holistic approach that combines adequate financial resources, structured tools, and continuous evaluation is essential for maintaining the impact of gender equality initiatives and securing their long-term success.

10. Annex I: List of Analysed Projects

	Project ID	Project Name	Status	Start Date	End Date
1	101094158	AGRIGEP	Ongoing	01/01/2023	31/12/2025
2	101094812	GILL	Ongoing	01/01/2023	31/12/2025
3	101070363	AEQUITAS	Ongoing	01/11/2022	31/10/2025
4	101070285	MAMMOth	Ongoing	01/11/2022	31/10/2025
5	101094529	SUPPORTER	Ongoing	01/04/2023	30/09/2025
6	101094949	NEXUS	Ongoing	01/09/2023	31/10/2025
7	101006543	MINDtheGEPs	Closed	01/02/2021	31/07/2025
8	101058093	GENDERACTIONplus	Closed	01/06/2022	31/05/2025
9	101006416	ATHENA	Closed	01/02/2021	31/07/2025
10	872260	TARGETED-MPI	Closed	01/09/2020	31/10/2024
11	873134	CALIPER	Closed	01/01/2020	31/12/2023
12	872427	Gender STI	Closed	01/11/2020	31/10/2023
13	824574	GRANteD	Closed	01/01/2019	31/10/2023
14	741874	GENDER NET PLUS	Closed	15/09/2017	14/09/2023
15	101006261	UniSAFE	Closed	01/02/2021	31/01/2024
16	101006396	EQUALS-EU	Closed	01/01/2021	31/12/2023
17	824536	GEARING ROLES	Closed	01/01/2019	31/12/2022
18	787829	SUPERA	Closed	01/06/2018	31/05/2022
19	101006203	SheMakes.eu	Closed	01/01/2021	31/12/2022
20	872113	CASPER	Closed	01/01/2020	31/03/2022
21	824585	GE ACADEMY	Closed	01/01/2019	31/12/2021
22	788204	ACT	Closed	01/05/2018	31/10/2021
23	101006560	RESET	Closed	01/01/2021	31/12/2024

11. Annex II: List of Deliverables on Datasets

Annex II of this report provides a comprehensive list of deliverables related to datasets/surveys from various EU-funded projects analysed in this study. These reports play a crucial role in tracking and evaluating the effectiveness of policies and actions implemented to reduce gender disparities, as well as training materials and teaching materials. Additionally, they provide insights into gender imbalances, gender equality audits, and teaching methods. These deliverables help monitor and assess the impact of gender equality initiatives across various sectors.

#	Deliverable (Project)	Project ID	Content summary	Link	Public Data Availability
1	Gender Imbalances at the Meso-Level	MINDtheGEPs, ID 101006543	Report with quantitative indicators on gender imbalances	Zenodo	Yes
2	Gathering Insights from Researchers	MINDtheGEPs, ID 101006543	Survey data on gender inequalities among researchers	Zenodo	No
3	Common database for gender equality audit	ATHENA, ID 101006416	Common GEA database and indicators	PDF	Yes
4	Data dashboard	GENDERACTIONplus, ID 101058093)	Interactive dashboard with gender data	Dashboard	Yes
5	Database of teaching material and methods	RESET, ID 101006560	Data on gender equality methods	PDF	No
6	Report on good practices and comparative mapping of inequalities	Nexus, ID 101094949	Intersectional analysis of GEP and inclusive practices, focusing on inequalities	NEXUS	Yes

7	Synthesis Report on Gender Differences in Grant Application Behaviour	GRANteD, 824574	ID	Gender differences in grant applications analyzed, focusing on intersectionality.	GRANteD	Yes
8	Synthesis Report on Gender Bias in Each Core RFO and Experimental Results	GRANteD, 824574	ID	Data on gender in research project participation.	GRANteD	Yes
9	The Making of a Professor: a Large-SCALE Longitudinal Analysis to Reveal Gender Disparities in Science Careers	GRANteD, 824574	ID	Quantitative gender-bias data on grant applications and outcomes	GRANteD D3.2 PDF	Yes
10	Factsheet per Co-funded Project	GENDER NET PLUS, ID 741874		Data on gender impact in H2020 or FP projects	GENDER NET PLUS	Yes

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This report, delivered through Service 5 of the Booster, presents a comprehensive analysis of 23 selected EU-funded projects, highlighting their most valuable results, tools, and initiatives for advancing gender equality in research and Innovation.

The report provides an in-depth analysis of project results and the challenges that remain in achieving greater gender equality in research and innovation.

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