

Minutes

Meeting of the E03833/4 SUB-GROUP TO THE EXPERT GROUP 'ERA FORUM' -  
Inclusive Gender Equality in the European Research Area  
14.03.2023, online

**1. Approval of the agenda**

**2. Nature of the meeting**

Irene Norstedt, Director of the PEOPLE Directorate in DG Research & Innovation, welcomed all the experts nominated to this subgroup of the ERA Forum, from Member States (21 countries at this stage: AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK), Associated Countries (2 countries: GE, NO) and EU level stakeholder organisations (13, including 7 higher education organisations (AURORA, CESAER, Coimbra Group, EUA, EuroTech, The Guild, YERUN), 4 research performing organisations (EARTO, EASSH, EU-LIFE, G6), 1 research funding organisation (Science Europe) and 1 science academy organisation (ALLEA)).

Irene Norstedt recalled that Action 5 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 adopted on 26 November alongside the Council Conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area, is intended to promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness, taking note of Ljubljana Declaration endorsed by 25 Member States, 10 Associated Countries (or seeking association to Horizon Europe) and by the Commission itself. The ambitious time frame to deliver on the outcomes set by the Council for Action 5 were also underlined, involving at least 3 meetings a year until the end of 2024.

**3. List of points discussed**

**Scope of ERA Action 5 – Mandate of the subgroup**

The European Commission co-chair of the subgroup (DG RTD.D4 Head of Unit) then recalled the four interlinked outcomes/deliverables set for ERA Action 5:

- 1) Develop a policy coordination mechanism to support all aspects of gender equality through inclusive Gender Equality Plans and policies, and a dedicated EU network on their implementation.
- 2) Strategy to counteract gender-based violence including sexual harassment in the European R&I system and to assure gender equality in working environments through institutional change in any research funding or performing organisation.
- 3) A policy approach to strengthen gender equality, that addresses gender mainstreaming to advance the new ERA.
- 4) Develop principles for the integration and evaluation of the gender perspective in research and innovation content in cooperation with national research funding organisations.

The proposed mandate of the subgroup (simplified Terms of Reference) – as validated by the Commission's Secretariat General and integrating comments received from the ERA Forum –

which had been shared with subgroup representatives ahead of the meeting, was presented by the DG RTD.D4 Gender Sector.

### **Tour-de-table of subgroup representatives and endorsement of subgroup mandate**

The Commission co-chair invited the nominated representatives participating in the meeting to introduce themselves and briefly explain their respective country's or organisation's state-of-play regarding gender equality and inclusiveness in R&I.

Member States (by alphabetical order in English):

- AT: Austria's ERA Action Plan was adopted in December 2022 in the Council of Ministers, including a package of measures with milestones supporting ERA Action 5, and support for higher education institutions in the development, implementation and monitoring of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) is currently being developed. A mapping of the last 20 years of gender equality measures in Austria will be published in June.
- BE: All universities in Belgium have GEPs and work is ongoing to develop and monitor GEPs in federal institutions. At the federal level, Belgium is funding new research programmes focusing on the integration of the gender dimension in research content and gender balance in research teams. In the French speaking community, the network of gender equality officers in universities is expanding to colleges. An ongoing national project, BEHAVES, aims to assess harassment in higher education institutions, and make policy recommendation by the end of 2023.
- BG: Women's representation in science and engineering in Bulgaria is higher than the EU average overall yet there is a lack of representation at higher level positions at research performing organisations (RPOs). GEPs are not mandatory in Bulgaria, but a number of RPOs, especially those taking part in Horizon Europe projects, have adopted GEPs.
- CY: Through national Cypriot funding programmes, the gender dimension has been integrated in research content and within research teams since 2016, and various GEPs have now been adopted by R&I organisations.
- CZ: GEPs are now required by the Czech Science Foundation, as an outcome of the GEP eligibility criterion being introduced in Horizon Europe, and the Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports is funding the Centre for Gender and Science until 2027 for supporting RPOs in adopting GEPs, including through a Community of Practice gathering over 450 people, e-learning and capacity building. An analysis of GEP adoption has been conducted by the Centre, reviewing the mandatory building blocks as well as thematic areas. During the Czech presidency, the Centre for Gender and Science organised a conference under the auspices of the Ministry on ending gender-based violence (GBV) in academia resulting in a call for action, and there is a newly established platform of ombuds people to combat GBV including sexual harassment in higher education and research, and a national prevalence survey on GBV in Czech institutions being launched this Fall. A small network of Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) is also working on better integrating the gender dimension in the contents of their programmes.

