

Gender Equality and Inclusiveness Plan

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1. Introduction

Gender equality and gender inclusiveness are fundamental principles of the COST program and central to the success of our Action. As the COST Gender Equality Policy emphasizes, equality is not only a matter of fairness and fundamental rights, but also a precondition for scientific excellence, innovation, and credibility. Diverse teams have been shown to generate more innovative solutions, broaden perspectives, and deliver higher-quality research outcomes (European Commission, Gendered Innovations 2, 2020).

In the context of academia and research, **gender equality** refers to the fair treatment of people of all genders in terms of opportunities, responsibilities, and resources. It encompasses equal access to career advancement, balanced participation in leadership and decision-making, and the elimination of barriers such as gender-based discrimination or harassment. Importantly, gender equality in research also includes integrating a gender dimension into the content of research itself, asking how sex, gender, and intersectional factors shape knowledge production.

Gender inclusiveness goes one step further. Whereas gender equality often operates within a binary framework of men and women, inclusiveness recognizes the diversity of gender identities and expressions beyond this binary. This includes, for example, transgender, intersex, and nonbinary (TIN*) individuals. Gender inclusiveness ensures that all members feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute to the Action's work, regardless of their gender identity, ethnicity, academic stage, or background. It also means addressing intersectionality – acknowledging that gender discrimination can be compounded by other axes of inequality, such as race, class, disability, or sexuality.

Promoting gender equality and inclusiveness also requires recognizing the structural barriers that prevent equal participation, such as caring responsibilities. Researchers who look after children, babies, or ill family members often face additional obstacles in attending conferences, workshops, or research stays abroad. These challenges disproportionately affect women, but also extend to men and gender minorities with care duties. By addressing these barriers – for example, through financial support, family-friendly scheduling, and the creation of welcoming and inclusive event environments – our Action acknowledges that true equality can only be achieved when all members, regardless of personal circumstances, are able to contribute fully. This commitment reflects COST's broader vision of inclusiveness

and excellence, ensuring that diverse perspectives are not lost due to unequal access to opportunities.

For our Action, fostering gender equality and inclusiveness means creating a research environment that is safe, respectful, and free from discrimination, and where all members – irrespective of gender or career stage – can participate fully. It is also directly aligned with COST’s mission: to promote excellence in science and technology by facilitating cross-border collaboration that is open, inclusive, and innovative.

Complementing our Gender Equality and Inclusiveness commitments, we understand **DEI** (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) as a cross-cutting principle that strengthens the Action. **Diversity** means broad representation across countries (including Inclusiveness Target Countries), disciplines, career stages, genders and gender identities, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, disability, and socio-economic situations. **Equity** means fair access to roles, resources, capacity-building, recognition, and decision-making—paired with proactive measures to remove structural barriers (e.g., care-aware scheduling, travel and accessibility support, and transparent selection criteria). **Inclusion** means cultivating a safe, respectful culture in which all members can contribute fully, supported by inclusive communication practices, a clear code of conduct (including zero tolerance for harassment), reasonable accommodation, and accessible events and materials. Aligning with COST’s Excellence & Inclusiveness policy, we will operationalize DEI across governance, networking tools, training, and dissemination. This approach will broaden participation—especially from ITCs and early-career researchers—strengthen collaboration, and enhance research quality, creativity, and societal relevance, thereby directly benefiting our Action’s outcomes.

Our objectives are therefore threefold:

- To ensure equal representation and participation of all genders across our Action’s activities, working groups, and leadership structures.
- To establish a culture of inclusiveness that recognizes and values the full diversity of our membership.
- To mainstream gender as an analytical category into our research on print culture and public spheres (1500–1800), recognizing that gender was a crucial factor in shaping communication, authorship, readership, and cultural production.

By embedding these values in the Action, we aim not only to model best practices within our network, but also to contribute to a broader transformation towards gender equality and inclusiveness in European research and higher education.

