GENDERACTIONplus2027 Community of Practice launch meeting

23–24 September 2026 | Brussels
Venues: NCBR Office and South Denmark European Office

National authorities and research and innovation funding organisations came together in Brussels to launch the GENDERACTIONplus2027 Community of Practice (CoP). The two-day meeting introduced the project's approach, gave members space to compare their experiences and established initial priorities for its two interconnected circles.

OPENING PLENARY



European perspectives

Hana Tenglerová, DG Research and Innovation, opened the policy discussion by outlining how inclusive gender equality is being advanced in the European Research Area (ERA). She highlighted the connections between the ERA Forum Sub-group on Inclusive Gender Equality, EU-funded projects and Commission activities.

She encouraged the community to welcome newcomers, particularly national authorities, and to document what helps implementation move forward. Small steps matter too: understanding them can help identify where support is effective.

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Michele Galatola, European Research Executive Agency, asked what the community could achieve together that its members could not achieve individually. Drawing on experience from more than 45 gender equality projects supported by €96 million in EU funding, he emphasised the challenge of turning good practice into common practice.

"Value comes from what this Community helps others do differently."

His message was to connect existing experience, translate evidence into usable tools and sustain cooperation beyond individual projects, helping approaches that work in one setting become useful elsewhere.

Project logic: connect, support, learn and act

Project coordinator Marcela Linková introduced GENDERACTIONplus2027 as the next stage of a collective effort, building on established relationships, trust and knowledge. She outlined four ambitions:

1. Connect: Strengthen connections between national authorities and funders across the ERA, between national and European policymaking, and between gender equality and other areas of research and innovation policy.
2. Support: Support one another in navigating different policy environments and implementation challenges.
3. Learn: Make better use of the evidence and practical knowledge within the community.
4. Act: Put shared learning into practice and contribute to change.



"The project is not delivering to the CoP. It is being built with the CoP."

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Members will help shape the project throughout its delivery. Their needs and experience will inform its activities, while lessons from applying project resources will feed back into ERA policy.

Introducing the Community of Practice

WP2 leader Liv Baisner Petersen and the circle co-leads introduced the community's working model: one CoP with two interconnected circles.



The National Authorities (NA) circle, co-led by Liv Baisner Petersen (SDU), Anna Knapińska and Magdalena Chrobak-Tatara (OPI), will focus on national policy developments and ERA implementation through peer learning, reflection and follow-up. Online meetings approximately every six to eight weeks will complement in-person exchanges and optional individual support.

The Research and Innovation Funding Organisations (RFO) circle, co-led by Sophia Ivarsson (Vinnova) and Helene Schiffbänker (Joanneum Research), will work primarily through mentoring teams organised around members' thematic priorities. Reciprocal mentoring will allow members to share expertise on one topic while receiving support on another.

Both circles will work from members' practical questions: bring a challenge, explore it with peers, consider possible responses, test approaches where feasible and return with further learning. National frameworks shape what funders can do, while funders' experience can reveal implementation barriers, making exchange between the circles an important part of the approach.

Getting to know the community

An icebreaker invited members to speak with people they did not yet know. Across three short conversations, they shared what they hoped to gain from the CoP, a question or challenge where colleagues' experience could help, and expertise they could offer others.



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Introducing the Work Packages

The remaining plenary presentations explained how the project's work packages will support the community and involve members in their delivery.



WP4: Monitoring ERA policy implementation

Three monitoring rounds will generate evidence on implementation progress, gaps and needs. Monitoring briefs and an ERA Gender Equality Monitoring Data Dashboard will help members explore findings and use them in their work. Members will contribute information and help interpret results in their national and organisational contexts.

WP3: Capability building and tools

Planned support includes intersectionality guidance and indicators, gender mainstreaming guidance for three selected ERA priority areas, and a toolkit bringing together relevant resources. Members will contribute through needs assessment, co-creation, testing and feedback. Capability building will accommodate different levels of experience and respond to needs identified within the circles.

WP5: Monitoring and evaluation of inclusive GEPs

WP5 will develop and test a national-level monitoring and evaluation approach for inclusive Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), with at least three national authorities participating in a supported pilot. The aim is to understand implementation beyond compliance and develop an approach that is feasible across different national contexts. The wider CoP will contribute to its refinement.

