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**GENDERACTIONplus**

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Inclusive and sustainable policy implementation**

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# **Report on the RFO Community of Practice actions and achievements**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

Abbreviation	Meaning
AC	EU Associated Countries
AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BMM	Bimonthly meeting
BG	Bulgaria
CH	Switzerland
CoP	Community of Practice
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EC	European Commission
EE	Estonia
EGET	European Gender Equality Taskforce
EL	Greece
ERA	European Research Area
ES	Spain
GE	Gender equality
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
GBV	Gender-based violence
GiRI	Gender Dimension in Research and Innovation
KIF	Norwegian Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research
IE	Ireland
IHS	Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna



IL	Israel
IRC	Irish Research Council
IT	Italy
JR	Joanneum Research
LT	Lithuania
MT	Malta
MLW	Mutual learning workshop
MS	EU Member States
ISAS CR	Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences
NIP	National Impact Plan
NL	Netherlands
NO	Norway
PT	Portugal
RFO	Research Funding Organisation
R&I	Research & Innovation
RO	Romania
RPO	Research Performing Organisation
SDU	University of Southern Denmark
SE	Sweden
TR	Turkey
UEFISCDI	Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research and Innovation Funding in Romania
WG	Working Group
WP	Work Package



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the management, activities, and outcomes of the Research Funding Organisations Community of Practice (RFO CoP). It evaluates the community's key actions, achievements, and lessons learned. Overall, the RFO CoP coordination mechanisms operated in alignment with its overarching goals and significant milestones were reached among members, including key initiatives and deliverables that reflect collective progress. The findings aim to inform future initiatives and enhance understanding of the RFO CoP's impact.



## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. About the project

Building on the Horizon 2020 project GENDERACTION, the overall goal of GENDERACTIONplus is to contribute to the coordination of the gender equality and inclusiveness objectives of the new European Research Area (ERA) through the development of two communities of practice (CoPs), one consisting of representatives of national authorities and the second consisting of representatives of Research Funding Organisations. The network is made up of a total of 22 EU Member States (MS) and 3 Associated Countries (AC), as well as 26 project partners and 14 Associated partners.

Adding the plus sign to the title of the previous GENDERACTION project not only indicates that it is a follow-up project but also makes it explicit that this project also addresses diversity and intersectionality (the gender+ approach).

Specifically, the GENDERACTIONplus project aims to:

- Develop strategic policy advice on existing and emerging policy solutions;
- Enhance the policy-making process by engaging with stakeholders, civil society organisations, and citizens;
- Build capacities, competence, and expertise for gender equality and mainstreaming in Research & Innovation among the policy and RFO community members, with special attention to countries with a less comprehensive policy;
- Create an impact through communication, dissemination, and exploitation.

Thematically, the project focuses on:

- Intersectionality and inclusiveness
- Gender-based violence
- The gender dimension in research and innovation
- Monitoring and evaluating gender equality actions in the European Research Area (ERA)
- Promoting institutional change through Gender Equality Plans (GEPs)

GENDERACTIONplus aims to achieve the following impacts:

- Advance policy coordination among MS and AC countries and through stakeholder and citizen engagement.
- Improve research careers and working conditions in European R&I, by developing policy dialogue and solutions on inclusion and intersectionality, combating gender-based violence, and promoting institutional changes through GEPs.
- Improve research quality and the social responsibility of knowledge by integrating the gender dimension into research and innovation (R&I).
- Reduce geographic inequality by targeting less experienced/engaged countries and regions.



## 1.2. Objectives of the report

Drafted by Vinnova and Joanneum Research as co-lead of the RFO CoP, responsible for its work, the aim of this report is to provide a comprehensive overview of the management, activities, and outcomes of the Research Funding Organisations Community of Practice (RFO CoP). It seeks to analyse and evaluate the key actions undertaken, as well as the developments and achievements that have emerged throughout the duration of the project. By doing so, the report contributes to a broader understanding of the RFO CoP's role, its internal dynamics, and its impact within the wider project framework.

Specifically, the report focuses on the following areas:

**The management and objectives of the RFO CoP:** This includes a description of the organisational structure, coordination mechanisms, and overall goals guiding the community's activities and deliverables.

**Progress and achievements:** The report presents an overview of the main activities carried out and reached achievements by the RFO CoP members over the course of the project. It highlights key initiatives, collaborative efforts, and outputs that reflect the collective progress made.

**Lessons learned:** Based on member experiences and project implementation, the report identifies challenges encountered, solutions developed, and insights gained. These reflections aim to inform future activities and foster continuous improvement in the functioning of future and similar initiatives.

