

# A NEW ERA OF INCLUSION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

## Introduction

This policy brief presents recommendations for European policymakers, national authorities, and research funding organisations (RFO) on positioning intersectionality and inclusion higher on the agenda and making it an integral part of the work for gender equality, inclusion, and diversity in Higher Education and Research and Innovation (HE and R&I) throughout the European Research Area (ERA). HE and R&I policies in Europe are only beginning to reflect the field of inclusion and intersectionality.

A more inclusive approach, however, is increasingly being called for in European policies for research and innovation. Important strategies such as the EU gender equality strategy (Union of Equality), the Commission Communication 'A new ERA for Research and Innovation', the Council Recommendations on a Pact for R&I, the Ljubljana declaration, and the Council Conclusions on the New European Research Area all contain inclusion and intersectionality as priorities for future European politics on research and innovation.

As part of the ongoing GENDERACTIONplus project, which plays a part in coordinating the work to achieve the gender equality and inclusiveness objectives of the new ERA, a benchmark report on terminology, legislation, and policy relating to intersectionality in the European HE and R&I sector (hereafter called the benchmark report) was finalised in the spring of 2023. The benchmark report highlights current work in intersectionality and inclusiveness across MS and AC national authorities and RFOs. This work, seen in policies and laws in HE and R&I, serves as the basis for the recommendations in this document. Stakeholders, consortium members, and external experts were consulted on the drafting of these recommendations.

## An intersectional approach in policy

When presenting the findings in the benchmark report it was useful to distinguish between the concepts of diversity and inclusion in relation to intersectionality. Although the terms diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably, they have important distinctions.

**Diversity** refers to differences among members, in terms of both observable (gender, ethnicity, age, disability) and unobservable (culture, cognition, education) attributes. Differences unrelated to inequality are not included under this term. **Inclusion**, on the other hand, is a feeling and perception of belonging. At the organisational level, this can relate to a leader's acknowledgement of employees for their contribution to work, a process, or policy development. Inclusion also allows space for new groups to gain

access to power and decision making. Diversity and inclusion address the need to be aware of and take into account inequality and discrimination in academia. This does not mean that gender equality is no longer important. Instead, it is a recognition that gender does not operate alone and that it is more meaningful to look at gender alongside other equality dimensions.

**Intersectionality** (Crenshaw 1989) takes the focus on multiple dimensions of inequality one step further. Equality dimensions should not be treated separately or in an additive manner but should be considered as crosscutting and as together producing more negative effects on affected minorities than individual dimensions do each on their own. The concept of intersectionality recognises that men, women, and non-binary persons are not homogeneous groups. Ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and disability intersect and are inseparable in the way they shape an individual's identity and experiences. An intersectional approach takes into consideration the intersecting aspects of an individual's identity and the cross-cutting forces of privilege and oppression operating in a specific context such as HE and R&I.

By considering the workings of multiple systems of disadvantage across dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, and class, it is not possible to simply focus on academic careers and progression without considering how equality dimensions affect academic advancement differently for people of different backgrounds. Intersectionality for policymakers is therefore an analytical tool and lens that can be used to ensure that policies are inclusive and recognise the diversity of groups in academia. Applying an intersectional approach in the development of policy on HE and R&I can help to identify measures that are more effective and relevant for addressing the needs and situations of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in a holistic way. This again will improve research and innovation for the future, making it relevant and inclusive for all.

## A statement of the issue

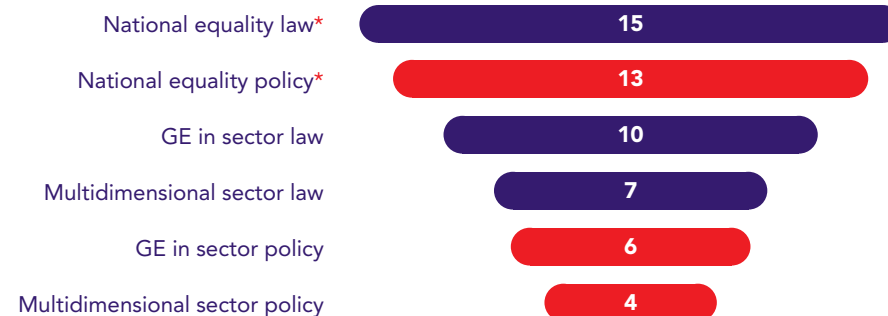
The shift witnessed in EU policy to taking an inclusive and intersectional approach to gender equality in R&I reflects feminist theory on the shortcomings of a single-dimensional approach to inequality and discrimination.

