



TERMS OF REFERENCE
COMMISSION EXPERT GROUP
ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GENDER EQUALITY IN EU R&I

1. BACKGROUND

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research has been one of the priorities of the European Research Area (ERA) since the European Commission's 2012 Communication. The new Communication on the ERA, adopted by the European Commission on 30 September 2020, underline the remaining gender gaps, and the specific challenges that need to be better addressed to promote inclusive gender equality policies in European research and innovation (R&I), such as better addressing diversity by opening up to intersectionality, as well as tackling gender-based violence including sexual harassment in academic and research organisations.¹

The latest 'She Figures 2021'² publication shows that while there is almost gender parity at doctoral graduate level, women are still underrepresented in the highest level of academia and decision-making positions, while significant gender gaps persist in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) studies, as well as access to research funding and submission of patent applications. The integration of the gender dimension into research publications' contents also remains very limited across Europe.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of studies are showing the negative impact that the crisis and the socio-economic lockdown have had on women researchers' activity and productivity. This risks setting back the progress that has been made on gender equality in R&I in the past years and widening existing gender gaps in research careers and decision-making positions. Still little is known on the long-term impact of the pandemic measures and its gendered consequences in areas such as researchers' work-life balance, precarious contracts, sharing of child-care duties, gender-based violence and sexual harassment in new working configurations, the impact on grant evaluation procedures and flexibility of research grants, as well as recognition and visibility of women researchers' achievements.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is already closely monitoring the effect of the pandemic on gender equality in general³, while the Horizon 2020 funded project, RESISTIRE⁴ examines the socio-economic impact of the crisis on gendered inequalities to

¹ Communication on a new ERA for Research and Innovation, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A628%3AFIN>

² The full She Figures 2021 publication will be released in November. The infographic is available here: <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/eu-law-and-publications/publication-detail/-/publication/61564e1f-d55e-11eb-895a-01aa75ed71a1>

³ <https://eige.europa.eu/topics/health/covid-19-and-gender-equality>

⁴ <https://resistire-project.eu/the-project/>

develop policy recommendations and sustainable solutions for an inclusive recovery and better societal resilience to future outbreaks. The ‘She Figures 2021’ publication that will be released in November 2021 will also include a specific focus on the impact of COVID-19 on women scientists in its policy briefs. However, an in-depth review of the pandemic’s impact on gender equality in R&I and supporting guidance for policymakers and R&I decision-makers at European level on countering the negative impact are still missing.

Therefore, the Expert Group on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on gender equality in EU R&I should deliver a study to the European Commission on the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and the pandemic containment measures put in place at institutional, national and EU level, on the work and productivity of women researchers and on gender equality in the EU research and innovation system in general. This will be developed into a report with key policy recommendations on mitigating the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women researchers and strengthening gender equality in R&I in the post-Covid recovery.

2. SUBJECT MATTER

The group of experts ‘Commission expert group on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality in EU R&I’ (‘the group’) is set up.

3. TASKS

The group’s tasks shall be:

Task 1: In-depth review and analysis of COVID-19 impact on gender equality in R&I

The group shall deliver a study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its containment measures put in place at institutional, national and EU level on gender equality in R&I. The following areas should be examined from a gender lens in the COVID-19 context, taking into account quantitative and qualitative methods:

- a) productivity of women researchers and innovators, including paper submissions, authorships, and patent applications;
- b) gendered differences in career development, recruitment and retention in R&I organisations during the lockdown, considering specifically the effects on precarious working conditions and early-stage career researchers;
- c) work-life balance, including sharing of care, educational and domestic responsibilities, and effects on mental health and wellbeing in the new working modalities (e.g. teleworking, hybrid working);
- d) key research networks, considering access to research collaborations, mobility schemes, and researchers’ visibility;
- e) challenges to grant applications and evaluation management and their effect on research careers;
- f) gender-based violence and sexual harassment in new working modalities;
- g) integration of the sex and gender analysis into COVID-19 research.

Where possible, an intersectional perspective should be considered. Research may encompass other R&I areas affected by COVID-19, beyond the ones listed above.

Task 2: Best practices and policy recommendations

Building on the outcomes of this analysis, the group shall bring about an exchange of experience and good practice in the field of:

- a) adaptation measures for grant management and evaluation procedures in research funding organisations;
- b) adaptation measures and gender-sensitive policy changes by R&I organisations to support researchers in the areas mentioned under Task 1;
- c) adaptation of gender equality plans to new working environments and modalities at R&I organisations.

To facilitate this exchange of experience, at least one workshop will be organised, in cooperation with DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD), with national level policymakers and key stakeholders from relevant Horizon 2020 projects, as well as stakeholders working on the update of the Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR)⁵ tool. Projects to consider include RESISTIRE, UniSAFE⁶, and the ACT Communities of Practice⁷, as well as gender equality plan (GEP) implementing projects, funded under the Science-with-and-for-Society (SwafS) Work Programme. The workshop shall focus on identifying challenges, policy needs and best practices in the COVID-19 context, and discussing sustainable solutions to strengthen gender equality in R&I systems, in line with the ERA policy agenda.

Other workshops for further exchange of experience with R&I stakeholders may also be organised. The group shall produce a separate report, summarising main points of discussion and conclusions, per workshop.

Based on this, the group shall develop evidence-based policy recommendations on mitigating the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women researchers and strengthening gender equality in R&I in the post-Covid recovery. The recommendations shall target policymakers at EU and national level and decisionmakers in R&I organisations.