**Suggested improvements for future projects:** Based on the RFO CoP management analysis of performed activities and achievements, improvements for future projects are outlined.

Together, these components offer a critical analyse of the RFO CoP's evolution and its contributions to the overarching project goals. The report is intended to serve both as a record of what has been accomplished and as a resource for future planning.

## 1.3. Relation of the deliverable report to other WPs

The organisation of Bimonthly meetings (BMM) and Mutual learning workshops (MLW) was developed and delivered by Vinnova and Joanneum. Vinnova organised the first hour with thematic and organisational updates relevant for CoP members whereas Joanneum organised the second hour by working with content from the last MLW. Appointed work group leaders from the RFO CoP collaborated with thematic work package leaders to ensure that ongoing actions and thematic developments were transferred to and discussed among CoP members, and RFO CoP members were invited to give feedback on work package leaders policy recommendations.

In carrying out the MLWs, VA provided specialised support in participatory methods to facilitate stakeholder engagement, while UEFISCDI managed logistics and conducted evaluations. The outcomes from RFO CoP activities were communicated through WP8, ensuring their visibility and impact across the broader project.



## 2. Research Funding Organisations Community of Practice

The Community of Practice is understood as a social learning environment aimed at broadening knowledge, promoting mutual learning and fostering empowerment (Amin & Roberts 2008; Wenger 1999). Key elements of successful CoPs are the identification of a defined domain and purpose, the involvement of a core group of committed individuals, the engagement of a broader community, shared vision and values, a safe learning environment, clarity of governance structures and members' roles, and active facilitation (Corradi et al. 2010; Iverson & McPhee 2002).

CoPs are an efficient way to connect people; create shared contexts to build understanding and insight; enable policy dialogue and practice on emerging topics; stimulate capacity building through mutual learning, mentoring coaching, and self-reflection, benchmark and diffuse existing knowledge to design solutions and collect promising practices; and take action to generate policy change, in order to transform policy cultures.

### 2.1. Membership and management

The RFO CoP brought together representatives of research and innovation funding organisation. In total, there were 22 RFO member organisations, of which 12 MS were beneficiaries and 8 MS associated partners. In addition, 2 MS were allied partners. Overall, the RFO CoP members represented 19 countries: AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, IE, IT, LT, MT, NL, NO, PT, RO, TR, SE.

Table 1 List of participating RFOs

No.	Country	Short name	Status	Organisation
1	SE	VINNOVA	Beneficiary	The Swedish Innovation Agency
2	BG	BNSF	Beneficiary	Bulgarian National Science Fund
3	CZ	TA CR	Beneficiary	Technology Agency of the Czech Republic
4	EE	ETAg	Beneficiary	Estonian Research Council
5	AT	JR	Beneficiary	Joanneum Research
6	IT	FRRB	Beneficiary	Regional Foundation for Biomedical Research
7	LT	RCL	Beneficiary	Research Council of Lithuania
8	LT	VU	Beneficiary	Gender Studies and Research Centre of Šiauliai University, Lithuania
9	NO	RCN	Beneficiary	Research Council of Norway/Kilden



10	PT	FCT	Beneficiary	Fundacao para a ciencia e a tecnologia
11	RO	UEFISCDI	Beneficiary	Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding
12	TR	TÜBİTAK	Beneficiary	The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey
13	BE-FWB	FNRS	Associated partner	Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique
14	IE	SFI	Associated partner	Science Foundation Ireland
15	CY	RIF	Associated partner	Research and Innovation Foundation
16	CZ	GACR	Associated partner	Czech Science Foundation
17	DE	DFG	Associated partner	German Research Foundation
18	DK	DFP	Associated partner	Independent Research Fund Denmark
19	NL	NWO	Associated partner	Dutch Research Council
20	MT	MFER	Associated partner	Council for Science and Technology
21	CH	SNSF	Allied partner with signed MoU	Swiss National Science Foundation
22	SE	FORTE	Allied partner with signed MoU	Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare

In accordance with the proposal, the RFO CoP management was responsible for:

- 1) ensuring the coordination and communication within the RFO CoP;
- 2) creation of working groups (WGs) mapping onto the thematic WPs and additional topics identified through the WP7 needs assessment;
- 3) organisation of regular WG meetings and CoP meetings;
- 4) reporting on developments on a regular basis as part of the Project Management Board meetings.

The RFO CoP was organised around four topics. Three of them corresponded to the work packages in the policy CoP, one additional topic was added, and work group leaders were appointed to each topic.