- DK: In Denmark, policies for gender equality lie mostly at the individual institutions, including through participation to related EU-funded projects (SPEAR, GENDERACTIONplus, INSPIRE), and there is no coordinated mandatory policy at national level, e.g. on GEPs. However, there has been recently a push from universities and RFOs for more coordinated national-level action.
- EE: The Estonian Research Council is showing the way regarding GEPs through their participation to several EU-funded projects (GEARING-ROLES, GENDER-NET Plus, GENDERACTIONplus) and sharing their knowledge with other Estonian institutions on GEP development.
- FI: The Ministry of Education and Culture founded a year ago a project examining the state of equality, non-discrimination and diversity among teaching and research staff in Finnish higher education institutions. Results showed that higher education institutions still have many challenges to address, with still low numbers of women and low ethnic diversity in higher career stages.
- FR: France is particularly focused on supporting women and girls in STEAM, and at the latest annual ceremony of the Irène Joliot-Curie Awards, an upcoming conference on women in science was announced which will lead to a national plan before the summer of 2023. The Ministry of Higher Education and Research supports higher education and research institutions in fully complying with the new GEP eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe, and launched in 2021 a first-time national plan to combat GBV, with a EUR 14 Million budget over 5 years, to train the R&I community, support listening and reporting units in institutions, communicate at national level on the notion of sexual consent, and support student initiatives.
- DE: The Federal Ministry of Education and Research's goal is to achieve gender parity in research in Germany in 2030, as anchored in the coalition agreement of the German government from December 2021 which emphasises the importance of gender equality and diversity as crosscutting political priorities. Several instruments have been established: 1) together with the Länder, the ministry funds the Programme for Women Professors now in its 4<sup>th</sup> phase, with a total budget of EUR 320 Million until 2030, 2) the Federal Ministry supports funding for gender aspects in R&I, women in STEM, and the visibility of women in R&I. And both RPOs and RFOs have GEPs.
- IE: The Higher Education Authority's National Centre for Excellence on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion oversees a comprehensive national framework encompassing gender equality, race equality and ending sexual violence and harassment. GEPs have been required from all Irish higher education institutions, in the form of Athena SWAN accreditations, in order to access national research funding since before the introduction of the eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe, and has proved to be a powerful lever.
- LT: GEPs are not mandatory in Lithuania, yet a national policy requires that all institutions and programmes implement gender equality policies, and at strategic level, in public funds, all programmes should meet horizontal priorities which include gender equality and equal opportunities, and the ministry also has dedicated funds to which research institutions can apply to support GEP development and implementation.

- LV: GEPs are not obligatory in Latvia, but the NCPs in the Latvian Council of Science stimulate higher education and research institutions in adopting GEPs, since it is a requirement for participation to Horizon Europe, and now a large amount of institutions have GEPs.
- PL: The National Information Processing Institute fully cooperates with the Polish Ministry of Science including through participation in the GENDERACTIONplus project and deployment of a gender data dashboard on women higher education and research. GEPs are not mandatory in Poland, but the eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe has now led many institutions to implement GEPs, and deeper discussions around the connection between gender equality and scientific excellence are now taking place.
- PT: Portugal has long-term national equality and non-discrimination strategy already embedded in an intersectional perspective, and aligned with the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. There was already a bottom-up momentum towards GEPs in higher education and research institutions prior to the introduction of the eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe, stemming from gender studies and participation to EU-funded projects, and now all institutions have a GEPs due to the criterion.
- SK: The Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information acts as national contact point on gender equality in R&I. National commitment and support for gender equality in R&I remains limited and there is a need for better gender-disaggregated data collection. GEPs are not compulsory, and therefore only institutions with the ambition to participate to Horizon Europe have them.
- SI: Slovenia recently adopted a new R&I Strategy with one of the horizontal objectives being to ensure gender equality in R&I, with priorities in line with the objectives of ERA Action 5. A dedicated action plan is being developed. GEPs are not a national requirement but institutions have one due to the Horizon Europe requirement.
- ES: Spain has adopted its first equality law in 2004 and continuous policy and normative action since then have proven effective. In 2022 the Law of science was updated, which make GEPs and protocols against sexual harassment mandatory for all public institutions. All universities in Spain now have GEPs and gender equality offices, and half of the Spanish public research organisations are led by women scientists. Spain has appointed a national contact point dedicated to the horizontal gender equality provisions in Horizon Europe at the Spanish Foundation for Research and Technology, which is also a partner in project GENDERACTIONplus. Yet, more efforts are needed to develop and intersectional approach to tackle multiple inequalities.
- SE: Sweden has had a gender mainstreaming assignment in place for universities since 2016 – supported by the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research which is celebrating its 25 years of activity this year – and has produced positive change to a large degree, and in line with the requirements for GEPs at Horizon Europe level. Integration of the gender dimension into research funding has also been significantly developed in the last 5 years. Sweden is also leading the GENDERACTIONplus project's work

package on GBV including sexual harassment in R&I, promoting a zero-tolerance approach at ERA level.

