

TOWARD NEW HORIZONS: INCLUSIVE GENDER EQUALITY IN FP10 AND BEYOND

GENDERACTIONplus Final Conference

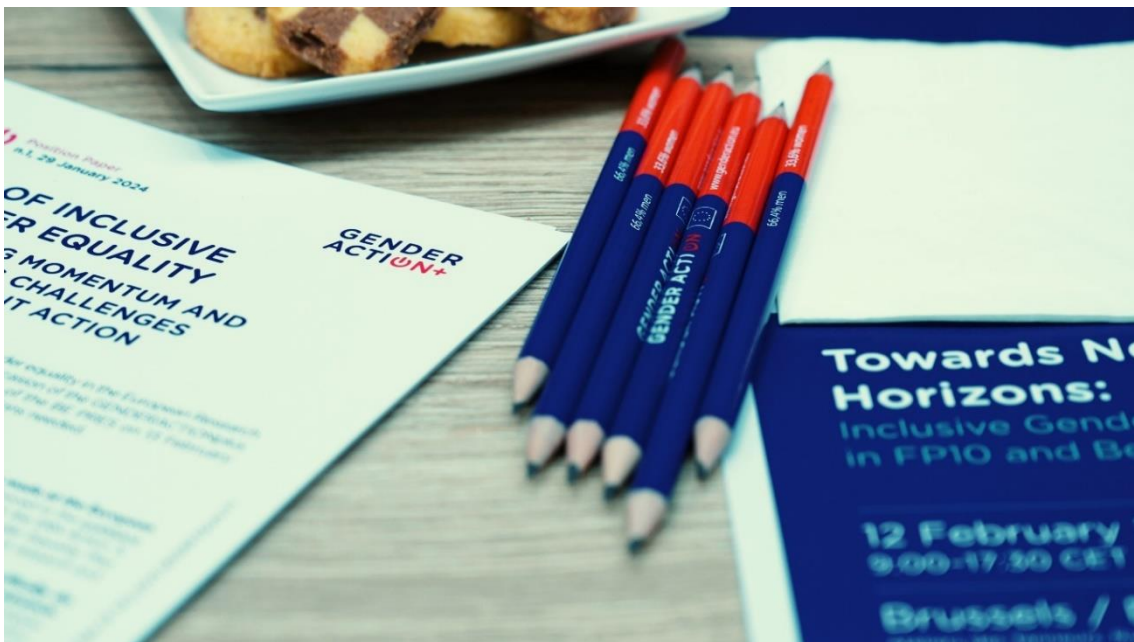
Date: 12 February 2025

Location: Les Ateliers des Tanneurs, Brussels, BE

Introduction

For the past three years, GENDERACTIONplus, funded by Horizon Europe, has been at the forefront of advancing inclusive gender equality in the European Research Area (ERA). By facilitating mutual learning, capacity building, and dialogue among stakeholders, the project has contributed to shaping gender equality policies at both national and European levels. As our work draws to a close, the final conference offers an opportunity to reflect on these achievements and discuss how the legacy of our project can continue to influence the future of gender equality in European research and innovation.

The aim of the conference is to review the progress made in advancing inclusive gender equality in research and innovation in the EU; assess advances in policy coordination accomplished through GENDERACTIONplus Communities of Practice; and engage in a ‘whole system’ dialogue with Policy makers, research funders, ERA stakeholder organisations, ERA gender equality officers, and scholars to discuss the challenges and opportunities ahead. The conference gathered a diverse audience of 67 participants onsite and over 100 online participants online from over 40 countries.



Opening

The conference opened with reflections from high-level representatives, who underscored the progress made in advancing gender equality in research and innovation and the significant challenges that remain in the current political climate.

1. Zuzanna Hazubska / Minister Plenipotentiary for the Coherence of National Science Policy, PL

Representing the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Zuzanna Hazubska, Minister Plenipotentiary for the Coherence of National Science Policy, framed gender equality as an essential dimension of “Security Europe,” the overarching priority of the Presidency. She emphasised that ensuring safety and resilience in the EU also means fostering inclusive, fair, and secure working environments in higher education and research.