2. Current Situation in CA23137

As of 1 September 2025, our Action has 173 members. Based on self-reported data, 86 identify as female, 85 as male, and 1 prefers not to disclose. Excluding the undisclosed respondent, the gender split is evenly balanced (**50% female / 50% male**); including the full membership, this corresponds to 49.7% female, 49.1% male, 0.6% undisclosed. This represents a strong starting point and reflects COST’s commitment to balanced participation. With regard to early-career researchers/young researchers and innovators (YRIs), our Action includes 65 YRIs (38% of the membership). Of these, 33 are female, 31 male, and 1 prefers not to disclose—equating to 50.8% female, 47.7% male, 1.5% undisclosed (or **51% female / 49% male among those who disclosed**). This indicates a balanced gender representation at this career stage. Balanced participation is also reflected at leadership level. The Action encompasses 28 leadership positions: 26 are held by a single individual and 2 are jointly held. Among the single-holder posts, 16 are held by women and 10 by men (62% / 38%). Within the Core Group of 12 members, 8 are female (67%) and 4 are male (33%), underscoring strong female representation in key leadership roles.

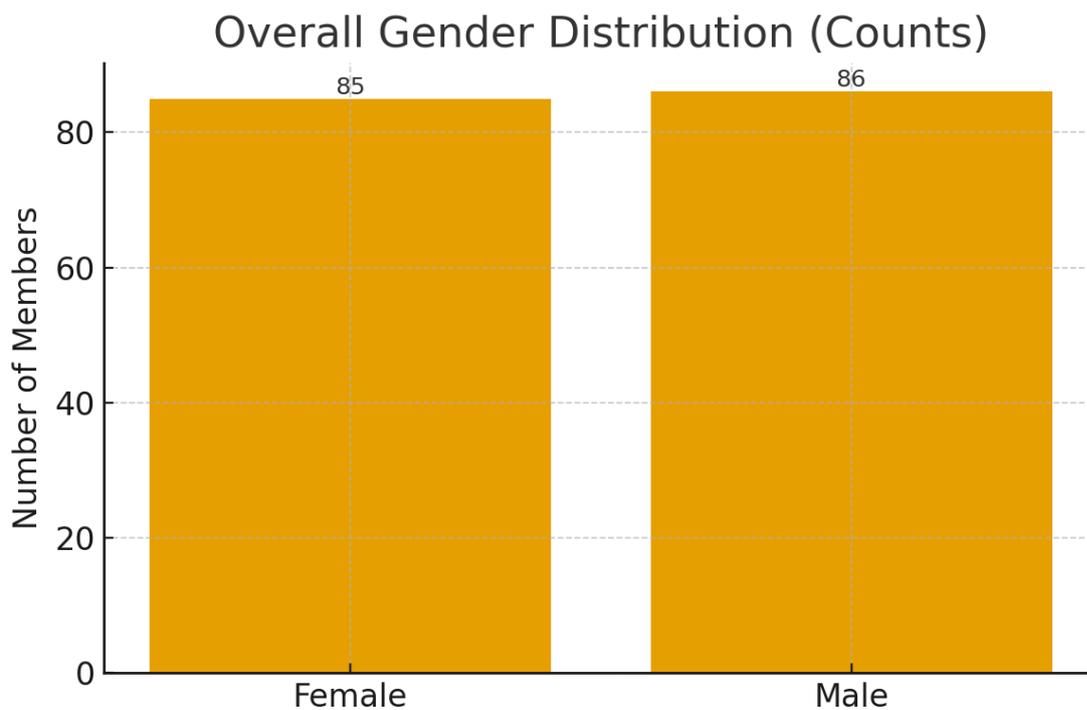


Fig. 1: Overall Gender Distribution (Sept. 2025, with one member preferring not to disclose their gender identity).

