

# FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION: STRENGTHENING ERA GENDER EQUALITY POLICY WITH BETTER MONITORING

## Introduction

The [Council Conclusions on Strengthening the competitiveness of the EU, reinforcing the European Research Area and overcoming its fragmentation \(16179/24\)](#) of November 2024 reaffirm the EU's commitment to enhancing long-term competitiveness, fostering prosperity, and strengthening global leadership through research and innovation (R&I). It envisions a European Research Area (ERA) with reduced fragmentation, enhanced inclusivity, and streamlined collaboration across Member States. These ambitions are commendable, but persistent challenges hinder their full realisation, particularly concerning gender equality.

Gender equality is a cornerstone of an inclusive and cohesive R&I ecosystem, critical to unlocking Europe's full talent potential and advancing socio-economic progress. Yet, GENDERACTIONplus findings reveal that systemic barriers to the implementation of gender equality policy remain prevalent across Member States, undermining the ERA's ability to deliver on its objectives. Fragmentation in the implementation of ERA Action 5 on gender equality, coupled with insufficient coordination and weak national-level commitment, threatens the EU's aspirations for a more unified and competitive R&I landscape.

This policy brief draws on GENDERACTIONplus findings to propose strategies that address these challenges. By targeting gaps in national commitments, improving data collection, and ensuring coherent policy frameworks, the ERA can strengthen its capacity to advance gender equality, thereby realising its broader goals of inclusivity, excellence, and competitiveness.

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## Key issues

To realise the ambitions outlined in the Council Conclusions, particularly in terms of enhancing the EU's competitiveness and fostering inclusivity, stronger commitment to ERA Action 5 on gender equality is essential. GENDERACTIONplus findings reveal several key issues that hinder the effective implementation of this action, ultimately undermining the EU's ability to achieve its broader R&I goals. These issues include:

- 1. Insufficient national coordination:** Unlike the previous 2015–2020 ERA period, there is now no requirement for Member States and Associated Countries to develop national action plans, resulting in limited information on specific national priorities, objectives, and measures. As a result, states signing up for ERA Action 5 outline objectives without supporting measures, leaving information on the implementation of these objectives incomplete. Although many objectives have been formulated and topics from ERA Action 5 adopted in principle, these commitments are not mirrored in measures planned or implemented across these areas. Addressing this gap is critical to staying aligned with the original goals and ensuring that efforts translate into tangible outcomes.
- 2. Gap between goals and implementation:** The gap between formulated goals and their implementation not only makes achieving the stated goals unlikely but also has implications for the monitoring process. The lack of relevant information on outcome indicators and national or regional gender equality policy strategies results in limited insight into the implementation of ERA Action 5 and seriously constricts the possibility of developing a unified and coherent gender equality policy in the ERA.

- 3. Inefficiencies from lack of data:** Monitoring the progress of policies is essential for realising ERA actions and therefore has significant potential for steering gender equality policy implementation at the European and national levels. However, this potential is currently untapped, due to this lack of comparable information from the national level. This absence of data makes it unfeasible to evaluate policy evolution, consistency, and coherence across Member States and Associated Countries.
- 4. Fragmented gender equality policies:** The lack of coordination at the European and national level results in fragmented gender equality policies and causes inefficiencies in the policy-making process. Without data supporting a unified policy framework, individual countries often develop and implement measures without exchange, which leads to several unwanted consequences: reduced efficiency, repeated mistakes, and unrecognised synergies.
- 5. Inconsistent policy concepts:** Additionally, divergent understandings of key concepts among stakeholders reinforce inconsistencies, contradicting the assumption that there is a common understanding of policy concepts in European documents.
- 6. Weakened policy commitment:** Finally, the voluntary nature of the ERA's political framework on gender equality, combined with limited reporting and monitoring of policy implementation at the national level, weakens the perceived binding force of these commitments.

GENDERACTIONplus is actively working to mitigate these issues by supporting policy coordination through policy exchange and mutual learning, building capacities and

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expertise, and developing policy recommendations for all relevant stakeholders to enhance the implementation of ERA Action 5. However, its capacity remains constrained by limited, project-based resources and the involvement of only some Member States, primarily those who are already committed to advancing gender equality policy in R&I. In contrast, countries which would benefit from policy advancement and coordination have not signed up to participate in the project. Additionally, as a time-bound initiative, GENDERACTIONplus lacks continuity beyond its current mandate, leaving no dedicated project support for the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027. Without sustained efforts at the official level – through official ERA monitoring and strengthened cooperation within the ERA Forum – these systemic issues will persist, undermining the EU’s broader ambitions for competitiveness and inclusivity in research and innovation.

## Recommendations

The findings show that the current voluntary framework and lack of adequate monitoring mechanisms risk perpetuating the fragmentation that the EU aims to overcome. To sustain and build upon current gender equality engagement in ERA, the voluntary character of political commitment must be paired with robust monitoring and an intensified gender equality policy discourse. To achieve this, the following recommendations are put forward by GENDERACTIONplus project:

- 1. Strengthen national action plans:** To not only request that countries make a commitment to an ERA action on a voluntary basis, but also to ensure that this is translated into a concrete national action plan (binding self-commitment).

- 2. Engage high-level policymakers:** To intensify the European discourse on gender equality by involving high-level policymakers (e.g. ERAC members).
- 3. Establish platforms for policy exchange:** To provide a platform for mutual learning and exchange already in the phase of policy development. This would support countries with little experience in particular and provide a possibility to reflect on already implemented measures for more experienced countries.
- 4. Integrate monitoring into existing systems:** To systematically collect information on the implementation of national and/or regional gender equality policies from the start of the implementation period and integrate this information in existing monitoring systems such as the ERA Monitoring Mechanism (ERA Scoreboard, ERA Dashboard) and She Figures.
- 5. Promote awareness and showcase best practices:** To use the results of monitoring for awareness raising activities (e.g. public presentation of the monitoring at European and national level) and for showcasing identified good practices.

These recommendations aim to strengthen commitment, reduce fragmentation, and ensure that efforts to advance gender equality are aligned with the broader objectives of the ERA. By doing so, they will contribute to a more efficient use of resources, enhance synergies across innovation ecosystems, and support the achievement of the Council's recommendations for a more competitive, inclusive, and cohesive European Research Area.

## Conclusion

A more coordinated and effective approach is essential in ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 to advance gender equality progress in Europe's R&I landscape, as outlined in the Council Conclusions of November 2024. Greater coordination in gender equality policy and across all innovation ecosystems would enhance the competitiveness and innovation performance of the Union, aligning with the Council's emphasis on fostering a unified and competitive R&I environment. GENDERACTIONplus emphasises that existing efforts can serve as foundational examples for mutual learning and enhancement. Prioritising monitoring would provide actionable insights into ERA Policy Agenda implementation, enabling better alignment and improving efficiency across capabilities and resources. A cohesive gender equality framework, supported by robust accountability mechanisms, would contribute to the realisation of the single market for knowledge and research, reinforcing synergies and strengthening the effectiveness of research and innovation in the ERA.

## **CONTACT**

### **GENDERACTIONplus Coordinator**

Marcela Linková, PhD  
Centre for Gender and Science  
Institute of Sociology  
Czech Academy of Sciences  
Jilská 1  
110 00 Prague 1  
Czech Republic  
web: [genderaction.eu](http://genderaction.eu)  
email: [info@genderaction.eu](mailto:info@genderaction.eu)



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