Inclusion and intersectionality are approaches that are still at an initial phase in being applied in the ERA. Most countries in the GENDERACTIONplus benchmark survey have national equal opportunity/anti-discrimination laws and policies, which include different equality dimensions. Fewer countries, however, have such laws and policies for the HE and R&I sector. A few countries have policies for the HE and R&I sectors that include multiple equality dimensions, but none of them are intersectional.

In the sample of RFOs there were 19 RFOs with gender equality policies. Fourteen of the RFOs also had policies that included other equality dimensions as well as gender. The mapping also found that national-level policies that consider multiple equality dimensions are better articulated than similar policies at the RFO level.

## Benchmark findings: Law and policies at national and sector level

N=15



\* Abbreviated from National equal opportunity and anti-discrimination law/policy (multidimensional)

## Gender equality and multidimensional policies in RFOs

N=19



The mapping revealed that the countries included in the sample covered a wide variety of dimensions and used inclusive terminology in their policies. Most policies included terms such as diversity and inclusion. From an analysis of excerpts from these policies, however, it was not clear what measures and actions have been taken to address vulnerable groups. Policy documents mostly included broad statements on the importance of addressing other equality dimensions than gender, with gender equality dimensions discussed separately as part of an additive approach. Despite the existence of legislation and policy that include multiple equality dimensions, there were few references to the *intersection* between different equality dimensions and vulnerable groups in academia.

The mapping also found that there are great contextual differences throughout Europe on the work for inclusion and intersectionality. Some countries and RFOs only work on gender equality and this work is well established. Others encounter significant resistance when promoting gender equality, while a few countries already have several dimensions included in their policy and active measures.

### **An example of an intersectional approach in equality work: Norway**

To work intersectionally means including two or more dimensions in your work, but also exploring differences within an equality dimension. Here is an example from Norway.

In Norway, the Ministry of Education and Research expanded the mandate of the Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research (KIF) in 2014 to also include ethnic minorities. The Committee identified a knowledge gap and began by commissioning a qualitative and quantitative study. Ethnic minority researchers were then categorised into four groups: 1) foreign scholars with tenure, 2) immigrants and their descendants, 3) mobile international scholars in temporary positions, and 4) indigenous people and national minorities. A comparison of researchers in groups 1, 2, and 3 was conducted (statistics on group 4 are not available) and the statistics were gender disaggregated. The analysis found that one-third of researchers in Norway are of foreign origin and four-fifths are international researchers. Norwegians with migrant parents (descendants) account for only 0.7% of all researchers.

Developing statistics combining migrant status, research position, and gender provided new insights on different groups' career paths. These statistics, combined with findings from qualitative and quantitative studies, offered a better understanding of privilege, disadvantage, and inequality at the crossroads between ethnicity and gender that has informed the work of KIF:

- Among foreign researchers, the share of women is smaller (45%) than among native Norwegians (52%). However, the proportion of foreign professors who are women is higher than among native full professors in most fields (except in the humanities and medicine). This contributes to a better gender balance in grade A positions in Norway.
- Among Norwegians with migrant parents, more women than men study in higher education institutions. Qualitative studies indicate that women with parents from the Global South are supported by their families in their careers. This finding is corroborated by statistics on dropouts in secondary education for young male descendants. This means that more attention needs to be paid to recruiting male descendants of immigrants into higher education in Norway.

- Among tenured staff in top positions who are from the Global South, there is a significantly lower ratio of women than men. This means that gender equality measures need to pay more attention to women with a minority background who are from the Global South.
- Two surveys in the sector suggest that gender and ethnicity are both associated with higher levels of discrimination. This indicates that there is a need for research on the combined effects of gender and ethnic minority status (multiple/intersectional discrimination) in academia.

### **Gaps identified**

The GENDERACTIONplus benchmark report revealed gaps when it comes to addressing and implementing intersectional policies and measures in HE and R&I at the European, national and RFO levels:

- There is a gap in how well concepts and terminology on inclusion, diversity, and intersectionality in HE and R&I at the European, national, and RFO levels are understood.
- There is a need for sector-based skills in how to translate theory into policy and into active measures and tools that capture the intersection of multiple dimensions.
- There is a lack of disaggregated data on multiple equality dimensions at the national and European levels.
- There is a need for research on how HE and R&I organisations can deal with intersectionality and take it into account in their structures and cultures.
- There is an unequal level of knowledge and experience between countries in working with several equality dimensions.
- There are contextual barriers in some countries in addressing several equality dimensions in policy and measures for HE and R&I.
- There is a need for a joint forum in which to share research, data, and best practice in the work for inclusion and intersectionality in HE and R&I at the European level.