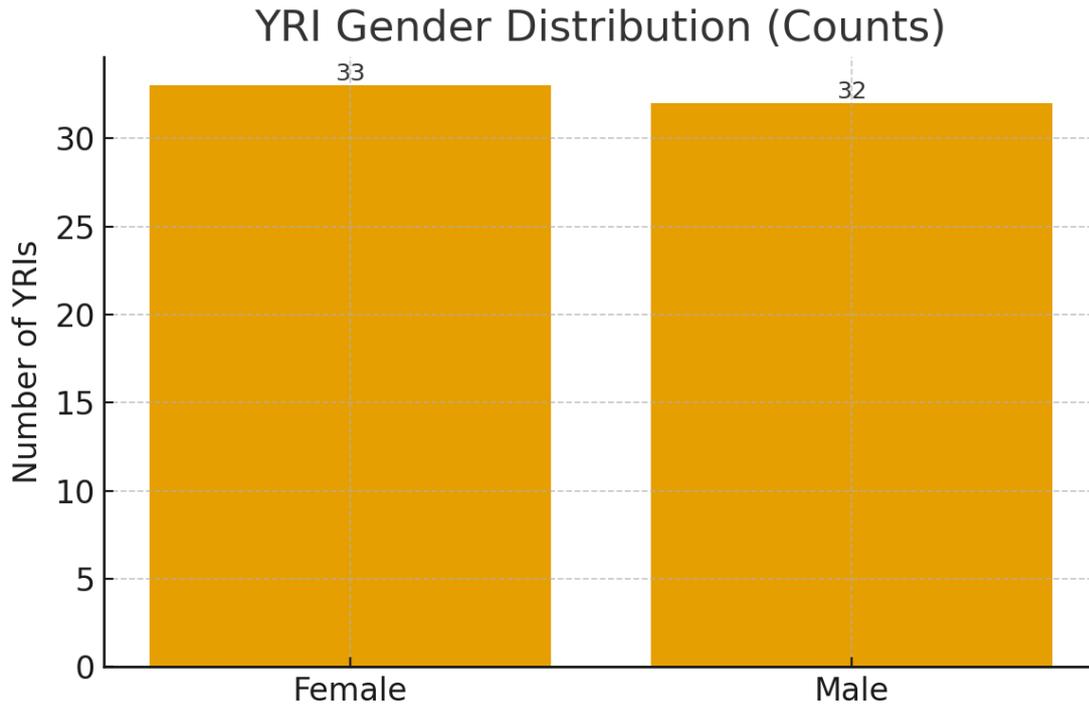


Fig. 2: YRI Gender Distribution (Sept. 2025, with one member preferring not to disclose their gender identity).