#### Associated Countries:

- GE: Georgia has adopted in August 2022 a unified strategy for education and science, including a specific action plan for science, technology, research and innovation 2022-2024 which comprises actions aiming to “leave no one behind” and addressing gender equality, diversity and inclusion, in line with EU priorities and UN Strategic Development Goals (SDGs). The action plan includes the creation of a digital platform for career planning and empowerment of girls and women in STEM. The Georgian National Foundation for Science and Technology has approved a GEP, to be updated every 2 years. A specific effort is in place on improving the collection and analysis of gender statistics in order to increase gender balance overall and access to leadership positions, as well as access to quality education for vulnerable groups.
- NO: Norway has a strong political commitment to gender equality in academia and research that has expanded to address diversity, with a focus on ethnic minorities, and a dedicated national Committee (KIF) working in particular on improving knowledge and data collection. The Research Council of Norway (RCN) also has its own programme (BALANSE now becoming BALANSE+) offering funds and support to institutions to promote gender equality, and now also diversity. There is also strong emphasis on combating sexual harassment and a national mapping is planned for 2024. There is also a new strategy for research careers in which gender and diversity are strongly targeted. 100% of institutions now have a GEP, mandatory, thanks to the Horizon Europe eligibility criterion, as it was not the case before, despite GEPs being mandatory as per the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, and RCN now has introduced a GEP eligibility criterion as well, and compliance checks are starting. Norway has also adopted a national ERA action plan.

#### Stakeholder umbrella organisations:

- CESAER: The Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research comprising 58 member universities of science and technology across Europe, has put gender equality in the broader context of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at the top of its agenda.
- G6: The representative from the Spanish National Research Council highlighted their commitment to gender equality with an equality plan running since 2013, and will report on the common position of the G6 (informal network comprising the 6 largest national public research performing organisations in Europe) in the next subgroup meeting.
- AURORA: This universities network representing 11 universities globally with associated partners in widening countries, focuses on SDGs including SDG 5 on gender equality. The introduction of the GEP eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe has had an impact in member universities and several activities promoting gender equality, cultural diversity and inclusion are undergoing, yet more efforts to align institutional and national policies are needed.
- EASSH: The European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities represents over 70 universities across Europe, and is offering to make available to the subgroup

knowledge and data from gender studies researchers, including on e.g. the correlation between gender and precarity in academia, which links also to ERA Action 4.

- **EUROTECH:** This alliance of six high-level universities of science and technology from 6 European countries is committed to addressing the gender equality challenges faced in traditionally male-dominated fields, with an objective of increasing the number of women professors, in the broader issue of EDI through a dedicated working group on gender equality and diversity. All members universities have adopted a GEP.
- **EARTO:** The representative from the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission underlined the organisation longstanding commitment to gender equality in research careers, reinforced after the 2019 French Law regarding equal pay, and will report on the common position of the European Association of Research and Technology Organisation in the next subgroup meeting.
- **ALLEA:** The Federation of European Academies of Sciences and Humanities in the Council of Europe regions represents more than 50 academies from about 40 EU and non-EU countries, and is committed to fostering gender balance in R&I and decision-making as a basis for excellence in R&I, and pays particular attention to intersectionality as a key asset of our global society, as well as to balancing research careers with caring responsibilities.
- **EU-LIFE:** Gender equality, and ERA action 5 in particular, is a high priority for this European Alliance of research institutes in the life sciences, and most member organisations have GEPs in place since 2016, and exchange on their effective implementation. EU-LIFE also works on determining meaningful gender indicators, has a special focus on helping members integrate the gender dimension into their R&I content, and also develops joint actions on ending bullying and GBV.
- **The Guild:** This academic network, representing 21 universities from across Europe, has a working group on gender and diversity, facilitating exchanges of best practices.
- **EUA:** The European University Association, representing more than 700 universities in Europe, raises awareness on gender disparities in their institutions, shares good practices in the field of EDI, and contributes to developing common policies on gender equality, in particular in relation to the research assessment system (link to ERA Action 3).
- **YERUN:** The Young European Research Universities Network is very committed to gender equality, and the YERUN representative from the University of Rijeka in Croatia underlines that her university was the first to have a GEP in Croatia, and is serving as a model for other Croatian universities.
- **Coimbra:** The Coimbra Group, an association of 14 universities among the oldest established in Europe, is very committed to gender equality and diversity and has a working group focusing on inclusive educational leadership, gender equality, diversity and intersectionality, which are crucial to facilitate excellence in R&I. The working group aims to develop a think tank to share good practices on inclusive GEP implementation serving as an advisory board to the leadership of member universities.
- **Science Europe:** EDI is a very important topic for this European association representing some of the largest national research funding and performing

organisations, and supports the new opening of gender equality policies to inclusiveness, as well as the ERA Action 5's focus on counteracting GBV in R&I.