WP6: Communication, uptake and impact

WP6 will help project results reach relevant audiences, document their use and plan for their continued availability after the project ends. Members were encouraged to share resources, identify policy and dissemination opportunities, and provide feedback and examples of uptake. Confidentiality will be respected when communicating learning from the community.

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PARALLEL CIRCLE SESSIONS

Following the opening plenary, members worked in their respective circles to compare contexts, identify needs and develop their working arrangements.

National Authorities Circle



The NA Circle sessions explored national implementation challenges and what members wanted from continued cooperation. The discussions highlighted members' considerable knowledge and practical experience, while also showing how changing policy priorities, limited institutional capacity and the challenge of engaging stakeholders beyond established networks can affect the implementation of gender equality policies. Discussions pointed to the importance of maintaining momentum in gender equality policy implementation, broadening engagement, and learning from approaches used in different national contexts.



Members also identified strengths to draw on, including existing networks, experience with GEPs and other policy tools, comparative evidence and knowledge from colleagues working under difficult conditions.

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Three initial priorities

The discussions identified three areas for further work:

1. Reaching people who are missing from the conversation: Broaden alliances, share outreach approaches and strengthen connections with funders and other relevant actors.
2. Inclusive communication and argumentation: Exchange approaches that help explain gender equality objectives to different audiences, including those who are undecided or not yet involved.
3. Sustainable engagement and mutual support: Explore practical peer support while recognising workload, institutional responsibility and the need for manageable participation.



Working arrangements and evidence needs

Members favoured sessions with national examples, questions and joint problem-solving. Clear preparation expectations and follow-up will support continuity without creating unnecessary reporting demands.

They also called for evidence that helps explain implementation barriers and support policy arguments. Comparisons should account for national differences, and missing data should not automatically be interpreted as failure. WP4 findings will support these discussions, with members contributing the context needed to interpret them.



The priorities provide a starting point for future activities, with specific topics and formats to be developed together.

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Research and Innovation Funding Organisations circle

Before the meeting, RFO members completed a survey identifying their priority topics and experience across six areas aligned with ERA policy actions. The results helped map available expertise and form three mentoring teams.

Mentoring Teams



1. Intersectionality in R&I policies

Members identified a need to clarify concepts and explore practical applications within funding processes. Interests included existing examples, relevant tools and literature, useful data and indicators, and contributions from external experts.

2. Inclusive Gender Equality Plans

This team focused on moving from formal plans to effective implementation. Members discussed what makes a GEP inclusive, how to monitor progress and how to build competence and institutional commitment. Differences in organisational experience offered opportunities for mutual learning.

3. The gender dimension in R&I

Members considered how gender considerations can be integrated throughout the funding cycle, including calls, proposal evaluation, monitoring and impact assessment. Priorities included assessment approaches, indicators and training for applicants, reviewers and funding agency staff.

Organising the mentoring work

Across the teams, members wanted practical examples, tools and opportunities to learn from one another. Limited staff time, uneven expertise and data collection constraints were recurring concerns.



The groups began allocating roles and identifying next steps. Members also reviewed the mentoring guide and selected urgent support needs to inform their work and provide input to WP3. Further activities proposed included sharing resources, documenting useful practices and inviting subject-matter experts.

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REPORTS BACK FROM THE CIRCLES

The circles reconvened to share their priorities and identify where cooperation could be useful.

NA Circle reflections



NA Circle members highlighted shared challenges in implementing gender equality policies across different national contexts. They identified communication, broader stakeholder engagement and stronger connections between national authorities and funding organisations as important areas for continued cooperation.

RFO Circle reflections



The RFO report back outlined how the survey and discussions had informed mentoring team formation and support needs. Reforming research assessment also emerged as an area of interest alongside the three mentoring topics.

RFO members identified expertise, implementation experience and data as contributions they could offer NAs. They also highlighted the need for clear points of contact, a clearer division of responsibilities between NAs and RFOs, and information about policy, particularly when political conditions change.

Areas for continued cooperation

The reports back identified shared interests in addressing resistance, improving communication and strengthening national coordination. These provide a basis for further exchange between the circles as their work develops. The launch established the community's initial priorities and working arrangements. Members will continue through peer learning and mentoring, contributing their experience to the project's monitoring, guidance and practical support.



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