"A strong, resilient, and forward-looking Europe must be safe for all."

She also stressed that eliminating gender-based violence, securing equal opportunities, strong leadership, and enabling all talent to thrive are fundamental to Europe's future success:

"Gender equality in science is not just a matter of fairness, it is a necessity for Europe's competitiveness."

2. Lina Gálvez / European Parliament, Chair of the FEMM Committee, ES

Lina Gálvez, Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), addressed the growing challenges to gender equality in R&I, warning against what she described as an organized effort to roll back progress.



"We are now facing a real threat, a real gender backlash, which is to dilute commitment to gender mainstreaming in research and innovation and to reduce investment in gender research. This is just unacceptable."

She pointed out that these efforts are not isolated, but part of a broader anti-gender movement aimed at undermining democratic values and fundamental rights:

"These attacks on science and on gender are part of a broader strategy... to leave knowledge as it has always been: a male and androcentric domain."



3. Coordinator welcome: Marcela Linková / GENDERACTIONplus project coordinator at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, CZ

Marcela Linková, GENDERACTIONplus coordinator, reflected on the collective achievements of the past four years, highlighting the unprecedented alignment between EU institutions, Member States, research funders, and stakeholder organizations in advancing gender equality. She noted that this alignment had enabled important policy advances, such as the 2021 Ljubljana Declaration and the Horizon Europe GEP eligibility criterion but also emphasized that these achievements are fragile.



"The past month has revealed with painful clarity how volatile the situation is and how fragile gender equality, inclusiveness, and diversity wins are."

Looking to the future, she called for continued ambition and leadership, stating:

"We must focus on preserving what we have but also imagine where we want to lead."

Panel Discussions

For the full programme and information on panellists and speakers, please refer to the Appendix.

Panel 1: Gender-based violence and the impact on research careers

Chair: Fredrik Bondestam / Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research, SE



The first panel addressed the urgent issue of gender-based violence in research and higher education and its profound, long-term impact on individuals and institutional cultures. The discussion focused on policy advancements at national and institutional levels and highlighted the need for comprehensive, coordinated responses to prevent and address gender-based violence in research environments.





Key Takeaways:

- **Gender-based violence is a serious issue in research and higher education:** The panel underlined that gender-based violence is widespread and has lasting impacts on research careers and institutional cultures.
- **Comprehensive and inclusive institutional policies are urgently needed:** Institutions should adopt robust policies which cover all aspects of gender-based violence, based on established frameworks like UniSAFE's 7P Framework. Policies must reflect diverse experiences and involve staff and students in their development.
- **Recognition of the full spectrum of violence:** From microaggressions to severe cases, all forms of violence should be recognized as "reportable", ensuring that survivors are heard and supported.
- **Victim-centred, trauma-informed approaches are essential:** Institutions must ensure sensitive handling of gender-based violence cases through capacity building and training for staff who receive and manage reports.
- **Awareness and accountability must be embedded:** Clear information on what constitutes gender-based violence, how to report it, and proportionate consequences for perpetrators are necessary to building trust and ensuring action.
- **Leadership must be held accountable:** Institutional commitment to developing policies and providing readily available resources are vital to preventing and addressing GBV. Training for leadership and academic managers on gender-based violence is needed to ensure accountability.



- **Institutional cultural change is crucial:** Tackling gender-based violence requires transforming competitive and toxic institutional cultures that enable misconduct.
- **National authorities play a critical role:** National-level frameworks are crucial for setting institutional standards and holding institutions accountable.

Panel 2: The future of inclusive gender equality plans and intersectionality



Chair: Jennie Rothwell / Higher Education Authority, IE

Panel 2 focused on the evolving landscape of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) and the intersectional approach needed to ensure that gender equality efforts are inclusive and impactful. The panel examined the crucial role of leadership, the importance of shared understanding, and the ongoing need for institutions to adapt to new challenges in an ever-changing political and social environment.

Key Takeaways:

- **Leadership is essential for achieving inclusivity goals:** Effective change requires an authentic commitment and strong conviction from leadership to make change.
- **Reinforce the “why” of the work:** It's important to regularly revisit and reinforce the core purpose of gender equality work to maintain focus and drive continuous improvement.