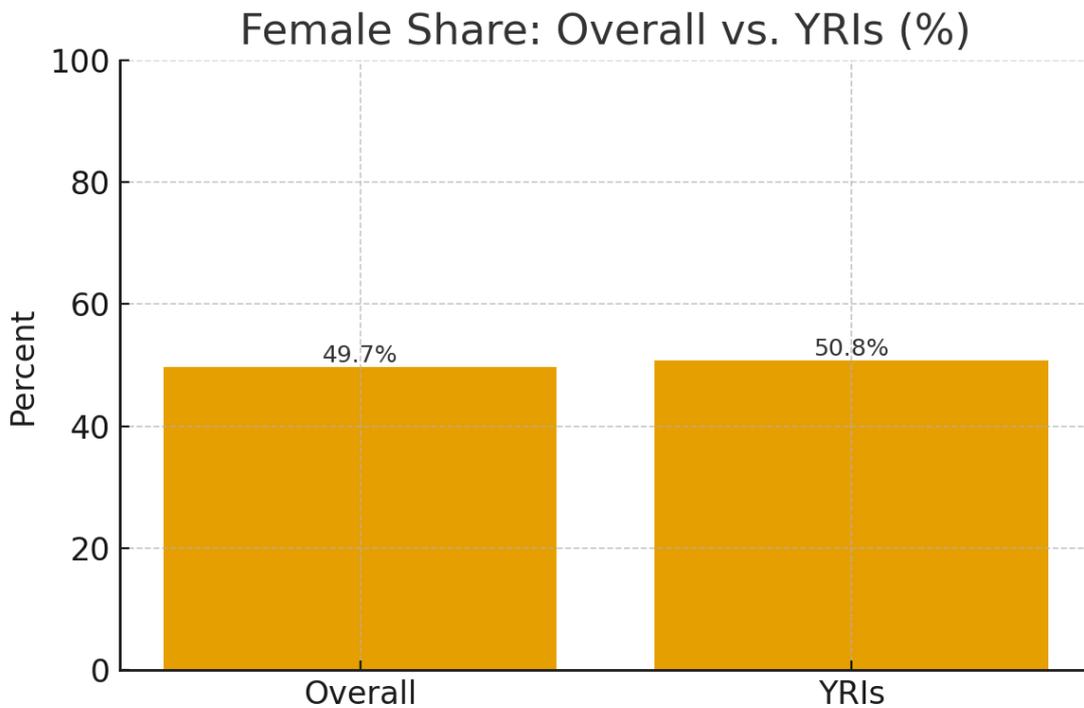


Fig. 3: Female Share: Overall vs. YRI (Sept. 2025, with one member preferring not to disclose their gender identity).

COST reports an average of 49% women across Actions; 52% of researchers in leadership positions are women, 43% of Action Chairs and 56% of Vice-Chairs are women, 53% of young participants are women, and 57% of ITC participants are women (July 2024). Against this backdrop, our Action’s overall 50/50 balance slightly exceeds the COST average for women’s participation and our 51% women among YRIs is close to—but a little below—the COST-wide figure of 53%. We will therefore aim to maintain our overall parity while taking steps to raise women’s participation among YRIs and to monitor leadership roles to align with, and where possible exceed, COST benchmarks.¹

This strong balance in membership demonstrates that our Action is well-positioned to foster an inclusive culture. However, numbers alone do not ensure equality. We recognize the continuing challenges faced by researchers in academia—such as unequal pay gaps, gendered career progression, or underrepresentation of women and gender minorities in leadership roles. Moreover, inclusiveness requires us to look beyond binary gender balance and to consider a broader spectrum of identities and experiences.

Our task, therefore, is to consolidate this strong balance and extend it to all levels of our Action’s work—from leadership positions, working group chairs, and scientific committee members to participation in workshops, training schools, and short-term scientific missions.

¹ <https://www.cost.eu/about/strategy/gender-equality/>

3. Measures to Foster and Maintain Gender Equality and Diversity

Building on COST’s Gender Equality Policy, the COST *Gender Equality Plan for Actions* (2025 template), and best practices from other Actions, we commit to the following measures:

3.1 Governance and Monitoring

- Publish this Gender Equality and Inclusiveness Plan (GEIP) on the Action’s website and circulate it to all members.
- Appoint a **Gender Equality Officer** to oversee the implementation of the GEIP.
- Dedicate a **regular agenda item at MC meetings** (at least once per year) to review progress and update measures.
- Collect and report statistics on gender distribution across all Action activities (leadership roles, grant distribution, conference speakers, etc.).

3.2 Partizipation and Leadership

- Strive for gender balance in all leadership structures, including working group chairs, the core group, and committees.
- Ensure equal opportunities for all genders in applying for grants (STSMs, ITCs, Virtual Mobility).
- Establish mentorship opportunities for early career researchers, with particular support for women and underrepresented groups.

3.3 Research Content and Outputs

- Encourage Action members to integrate gender as an analytical category into their research on print and public spheres, where relevant.
- Highlight research that foregrounds gender and inclusiveness in dissemination activities, publications, and events.

3.4 Inclusiveness and Support Measures

- Promote the use of **gender-inclusive language** in all Action communications, publications, and events.
- Respect members’ chosen pronouns and ensure registration forms allow for self-identification beyond binary categories.
- Consider budgetary support (where possible within COST rules) for measures such as childcare grants during conferences or short-term scientific missions.
- Consider accessibility needs wherever possible—for example, enable **live captions in online meetings** for participants who are deaf or hard of hearing, and offer **dyslexia-friendly fonts** and accessible formats for participants with reading disabilities.
- Promote a safe, respectful environment by adopting a **zero-tolerance policy for harassment or discrimination**.