- Gender dimension in research and innovation
- Intersectionality and inclusiveness
- Advancing GEP implementation and measuring their impact
- Gender bias in the research and innovation funding process



The RFO CoP was managed by Vinnova (Sophia Ivarsson and Moa Persdotter) in close cooperation with the task leaders for T7.4 at Joanneum (Helene Schiffbänker and Julia Greithanner). This joint management was central to the planning and execution of the RFO CoP work, with a core objective to strengthen capacities, competence, and expertise for gender equality and mainstreaming in R&I among RFO CoP members.

The management of the RFO CoP was characterised by an ongoing and adaptive collaboration between Vinnova and Joanneum, focused on identifying and refining the optimal format and structure for BMMs and MLWs. The BMMs were needed to re-discuss the content provided in the MLW. This iterative process ensured that the activities were responsive to the evolving needs of the community to benefit its members. Continuous and systematic feedback loops were established, drawing on regular input from RFO CoP members to inform improvements and adjustments.

Close collaboration with work package leaders further ensured that knowledge, insights, and outputs generated across the project were effectively communicated to the RFO CoP, facilitating mutual learning and knowledge exchange.

Fifteen BMM and 9 MLW were delivered during the project time. These are described in detail in D7.2 Final evaluation report on capacity building and mutual learning.

## 2.2. Progress and achievement during project time

Towards the end of project time, the RFO CoP management initiated workshop sessions followed by a survey to assess achievements and progress made during the project timeline by the RFO CoP members. About one-third of the total sample responded to the survey. While this sample size is limited, the responses provide valuable insights into key accomplishments and challenges. The survey results align with broader observations from project workshops and documentation, highlighting consistent progress across key work packages and several notable achievements were reported.

**Implementation of Gender Equality Plans: (GEPs):** One of the reported key achievements by the RFO CoP members has been the significant progress in implementing GEPs. This progress is demonstrated by increased staffing dedicated to gender equality, the formation of cross-departmental working groups for GEP development, partnerships with universities to expand the impact of GEPs, and the introduction of specific measures to support researchers with caregiving responsibilities. Being an eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe funding, these GEP developments highlight how the requirement is effectively fostering institutional change.

**Integration of gender dimensions in research and innovation content:** RFO CoP members reported progress by integrating the gender dimension into application templates and evaluator guidelines, and by developing advanced tools like AI-based solutions to assess gender aspects in proposals. The integration of the gender dimension tends to focus on early stages of the funding process, with less emphasis on consistent application throughout project monitoring and evaluation. Practical implementation of inclusive and intersectional gender analysis also remains limited.



**Intersectionality and inclusiveness:** As cross-cutting principles, intersectionality and inclusion were integrated across all topics. However, translating these concepts into practical implementation within the R&I funding process proved challenging. Notably, intersectionality and inclusion were central to discussions on research assessment and bias in R&I, addressing issues such as language barriers, migration background, disabilities, and the challenges faced by early-career researchers.

**Gender-based violence:** Addressing how RFOs can contribute to mitigating GBV within the research and innovation funding landscape was a new issue for most RFO members, and their activities have primarily focused on raising awareness of the RFOs' role in this area. Reported achievements include integrating GBV-specific measures into ethical codes to strengthen institutional accountability, awareness campaigns among stakeholders, and establishing reporting mechanisms to provide safe and confidential avenues for reporting GBV incidents.

**Bias in the research and innovation funding process:** Although this topic did not correspond directly to a work package within the larger project consortium, advancements were reported. RFO CoP members reported achievements such as deeper insights into the field of bias in R&I, resulting in the development of guidelines to identify and mitigate biases in funding decisions.

### 2.3. Feedback on the overall CoP experience

A feedback session on the overall satisfaction with the RFO CoP was held at the last BMM on 24 April 2025. The overall feedback expressed by the RFO CoP members was that the format and the frequencies of the BMMs were satisfactory. Most appreciated were the sharing of practices and experiences among the members, the knowledge transfer from experts to practitioners on relevant topics and the development of practical guidelines and tools as a result of policy implications.

#### 2.3.1 RFO CoP management reflections

##### **Strengths and Collaborative Approach**

A key strength in managing the RFO CoP was the effective collaboration between Vinnova, as an RFO representative, and Joanneum, which contributed valuable research expertise on RFOs funding practices. This partnership fostered a collaborative and iterative management approach, ensuring strong alignment and operational efficiency throughout the project. Over time, the collaboration matured, leading to a shared understanding of the evolving needs of RFO CoP members. Notably, the alignment between the BMM and MLW processes enabled the development of in-depth focus topics, which were systematically explored in each BMM following every MLW session.



