

# GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION

Analysis conducted by Horizon 2020 project GENDERACTION reveals that most EU and non-EU policy documents related to international cooperation in science, technology and innovation (STI) adopt a gender-blind approach, especially in the case of bi- and multi-lateral agreements. The present Briefing Paper highlights key gender issues for international STI cooperation and presents a set of recommendations for better promotion of gender equality in policy design and implementation in STI at the international level.

## **Gender and international STI cooperation as a policy priority**

Gender equality is a **core objective** of [EU external action](#). In line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the EU promotes gender equality and women's empowerment in its international partnerships with third countries<sup>1</sup>. The next Framework Programme, Horizon Europe, aims at

achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including targeted impacts for SDG 5 Gender Equality.

In 2015, the Council of the European Union adopted Conclusions on Advancing Gender Equality in the European Research Area which invited *"the Commission and Member States to consider including, among others, a gender perspective in dialogues with third countries in the area of*

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**1** | "A country that is not a member of the European Union as well as a country or territory whose citizens do not enjoy the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code)" (Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/glossary\\_search/third-country\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/third-country_en)).

For the list of third countries as defined by the European Commission, see: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/wp/2016-2017/annexes/h2020-wp1617-annex-a-countries-rules\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/wp/2016-2017/annexes/h2020-wp1617-annex-a-countries-rules_en.pdf).

science, technology and innovation (STI)”. The Council also invited the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) and the Helsinki Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (HG) “to consider developing joint guidelines on a gender perspective for international cooperation in STI”.

In response to this invitation, SFIC and the ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (former HG) conducted a survey in 2017 showing that **very little effort was made by the EU Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (AC)<sup>2</sup> to mainstream gender in international cooperation in STI**. The two groups concluded that:

- EU Member States and Associated Countries should consider taking additional measures with a view to better integrating gender issues in international STI cooperation **at the agreement level as well as operational level** (work programmes, joint calls, evaluation, etc.) for both governmental institutions and research funding / programme management institutions.
- There is a clear scope within the EU collaboration framework to start working on **common guidelines** as many countries would appreciate **best practices, concrete examples, and a common approach**.
- The **European Commission should consider taking up these issues** (both gender equality and gender-related research in projects) in its international cooperation initiatives and dialogues

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**2** | A non-EU country that benefits from the same conditions of participation to Horizon 2020 as EU Member States. For the list of Associate Countries as defined by the European Commission, see: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants\\_manual/hi/3cpart/h2020-hi-list-ac\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/3cpart/h2020-hi-list-ac_en.pdf).

and in the context of its internationalisation strategy and activities in the next EU Framework Programme. Moreover, **gender aspects should be addressed in the evaluation of the calls** involving project partnerships with non-EU partners, as appropriate.

To follow up on this work, GENDERACTION developed a **checklist for policy makers** to provide further guidelines on integrating gender issues in international STI cooperation. In addition, in 2019, GENDERACTION:

- surveyed national authorities and Research Funding Organisations for **policy developments** in EU MS and AC regarding gender equality in international STI cooperation;
- reviewed **international literature** on the subject;
- surveyed **Third Country organisations** that focus on women and gender in STI on the needs and priorities regarding international cooperation in STI; and
- organised **mutual learning workshops** to build further knowledge and discuss the emerging recommendations relevant to Third Country concerns.

## Why implementing a gender perspective in international STI cooperation is important

It is well recognised that significant global inequalities exist not only in economic and political dimensions but also in the **epistemic** one, which concerns the **opportunities to produce and use knowledge and to have one’s knowledge recognised as authoritative**. These inequalities, often gendered, have been repeatedly shown to be a result of long-term historical, colonial, and postcolonial developments.

International cooperation in STI does not remedy these historical inequalities automatically but **may, in specific cases, rein-**

**force them.** If researchers from non-Western countries and women in particular are engaged in collaborative research on unequal terms, international cooperation can become unjust and produce inferior knowledge. **This can result in missed opportunities for revising existing concepts and theories and contributing to Sustainable Development Goals in the most effective way.**

**Importantly, international cooperation in STI has the power to mitigate inequalities** that exist in the collaborating countries and institutions. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop new (kinds of) partnerships on equal footing, making sure that European collaborations do not unreflexively plug into existing power and knowledge infrastructures, including ones relating to gender, whereby they collaterally reproduce them.