3.5 Capacity Building and Outreach

- Support attendance of **training or workshop** on gender equality and inclusiveness during the Action's lifetime.
- Share best practices with other COST Actions and contribute to COST's broader Gender Equality Policy.
- Use the Action's social media channels to promote our commitment to gender equality and highlight activities in this area.

3.6 Capacity Building and Outreach

- Introduce top-up grants to support members with caring responsibilities (e.g. child-care, care for ill family members) so that they can attend conferences, workshops, and meetings.
- Schedule Action events (conferences, workshops, meetings) during conventional working hours, avoiding evenings and weekends to reduce conflicts with family time.
- Ensure that all Action events foster a family-friendly and welcoming atmosphere, encouraging the participation of members with caring duties.

4. Gender Inclusive Language

What we mean by gender-inclusive language

Gender-inclusive language is communication that does not make assumptions about people on the basis of sex, gender identity, or gender expression. In practice, it replaces gender-biased terms with neutral alternatives, uses people-first wording, and avoids phrasing that implies one gender as the norm. This approach is widely endorsed across international and EU institutions and major scholarly style guides.

Why it matters for our Action

Language shapes who feels addressed, respected, and able to participate. Using inclusive wording supports COST's Excellence & Inclusiveness goals and improves clarity for international, interdisciplinary audiences. It also aligns our publications and events with current EU and academic standards on inclusive communication.

Core principles we will apply

- Use correct and respectful pronouns (he/she/they) and the singular they when a person's gender is unknown or irrelevant; use a person's self-identified pronouns where provided.
- Prefer gender-neutral role nouns: chair, spokesperson, police officer, firefighter, server, actor (as neutral where appropriate); avoid default masculine generics (chairman, spokesman, policemen).
- Avoid gender-biased or stereotyped expressions and relationship assumptions.
- Choose inclusive collective terms: people, everyone, colleagues, participants rather than ladies and gentlemen.

Concrete examples (before → after)

- Each editor should submit *his* report by Friday.
→ Each editor should submit *their* report by Friday.
- The *chairman* will circulate minutes.
→ The *chair* will circulate minutes.
- We need 20 *man*-hours for layout.
→ We need 20 *person*-hours for layout.
- Speakers may attend with their *wives*.
→ Speakers may attend with their *partners*.
- Dear *Ladies and Gentlemen*
→ Dear *colleagues / everyone*.
- *mankind*
→ humankind.

Benefits for our Action

Systematically applying gender-inclusive language will widen participation (especially for early-career scholars and members from diverse linguistic backgrounds), reduce inadvertent exclusion, and improve the precision and credibility of our research communications across the network.

5. Top-Up Grants

Purpose and scope

For the first time, our Action will offer top-up grants to enable members with caring responsibilities (e.g., for children or ill/disabled family members) to participate in **COST grant-based in-person scholarly activities**. The aim is to remove practical barriers to mobility, support continuity of research, and promote career progression, particularly for early-career researchers and innovators (YRIs).

Top-up grants may be requested **only in connection with the following COST grant schemes**:

- Young Researcher and Innovator (YRI) Conference Grants;
- Inclusiveness Target Country (ITC) Conference Grants;
- Dissemination Grants;
- Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs).

Grants are financed from the Action's budget whenever funds allow and are awarded on a competitive basis.

Financial support (amounts and eligible costs)

- Maximum award: up to 500 € per approved application.
- Nature of support: a *supplementary* contribution to additional costs directly caused by caring responsibilities linked to the travel (i.e., not intended to cover all costs of care).
- Examples of eligible costs:
 - ✓ On-site childcare or supervised care services during the event;
 - ✓ Short-term home/respite care while the applicant is travelling;
 - ✓ Travel and accommodation for a caregiver accompanying the applicant or dependent;
 - ✓ Extended accommodation necessary to accommodate a dependent or caregiver;
 - ✓ Reasonable accessibility arrangements related to care (e.g., accessible room where needed for a dependent).

