



## INPUT TO CONSULTATION

### 2026-2030 GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY

Research and innovation (R&I) must continue to be recognised as a critical area for gender equality, intersectionality, and gender mainstreaming. Despite progress, gender and intersectional inequalities remain widespread in European R&I, as documented in She Figures. At the same time, R&I is increasingly positioned as a key driver of competitiveness in the EU single market. The Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 must therefore identify R&I as a core area for action and reaffirm the institutional change approach. Continued focus is needed on gender balance in research teams and decision-making, as well as the integration of the gender dimension in R&I content.

The Strategy must also leverage the ERA Act as a key tool for EU policymaking. As a legislative instrument aligning EU and national R&I systems, the ERA Act should embed inclusive gender equality, justice, and academic freedom, in line with the EU Pact for R&I. It must advance gender mainstreaming and address intersectional inequalities. This includes recognising gender-based violence and the backlash against feminist research as systemic threats to academic freedom, promoting safeguards for researchers at risk, embedding gender equality in ERA governance, and strengthening inclusive Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) as tools to tackle discrimination and violence.

Horizon Europe must remain a cornerstone for gender equality in R&I. The Strategy should continue to treat it as a primary policy instrument. Existing provisions must be maintained: GEPs as an eligibility criterion, the gender dimension as a default criterion for excellence, and gender balance as an ex aequo ranking criterion.

GEPs must be reinforced and expanded to intersectionality and inclusiveness. Horizon Europe established them as change instruments. Sustaining and strengthening GEPs is essential to close the implementation gap, build long-term capacity, and embed inclusive and intersectional approaches. Shared monitoring frameworks and coordination among the Commission, Member States, RFOs and RPOs are needed to secure commitment and impact.



# GENDER ACTION+

Gender-based violence remains prevalent and under-addressed in higher education and R&I. Between 2021 and 2025, key steps were taken: the largest EU-wide survey, the development of the UniSAFE 7P model, and the ERA Forum's Zero Tolerance Code of Conduct. But implementation remains limited. LGBTQIA+ researchers, those on mobility schemes, and those in precarious contracts are at particular risk. The next Strategy must prioritise implementation of the Code and adoption of the 7P model. Receiving institutions must have clear responsibilities and policies on gender-based violence. EU mobility schemes should require policies and protections as a funding condition.

The gender dimension remains persistently excluded from high-stakes research areas. Despite commitments, it is inconsistently integrated in critical fields such as AI, health, climate, and defence. The Strategy must reaffirm it as a default requirement in Horizon Europe 2028–2034 and promote targeted action in high-impact domains. Dedicated funding must support feminist and gender research to ensure EU-funded knowledge is free from bias and stereotypes.

AI must remain a strategic focus for gender equality. While identified as such in the 2020–2025 Strategy, inequality in AI persists. The 2024 AI Act recognises gender equality as essential to trustworthy AI, but skills gaps and lack of diversity remain barriers. The Strategy must ensure Horizon Europe AI projects fully integrate gender equality in line with the AI Act. DG RTD should review Horizon Europe 2021–2027 to assess how gender and inequality grounds were addressed. Inclusive AI skills development must be supported to close the gender digital divide and promote participation of women and marginalised groups across AI education, research, and careers, in synergy with the Union of Skills initiative.