- **Shared language and understanding:** A common understanding of gender equality concepts across different contexts is crucial for fostering the effective collaboration and mutual learning required for progress.
- **RFO gender equality requirements are impactful.**
- **EDI is a continuous process:** EDI work should be viewed as an ongoing journey of learning and improvement, with no fixed endpoint.
- **GEPs reflect the reality of institutions:** GEPs gather information on the unique circumstances of each institution, which is important for guiding efforts and informing how to move forward.
- **Requiring GEPs is good business practice.**
- **Support for change agents is critical:** Those driving change within institutions need more support, particularly considering political challenges and shifting priorities.
- **A multilevel approach is key:** Achieving systemic change requires a coordinated effort at various levels, including European Commission (EC), national authorities (NA), government bodies, and institutions.

Panel 3: The future of research assessment including the inclusive gender analysis in R&I

Chair: Lydia González / Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology, ES



Panel 3 focused on the need to redefine research assessment criteria and broaden the concept of excellence to include societal impact and collaborative work. The panel explored how integrating inclusive gender analysis in R&I can reshape the way research is evaluated and how collaboration should be emphasized over competition. It highlighted the responsibility of RFOs in addressing gender biases in the assessment process and the importance of training reviewers to incorporate inclusive perspectives.

Key Takeaways:

- **Assessment criteria should include societal impact:** Research should be evaluated not just for scientific merit but also for its societal contribution, recognizing the work of entire research teams and ecosystems.
- **Collaboration over competition:** The future of research hinges on collaborative efforts. To maximise impact, it is more important to focus on collaborative work than to prioritise competitive research.
- **Excellence is a collective effort:** Excellence is not a personal characteristic but a product of the research ecosystem. Working conditions and a supportive environment are essential for fostering scientific excellence.
- **RFOs have responsibility to address the gender dimension in research assessment.**
- **There are already promising approaches in RFOs:** There is increasing emphasis on training reviewers with specific guidelines and involving gender experts in assessment panels.
- **Mitigating bias should be central:** The TIER Working Group (WG) emphasized the importance of mitigating bias in research assessment, proposing a network of WGs focused on this issue within the CoARA initiative.
- **Establish a Code of Conduct on scientific integrity:** Institutions should develop a Code of Conduct to address scientific misconduct, incorporating data collection, sanctions, and best practices, while linking these issues to gender analysis in research.
- **Transition to a broad sense of excellence:** This shift will require change agents and a new kind of leadership to lead institutions toward a more inclusive future of research assessment.
- **Social science's contribution to societal change:** Research assessment should connect the role of social science in driving societal change, reinforcing the importance of research beyond scientific output.
- **Diverse reviewers are key:** Broadening the pool of reviewers to include individuals from different career stages, sectors, and societal backgrounds will enrich the assessment process. Additionally, training reviewers to assess excellence beyond just scientific output is crucial for fostering a fair and inclusive system.



Panel 4: Illiberal governance, anti-gender backlash and academic freedoms

Chair: Moa Persdotter / Vinnova, SE

Panel 4 addressed the growing anti-gender backlash and its impact on academic freedom and gender equality (GE) in research and innovation. The panel discussed how illiberal governance is challenging gender equality initiatives across Europe, while also emphasizing that evidence-based research and international alliances can help counter these attacks. The discussion highlighted the critical role of the European Commission in supporting the gender dimension of research and innovation, even in the face of backlash, and stressed that academic freedom and gender equality should be seen as complementary forces.



Key Takeaways:

- **Research can help overcome anti-gender attacks:** Projects like Horizon Europe Cluster 2 provide valuable research that can counter the rise of anti-gender rhetoric and policies.
- **Finding allies within the Commission:** Successful efforts in the past demonstrated the importance of building alliances within the European Commission and engaging external experts like those involved in GENDERED INNOVATIONS.
- **Poland as an example of overcoming restrictions:** Poland has managed to resist attempted restrictions on gender equality, which can be used as an example for how backlash can be overcome.