Applicants must:

- Be members or participants of the Action (e.g., MC members/substitutes, WG members, invited speakers engaged in Action activities);
- Have documented caring responsibilities for a dependent (child or adult in need of assistance);
- Hold, or be in the process of applying for, an eligible COST grant listed above;
- Demonstrate a clear link between the proposed travel and the Action's objectives (e.g., presenting a paper, chairing a session, key WG contributions).

Application process

- Initial contact: Applicants should speak to the Action’s Grant Awarding Coordinator to discuss eligibility and timing.
- Submission: Provide (i) a brief justification explaining how the top-up will enable participation otherwise at risk, and (ii) a detailed budget listing expected additional care-related costs. Where possible, include confirmations (e.g., event acceptance letter, draft program).
- When to apply: Ideally at least four weeks before travel to allow evaluation and, where applicable, pre-approval of specific cost items.

Evaluation criteria

1. Relevance and impact: the importance of the activity for the Action and for the applicant’s research/career;
2. Barrier removal: the extent to which the requested support directly addresses care-related obstacles to participation;
3. Value for money: clarity and reasonableness of the budget and requested amount;
4. Feasibility and timing: realistic plan for arranging care and travel within the event schedule.

Priorities

In line with the Action’s GEP and COST’s Excellence & Inclusiveness policy, the following will be considered when ranking proposals of comparable merit:

- Gender balance within the cohort of grantees;
- Young researchers and innovators (YRIs);
- Researchers from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs);
- Applications that do not duplicate recent top-up awards to the same applicant, to broaden access.

Obligations of grantees

- Submit a **short post-event report** (½–1 page) outlining how the grant facilitated participation and any outcomes (e.g., paper delivered, contacts established).
- Acknowledge the Action’s support in relevant dissemination (slides, poster, program bio).

Clarifications

- These top-ups do not cover all care-related costs during mobility; they provide *additional* support to make participation feasible.
- Funds cannot be used for standard travel or per diem items already covered by other COST instruments; only extra costs due to caring responsibilities are eligible.
- Awards are contingent on budget availability and compliance with COST and institutional financial rules.

Contact

For questions and to initiate an application, please contact the **Grant Awarding Coordinator** Dr Joelle Weis (weis@uni-trier.de).

6. Further Information

COST Policies, Templates & Guidance

- COST – Gender Equality (overview):
<https://www.cost.eu/about/strategy/gender-equality/>
- COST – Excellence & Inclusiveness Policy:
<https://www.cost.eu/about/strategy/excellence-and-inclusiveness/>
- COST – Gender Equality Plan for COST Actions (template, PDF):
<https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2024/11/GEP-template-for-COST-Actions-v27022025.pdf>
- COST – Gender Equality Plan for COST Activities (landing page):
<https://www.cost.eu/publication/gender-equality-plan-for-cost-activities/>
- COST – Tips for creating a Gender Equality Plan:
<https://www.cost.eu/tips-for-creating-a-gender-equality-plan/>

European Union (Policy & Guidance)

- EU – Gender equality in research & innovation (DG RTD hub):
https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en
- EU – Gender Equality Strategy (Commission):
https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en
- Horizon Europe – Guidance on Gender Equality Plans (Publications Office):
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffcb06c3-200a-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1>

Tools to Implement GEPs / Inclusiveness

- EIGE – GEAR Tool (Gender Equality in Academia & Research):
https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear?language_content_entity=en
- EIGE – GEAR Action Toolbox:
<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/action-toolbox>
- UniSAFE Toolkit (addressing gender-based violence in HE & RPOs):
<https://unisafe-toolkit.eu/>