## Gender and international STI cooperation: still a long way to go

To date, the policies of the EU, EU Member States and Associated Countries on international cooperation in STI **rarely reflect existing knowledge related to gender and other inequalities.** The survey among national authorities and research funding organisations in the EU Member States and Associated Countries carried out in 2019 and the comparison of the survey data with findings from the 2017 SFIC-SWG GRI survey, leads to the following conclusions:

- Gender equality in international STI cooperation received slightly more attention in 2019 than in 2017; it tends to be included as a **value** with the definition of **several objectives to promote women in STI.**
- A significant, though still limited, number of national authorities is willing to **take action** in the future **if adequate support is provided.**

- Efforts are being made by a majority of **Research Funding Organisations** to formulate their programmes and calls in such a way that they **do not discriminate**, directly or indirectly, **against women or researchers with caring responsibilities.**

**Despite this, difficulties persist:**

- The **inclusion of gender aspects in bi- or multi-lateral agreements in STI cooperation is limited.** The main reason given is that this is addressed on the operational level of programmes and calls.
- There is a **lack of examples and guidelines, support for human resources and availability of financial resources**, and this continues to make it difficult for national authorities to include a gender perspective in STI cooperation (e.g. joint research calls, joint calls for proposals).
- Most national authorities and Research Funding Organisations **do not monitor or evaluate gender aspects in their international STI cooperation** and few are willing to take up monitoring in the future.

The survey among organisations from third countries focusing on women and gender in STI affords a **first glance at non-EU regions' challenges and insights on gender issues in international cooperation in STI.** The survey results were confirmed by exchanges at the two mutual learning workshops organised.

**Main messages:**

- There are many **obstacles** to women's participation in international STI cooperation that are shared among all the world regions. These include **stereotypes and toxic behaviours** in schools and higher education; **work-life balance issues; economic and material issues;** and **systemic gender discrimination.**

- There is a **lack of information** about whether actions are being taken in international STI cooperation. Around 20% of the respondents think that gender issues are addressed in international STI cooperation between the EU and their country, 37% think that they are not and full **43% do not know if gender is addressed in their countries' international cooperation in STI**.
- Moreover, when actions are in place, in many cases they are either **not suited to women's situations**, there are **not enough of them**, or they tend to **benefit privileged groups of women**.

The survey respondents made several **propositions** on how to improve the current situation, which were supported at the mutual learning workshops:

- There is a **need for more awareness raising** and **education** among political representatives, industry, youth and society in general.
- **Adequate funding and material support** would ensure that gender issues are considered at all levels (research content, research teams, projects, etc.).
- A **grassroots** and **intersectional perspective** is necessary to prevent the reproduction of discrimination in international STI cooperation.

**Although the implementation of gender issues in international STI cooperation is a policy objective, limited efforts have been made by the European Commission, EU Member States, Associated Countries and Research Funding Organisations since 2017** to address the issue in their agreements and funding schemes. These actors have an essential role to play in the making of a fairer, more robust, and effective R&I that will contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the Union of Equality and the Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe.

## Recommendations

These recommendations build on the objectives of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 in relation to international partnerships and cooperation<sup>3</sup> and the ERAC Opinion on the Future of ERA<sup>4</sup>.

For specific recommendations to the European Commission and Horizon Europe implementation, see GENDERACTION Policy Brief No. 6.<sup>5</sup>

### Recommendations to all stakeholders:

**1) Prevent the negative environmental and social impacts of academic mobility:**

- If possible, **international physical mobility should not be mandatory** and **funding should be provided for alternative modes of mobility**, i.e. virtual mobility, as part of the programme and project budgets. This will benefit people with caregiving commitments whose flexibility and mobility may be limited. It also contributes to issues of safety, as international mobility may be putting women at particular risk of gender-based violence. In addition, it contributes to the environmental sustainability of academic practices.
- Provide **funding for the development and use of high-quality remote/virtual modes of communication**, including, if

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**3 |** The EU Gender Equality Strategy is available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A152%3AFIN>.