### **Recommendations**

- Organisations and stakeholders at the European and national levels that represent minoritised and disadvantaged groups should be included in processes related to developing data, research, and guidelines on diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality.

#### **At the European level**

- The Commission should request a report from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) on multiple discrimination grounds in HE and R&I with statistics at the European and national levels on multiple equality dimensions and intersectional discrimination.

- The EU high-level group on non-discrimination, equality, and diversity and FRA should develop guidelines for multidimensional and intersectional data in HE and R&I.
- The Commission should support the technical capacity of EU Member States' national statistical bodies and national equality bodies.
- Horizon Europe should have calls for research on multiple equality dimensions and intersectional discrimination in HE and R&I in MS and AC.
- She Figures should include statistics on multiple and intersectional equality dimensions combining statistics on gender with other equality dimensions.
- The next European Commission Gender Equality Strategy should incorporate a multi-dimensional approach and intersectional mainstreaming. The strategy should provide common definitions and terminology on inclusion, diversity, and intersectionality.
- The ERA policy agenda for 2025-2027 should promote an intersectional approach in its priorities, particularly in the priorities relating to research careers, research assessment, research content, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and gender equality plans (GEPs).
- As part of the ERA policy agenda for 2025-2027, a task force should be set up to supplement the ERA Forum Action 5 Subgroup in continuing the work of providing policy advice and guidelines on inclusion and intersectionality in European HE and R&I.
- The Commission should revise the current Equality Data Collection website<sup>1</sup> so that it includes policy initiatives and best practices on diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality.
- The Commission should include more equality dimensions in the Horizon Europe GEP requirement.
- European umbrella organisations in HE and R&I (such as The League of European Research Universities, the Guild, and The European University Association) should be used to raise awareness and competence on inclusion and intersectionality.
- The European Research Council (ERC) and Science Europe should expand their equality agenda to encompass more equality dimensions.
- The Commission should support and organise conferences at the European level where research, data, guidelines, and best practices can be shared between national authorities, RFOs, and advanced higher education institutions in the work on diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality.

### At the national level

- National policies for HE and R&I should be designed to reflect national legislation on equality and anti-discrimination by articulating concrete challenges for disadvantaged groups in academia.
- Research should be commissioned on multidimensional and intersectional discrimination in HE and R&I using a broad set of data sources and including disadvantaged groups in designing the research and in the analysis.
- Guidelines and tools for intersectional and inclusive work and a monitoring system for the HE and R&I sector should be developed.

<sup>1</sup> | [Equality data collection - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-commission.europa.eu/equality-data-collection)

- Multiple equality dimensions should be included in existing data collection for the HE and R&I sector.
- Researchers, policymakers, and gender equality bodies should be trained in data collection, the use of administrative data, and the translation of intersectional analysis into practical frameworks.
- National requirements and guidelines should be drawn up on inclusive GEPs for the HE and R&I sector.
- Support should be given to creating and improving monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress in the implementation of inclusive GEPs.
- Questions on multiple dimensions, GBV, and intersectional discrimination should be included in existing monitoring tools for HE and R&I, such as student surveys, work environment surveys, and national statistics on higher education.
- A national coordinating body should be established for the work on equality, diversity, and inclusion in the HE and R&I sector based on models from Ireland, Norway, Czechia, and the UK.
- A network of equality and diversity experts should be established to serve the HE and R&I sector in the work on inclusion and intersectionality.
- National authorities should organise conferences for the HE and R&I sector where European and national research, data, and guidelines can be shared to create a common knowledge base and develop competence on diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality.

### At the RFO level

- Each RFO should develop strategies and priorities that reflect European policies and national legislation on equality and anti-discrimination and address concrete challenges faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in academia. These strategies need to reflect and be adapted to specific national challenges and structural limitations. The strategies should encompass each RFO as an organisation and as a funder.

#### RFOs as organisations

- Develop skills and train staff on issues related to diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality that are specific to the RFO context.
- Have dedicated staff who have a good understanding of gender equality and other equality dimensions and how to mainstream and operationalise inclusion and intersectionality in the RFOs' routines and procedures.
- Develop inclusive GEPs with an intersectional approach.
- Increase diversity in staff recruitment in accordance with national anti-discrimination legislation.

#### RFOs as funders

- Operationalise the multidimensional and intersectional strategy into the funding cycle – from calls to assessment to the awarding of funds.
- Monitor the funding cycle to follow the progress on inclusion and intersectionality.
- Develop guidelines for reviewers/evaluators to assess the multidimensional/intersectional dimension in research content.
- Train reviewers/evaluators on terminology/concepts and how to use the guidelines.



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GENDERACTIONplus is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101058093.

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