Overall, representatives underlined their interest in sharing good practices and driving the policy agenda to improve policies at the national and EU levels, as well as the need to work jointly on the monitoring and evaluation of GEPs across the ERA.

Following the tour-de-table, the mandate was formally endorsed by the subgroup.

### **Election of the Member State Co-Chair of the subgroup**

The only candidate, from the Czech Republic, was unanimously elected as Member State co-chair of the ERA Action 5 subgroup.

The newly elected co-chair expressed her appreciation for this role and emphasised the importance of having EU-level stakeholder umbrella organisations participating to this subgroup – a novelty compared to the previous ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation – and the focus on intersectional approaches to equality, and on combatting gender-based violence in R&I.

### **Setting the scene: updates from the Commission**

The RTD.D4 Gender Sector presented updates (see supporting PowerPoint presentation) on:

- the launch of the GEP eligibility criterion compliance check pilot;
- the 15 March dissemination event that will discuss the key findings of the evaluation study on the impact that EU and national policies and programmes supporting or imposing GEPs have had on gender equality in R&I across the ERA (report to be published later);
- the four winners of the first edition of the Horizon Europe EU Award for Gender Equality Champions, awarded on International Women's Day by Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel;
- the key findings of the pilot study on existing national and institutional approaches to inclusive gender equality in R&I in Europe, already published last September, and which offers a preliminary state-of-play on emerging intersectional, gender+ and EDI approaches;
- as well as several other initiatives related to the work of the subgroup, including the upcoming release of the Commission Expert Group report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality in R&I, and the launch of the *She Figures 2024* production.

### **Setting the scene: presentation of Horizon Europe WIDERA-funded projects GENDERACTIONplus and INSPIRE**

The Commission co-chair introduced the two presentations of these two core policy support projects funded under the 2021 WIDERA Work Programme of Horizon Europe, both with a direct relevance to the objectives of ERA Action 5:

- GENDERACTIONplus (Gender Equality Network to Develop ERA Communities To coordinate Inclusive and sustainable policy implementation) was presented by the project coordinator – *and new appointed Member State co-chair of the ERA Action 5 subgroup* (see supporting PowerPoint presentation)
- INSPIRE (European Centre of Excellence on Inclusive Gender Equality in Research & Innovation: Creating Knowledge & Engaging in Collaborative Action) was presented by the project coordinator (see supporting PowerPoint presentation)

### **Towards an ERA Action 5 workplan**

Due to lack of time, the co-chairs proposed to postpone the discussion on the priorities to be set for the workplan to the next meeting of the ERA Action 5 subgroup. They invited representatives to provide any comments that they already had, in writing.

### **Update from Presidencies, and wrap-up by co-chairs**

The Spanish representative from the Ministry of Science and Innovation provided a brief insight into the programme of the forthcoming Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, which will include a Presidency conference on gender equality in academia organised by the Ministry of Universities.

Furthermore, on 4 April, a workshop on gender equality and inclusiveness in international R&I, with close links with the objectives of ERA Action 5 is being organised in the framework of ERA Action 9 and the multilateral dialogue on values and principles, by the Spanish representation and the DG RTD Directorate for the Global Approach & International Cooperation in R&I, in collaboration with the DG RTD.D4 Gender Sector.

### **4. Next meeting**

The next meeting of the ERA Action 5 subgroup will be organised before summer 2023, most likely end of June 2023 and will be in-person (hybrid), most likely in Brussels.

The co-chairs thanked all subgroup representatives for their engagement in the meeting and commitment to the objectives of ERA Action 5.

### **5. List of participants**

At the meeting, participants from the following countries and organisations were present:

Member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden

Associated countries: Georgia, Norway

Organisations: ALLEA, Aurora Universities Network, CESAER, Coimbra Group, EARTO, EASSH, EUA, EU-LIFE, EuroTech Universities Alliance, G6, Science Europe, The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, YERUN

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European Commission: RTD.D.0, RTD.D.4, RTD.A.2, EAC.C.2, SG.D.3