Inclusive Communication (Practical Guides)

- EIGE – Toolkit on Gender-Sensitive Communication (landing):
https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/toolkits-guides/gender-sensitive-communication?language_content_entity=en
- EIGE – Toolkit on Gender-Sensitive Communication (PDF):
https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/20193925_mh0119609enn_pdf.pdf

- EIGE – Words Matter: Gender-inclusive language & communication (PDF):
<https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/words-matter-supporting-gender-equality-through-language-and-communication.pdf>

Integrating Gender in Research Content

- Gendered Innovations 2 (EU Policy Review – Publications Office):
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/33b4c99f-2e66-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- “Sex and gender analysis improves science and engineering” (Nature 2019):
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1657-6>

Reporting Standards

- SAGER Guidelines – EASE overview:
<https://ease.org.uk/communities/gender-policy-committee/the-sager-guidelines/>
- SAGER Checklist (PDF):
<https://ease.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/EASE-SAGER-Checklist-2022.pdf>
- SAGER rationale & recommended use (Research Integrity & Peer Review):
<https://researchintegrityjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41073-016-0007-6>

Data & Benchmarking

- She Figures 2024 (interactive):
<https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/knowledge-publications-tools-and-data/interactive-reports/she-figures-2024>

Preventing Gender-Based Violence in R&I (Zero-Tolerance)

- Zero-Tolerance Code of Conduct (Publications Office):
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6ce8aef5-70b3-11ef-a8ba-01aa75ed71a1>
- GENDERACTIONplus template for zero-tolerance policy (PDF):
https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/GENDERACTION-plus_D3.3_Online-template-for-a-zero-tolerance-policy-on-GBV-and-SH-for-RFOs.pdf

7. Short Version

Gender Equality & Gender Inclusiveness Plan

COST Action CA23137 – Print Culture and Public Spheres in Central Europe, 1500–1800 (PCPSCe)

Why It Matters

- Excellence & Innovation: Diverse teams generate better, more rigorous research and wider impact (cf. *Gendered Innovations 2*, EC 2020).
- Fair Access: Equality means balanced participation, opportunities, resources, and zero tolerance for discrimination/harassment.
- Inclusiveness Beyond the Binary: We recognize and support all gender identities (incl. TIN*) and commit to intersectional practice.

Current Snapshot (2025)

- Total membership: 171 → Female 85 | Male 86 (~ 50/50 overall).
- Young Researchers & Innovators (YRIs): 65 (38% of total) → Female 33 (51%) | Male 32 (49%).
- We will maintain overall parity, monitor leadership balance, and ensure inclusiveness is reflected across all activities and roles.

Objectives

1. Balanced participation & leadership across all Action bodies and events.
2. Inclusive culture valuing the full diversity of members and perspectives.
3. Gender dimension in research on print culture & public spheres (1500–1800).

What We Will Do

1. Governance & Monitoring

- Publish the GEI Plan on the Action website; brief new members.
- Annual MC agenda item to review progress; collect/report gender-disaggregated data for leadership, grants, speakers, trainees.

2. Participation & Leadership

- Strive for balance in WG chairs/core group/committees.
- Ensure equal access to grants (STSM, ITC, VM) and establish **mentoring** for ECIs/underrepresented groups.

3. Research & Outputs

- Integrate sex/gender/intersectional analysis where relevant; highlight inclusive research in dissemination and training.

4. Inclusive Practice & Support

- **Gender-inclusive language** and respect for chosen pronouns; inclusive registration forms beyond binary options.

- **Caring responsibilities:** explore **top-up grants** (within COST rules); avoid evening/weekend scheduling; ensure family-friendly, welcoming events.
- **Safe environment:** zero-tolerance for harassment/discrimination; clear reporting pathways.

5. Capacity building & Outreach

- At least one training/workshop on GEI during the Action.
- Share good practice across COST; communicate our GEI work via website/social channels.

GEI Officer: (role holder) — coordinates implementation and annual review.

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