**4 |** The ERAC Opinion on the Future of ERA, published on 23 January 2020, is available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1201-2020-INIT/en/pdf>.

**5 |** GENDERACTION Policy Brief No. 6 is available at [https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GENDERACTION\\_PolicyBrief\\_FP9\\_IntCooperation.pdf](https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GENDERACTION_PolicyBrief_FP9_IntCooperation.pdf).

possible, infrastructural, and technical investments.

### **Recommendations to national authorities and the European Commission:**

**2)** Create a joint strategic approach for gender equality in international cooperation in STI:

In line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the ERAC Opinion call for “a joint strategic approach for international cooperation as well as for regulation mechanisms to reduce policy fragmentation and unnecessary duplication” under future priority 2, and specifically “ensuring closer collaboration between MS and the EU Commission on international cooperation”, future policy for international cooperation in STI should address gender equality aspects as a general guiding principle as well as, as specific areas of cooperation activities.

### **Recommendations to all Research Funders, including the European Commission:**

**3)** To prevent the reproduction of subordinate integration of third countries’ research teams in consortia and the reinforcement of unjustified global epistemic inequalities, including gender inequalities:

- In the wording of research calls, **encourage appropriate forms of engagement of all research participants involved**, taking into account their expertise and experience, to mobilise the full potential of the whole consortium for analytical and conceptual work.
- Make requirements for a clear statement on the appropriate and legitimate sharing of **Intellectual Property Rights** within the consortium defining a specific mechanism that could be used in the case of conflicts and disagreements. The guiding principles should include equitable access to data and fair authorship allocation within international research teams and consortia.

- Include a **provision in the framework agreement or contract** that participating researchers in comparable positions be employed on the **same salary terms** regardless of their gender.
  - Consider **anonymisation and different career paths (e.g. career breaks)** in hiring processes and funding applications. Also, consider those aspects at the evaluation stage.
  - **Do not apply strict age limits as eligibility criteria, especially in mobility schemes**, as researchers caring for children may only become more mobile in the later stages of their career trajectory.
  - **Provide effective assistance** to researchers and their family **with visa and immigration procedures** once a researcher has been accepted for a position, including researchers’ same-sex partners who may not be officially recognised in the researcher’s home country.
  - Implement **effective mechanisms to report and deal with sexual harassment and gender-based violence** in the receiving EU countries.
- 4)** To strengthen the role of local communities and grassroots civil society organisations:
- Make a **special effort to reach women researchers for collaboration** (see the list of organisations in third countries that deal with women and gender in STI on [GENDERACTION website](#)).
  - Where appropriate, encourage the **inclusion of actors from local communities and civil society organisations**. This should constitute one of the criteria in the evaluation in relevant funding schemes.
  - Where appropriate, reserve a **designated share of the programme or project budget** for actors from local communities and civil society organisations, including women’s organisations.

5) To provide space for a proper negotiation of research objects and interests that will equally benefit all parties involved:

- **Encourage and support project activities aimed at negotiating shared research objects across all parties involved** (including different disciplines, academic and non-academic collaborators, and researchers with different cultural backgrounds). While these activities would probably be most relevant at the beginning of a research project, they should also be iterated throughout to reflect its course. The encouragement and support should best be worded in the call for funding and in budgeting conditions, as well as in the proposal evaluation criteria.
- Do not evaluate the success of a project strictly based on established quantitative bibliometric indicators. **Facilitate and recognise publications in different languages and for various relevant audiences as well as the possible impact on local communities.**

6) To articulate gender and the possible gendered impacts of research and innovation in content:

- Require an **obligatory consideration of gender in research and innovation content** in submitted research proposals.
- **Provide funding to explore and monitor the unintended gendered aspects and consequences of research projects**, as they may emerge in later stages of research.

## References

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