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- **Nordic countries' pioneering status under threat:** The backlash against feminist developments has set back the pioneering work of Nordic countries in the gender equality field.
- **R&I system must serve Europe fairly:** The EU's research and innovation system needs to ensure fairness across the continent while promoting competitiveness.
- **Consistency is key:** It is not about urgent actions, but rather about maintaining consistent efforts to protect and advance gender equality in research and innovation.
- **The Commission has committed to gender equality:** There is a commitment from the Commission to support the gender dimension in R&I, particularly regarding innovation.
- **Academic freedom and gender equality are complementary:** While academic freedom is often used as an argument against gender equality policies, gender equality can, in fact, strengthen academic freedom by creating a more inclusive, fair environment.
- **Academic freedom is at risk due to gender-based violence:** The prevalence of gender-based violence within academic environments poses a direct threat to academic freedom and the safety of individuals within these institutions.
- **Evidence-based policies:** Evidence-based policies are crucial, and the evidence regarding gender inequalities in research and academia is undeniable.
- **Anti-gender movements infiltrating democratic institutions:** The panel highlighted how anti-gender movements are increasingly entering and influencing democratic institutions, creating a crisis of democratic values.
- **Hard times create strong people:** While these challenging times present significant obstacles, they also create the opportunity for strong leadership and resilience from individuals and communities committed to defending gender equality and academic freedom.



Audience Engagement

The conference gathered broad representation from many countries across the EU and beyond, including Romania, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, UK, Ireland, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Estonia, Portugal, Lithuania, Norway, Czechia, France, Italy, and Greece. Participants came from a variety of organizations, such as National Authorities, Research Funding Organizations, European and national organizations, and others.





Key insights from the Mentimeter polls:

- Overwhelming support for including gender-based violence as an obligatory part of Gender Equality Plans in FP10.
- On the purpose of research assessment, participants emphasized quality, excellence, transparency, innovation, fairness, and funding allocation.
- The future of research assessment was envisioned as inclusive, fair, diverse, multidimensional, equitable, transparent, and connected.
- Urgent actions needed at EU level to protect academic freedom and gender research include: more women in leadership, preserving achievements, dedicated funding for gender studies, strong political and institutional support, and building alliances to resist backlash.
- Key takeaways from the day focused on solidarity, resilience, and motivation to continue fighting for gender equality, recognizing that fighting gender-based violence is part of protecting academic freedom and that collective effort and alliances are crucial.
- Commitments for future action included: raising awareness, engaging stakeholders, writing to MEPs, speaking out, providing evidence, finding allies, and staying focused and optimistic despite challenges.



Closing

Participant Reflections:



GENDERACTIONplus has invited three conference participants to share their takeaways from the day. Claartje Vikenburg (*DIHOO member, the national advisory committee on EDI in HE and Research, NL*) noted how inspiring it was to see gender equality discussed in close connection with anti-racism, discrimination, and social safety, and highlighted the need to better integrate these issues at home. Yvonne Bishop (*Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Professor of Comparative Politics in Technological University Dublin, IE*) emphasized the critical role of collaboration between research funders and national authorities, as well as the importance of soft measures that have proven effective in driving change, especially on persistent issues like gender-based violence. Ffion Storer Jones (*Senior Advocacy Officer at Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung [DSW]*) called for collective action to defend equality and democracy in research and innovation, reminding us that:

“In a marathon, when it gets hard — when it’s time to sprint — it’s much easier to do that when you’re together, when you’re in a pack.”

Coordinator’s Closing Words:

Marcela Linková / GENDERACTIONplus project coordinator at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, CZ



Marcela offered the final closing words, reminding everyone that “*GENDERACTIONplus may be ending in May, but clearly our work is not.*” Looking ahead, she highlighted the dual need for rapid mobilisation and sustained effort:

“We need to be able to come together extremely fast to mobilise, and then we need to have the long durée, sustained energy. We will need to do both.”

As a final reminder, she urged everyone to care for themselves and each other, because “*we need to take care of ourselves so we can continue working for gender equality.*”



Appendices

1. [Conference Agenda](#)
2. [Speaker Bios and event information](#)
3. [Goodie bag](#)

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