## Challenges and Recommendations for Engagement

One of the main challenges encountered was maintaining consistent engagement and continuity among CoP members and work group leaders. Organisational changes led to participant turnover, and while some members were replaced, the loss of work group leaders proved particularly difficult to address. This turnover often hindered regular and meaningful contributions from members. To enhance continuity and distribute responsibility, it is advisable to involve at least two representatives from each organisation in the RFO CoP.

## Online Format – Benefits and Limitations

Delivering most activities online offered clear advantages, such as efficient access to CoP events and the facilitation of structured dialogues through tools like breakout rooms and collaborative platforms (e.g., Miro). However, the virtual format also limited opportunities for informal interactions and deeper personal connections, which are essential for building trust and addressing complex or sensitive issues. This limitation may have contributed to the observed decline in participation over the course of the project.

## Importance of Onsite Events

In-person events played a crucial role in team building and establishing a safe, trusting environment among members. These face-to-face interactions were instrumental in fostering relationships that support open dialogue and collaboration, complementing the structured online activities.

### 2.3.2 Lessons learnt

#### Multi-Level Learning and Collaboration

The CoP co-leads successfully facilitated learning at multiple levels, emphasising the importance of expert input, peer sharing, and collaboration. Expert-led presentations and peer exchanges were instrumental in driving progress. The construction of communities of practice, bringing together members with similar assignments, such as representing research and innovation funding bodies, proved very effective. Notably, several RFO CoP members replicated this model by forming similar communities of practice in their national contexts, hence amplifying the impact. These are for example, the Czech Republic, Portugal and Sweden.

#### Insights from Work Package Leaders

Presentations by Work Package leaders provided participants with valuable insights and up-to-date information on specific topics. These sessions deepened their understanding and offered actionable knowledge that participants could apply within their organisations or national contexts. This expert-driven approach enriched the learning experience and ensured alignment with the project's overarching goals.

#### Feedback and Policy Co-Creation

The collaboration between the RFO CoP and the Policy CoP was valuable. For example, policy drafts developed by the Policy CoP were discussed during feedback sessions with the RFO CoP, which were



highly appreciated by members. These sessions allowed RFO CoP members to provide input on the consequences and effects of proposed policies, ensuring that practical considerations were integrated into policy development.

RFO CoP members expressed a wish for greater collaboration and exchange with the Policy CoP by emphasising the importance of translating policies into practical implementation strategies tailored to their needs. A co-creation approach was considered essential for developing effective policies that align with organisational realities while driving gender equality initiatives.

## 2.4. Suggested improvements for future RFO CoP collaboration

As a result from the RFO CoP management analysis, areas for improvements that provide actionable insights for enhancing future projects are presented below.

### **Strengthening Collaboration Between RFO CoP and Policy CoP**

RFO CoP members expressed a desire for greater engagement with the Policy CoP during the project. To ensure stronger alignment between policy development and practical implementation more frequent interactions between the two communities of practice, such as joint workshops, collaborative sessions, or co-creation activities would be recommended.

### **Maintaining Engagement Over Time**

A decline in RFO CoP members' engagement was noted over the course of the project, with participation narrowing to a smaller core group by the end. While the exact reasons for member attrition are unclear, some assumptions can be considered, such as insufficient onboarding for new members. It is possible that new members who joined mid-project did not become fully integrated into the CoP. Additionally, changing political landscapes in some member states, potentially deprioritising gender equality, might have influenced member continuity, although this was not explicitly stated.

These potential risks could be mitigated by encouraging transparent communication about membership changes and providing comprehensive handovers and onboarding processes for new members. Assigning mentors or buddies to help new members integrate and build connections within the group could also have counteracted member attrition.

### **Enhancing Peer Learning Opportunities**

Peer exchanges and sharing promising practices were highly appreciated by the RFO CoP members and could be expanded further, for example more frequent sharing sessions and case study presentations. Informal networking opportunities to strengthen relationships among members could also be considered.



### 3. Conclusions

A key strength in managing the RFO CoP was the effective collaboration between Vinnova, as an RFO representative with hands-on experience in the practical integration and implementation of gender equality measures, and Joanneum, which contributed valuable research expertise on RFO funding practices. This partnership fostered an adaptive and responsive management approach, ensuring strong alignment and operational efficiency throughout the project. The structured interplay between BMMs and MLWs created a dynamic environment for knowledge exchange and practical implementation. Systematic feedback loops enabled continuous adaptation to the evolving needs of the RFO CoP community, supporting the development of effective guidelines and tools. Members consistently valued this approach, noting that it maintained momentum and facilitated the translation of policy into practice. While significant progress was made, sustaining active engagement among RFO CoP members remained a challenge. The lessons learned and recommendations from this process provide a valuable foundation for future initiatives.