Recommendations shall include a methodology, including indicators where relevant, for measuring the crisis' impact on women scientists' careers, which could be used for the next 'She Figures 2024'⁸ study.

Task 3: Dissemination and Outreach

The group shall develop a final report (100 – 200 pages) in a clear, proofread and attractive format analysing and summarising the findings of Task 1 and Task 2. The report shall include a foreword by the Commission and a citizen friendly, easy-to-read executive summary. The

⁵ EIGE's Gender Equality in Academia and Research tool: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear>

⁶ <https://unisafe-gbv.eu/>

⁷ <https://act-on-gender.eu/communities-practice>

⁸ The 'She Figures' publication is the main source of pan European, comparable statistics on the state of gender equality in research and innovation, released every 3 years since 2003. 'She Figures 2021' will be published in November. The previous 2018 edition can be found here: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9540ffa1-4478-11e9-a8ed-01aa75ed71a1>

group shall also develop a factsheet (max 2 pages, 750 words), which may be accompanied by relevant metrics, to highlight key findings and recommendations, in agreement with DG RTD.

4. CONSULTATION

1. DG RTD may consult the group on any matter relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality in R&I.
2. The Chair of the group may advise DG RTD to consult the group on a specific question.

5. MEMBERSHIP

1. The group shall be composed of up to 15 members.
2. Members shall be individuals appointed in a personal capacity, who shall act independently and in the public interest.
3. Members who are no longer capable of contributing effectively to the expert group's deliberations, who, in the opinion of DG RTD, do not comply with the conditions set out in Article 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union or who resign, shall no longer be invited to participate in any meetings of the group and may be replaced for the remainder of their term of office.

6. SELECTION PROCESS

1. The selection of the group's members shall be carried out *via* a public call for applications, to be published on the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities ('the Register of expert groups'). The call for applications shall clearly outline the selection criteria, including the required expertise in relation to the work to be performed. The minimum deadline for applications shall be four weeks.
2. Individuals applying to be appointed as members of the group in a personal capacity shall disclose any circumstances that could give rise to a conflict of interest. In particular, the Commission shall require those individuals to submit a declaration of interests ('DOI') form on the basis of the standard DOI form for expert groups⁹, together with an updated *curriculum vitae* (CV), as part of their application. Submission of a duly completed DOI form shall be necessary in order to be eligible to be appointed as a member in a personal capacity. The conflict of interest assessment shall be performed in compliance with the Commission's horizontal rules on expert groups ('the horizontal rules')¹⁰. In addition, members will need to respect the conflict of interest rules described in the Code of Conduct annexed to their contract and be subject to the contractual measures in case of their breach.
3. The members of the group shall be appointed by the Director-General of DG RTD from specialists with competence in the areas referred to in section 3 and who have responded to the call for applications.

⁹ See Article 11 of C(2016) 3301 (the horizontal rules) and Annex 4.

¹⁰ *Idem*.

4. Members shall be appointed for one year from date of signature of the contracts. They shall remain in office until the end of their term of office. Their term of office may be renewed.
5. DG RTD shall establish a reserve list of suitable candidates that may be used to appoint members' replacements. DG RTD shall ask applicants for their consent before including their names on the reserve list.

7. CHAIR

DG RTD shall appoint the Chair among the members of the group.

8. OPERATION

1. The group shall act at the request of its Chair with the agreement of DG RTD, in compliance with the horizontal rules¹¹.
2. DG RTD, in agreement with the Chair, will appoint a rapporteur amongst the members of the group. The rapporteur's tasks will include integrating and harmonising the contributions of the members, leading the final compilation and editorial drafting of the group's report. She/he will act as 'lead editor' of the written deliverables based on all members' written contributions, in accordance with the Chair's orientations. Furthermore, as rapporteur, he/she will support or replace the Chair when/if needed.
3. Meetings of the group shall, in principle, be held virtually. A physical meeting may be foreseen to take place on Commission premises in Brussels in the final stages. Upon request from the group's members, and in agreement with DG RTD, the group may have the possibility to organise ad hoc meetings or thematic workshops remotely, with the prior written agreement of the Commission services as appropriate within the limits of the agreed budget.
4. DG RTD shall provide secretarial services. Commission officials from other departments with an interest in the proceedings may attend meetings of the group and its sub-groups.
5. In agreement with the DG RTD, the group may, by simple majority of its members, decide that deliberations shall be public.
6. Minutes on the discussion on each point on the agenda and on the opinions delivered by the group shall be meaningful and complete. Minutes shall be drafted by DG RTD under the responsibility of the Chair.
7. The group shall adopt its opinions, recommendations or reports by consensus. In the event of a vote, the outcome of the vote shall be decided by simple majority of the members. Members who have voted against shall have the right to have a document summarising the reasons for their position annexed to the opinions, recommendations or reports.
8. The working arrangements and methodology are organised as follows:

¹¹ C(2016)3301, Article 13.1.

As a general rule, meeting minutes, working and final documents shall be drafted in English and meetings shall also be conducted in English.

The group shall be supported by DG RTD. DG RTD shall ensure that all administrative formalities are duly met, help facilitate meetings, provide information and policy framing, publish study outputs and liaise with relevant Commission services to ensure policy relevance and visibility.

9. The distribution of the work among the members of the group is organised as follows:

The Chair will be responsible for coordinating the work of the group in accordance with its specific mandate and in compliance with the Commission's horizontal rules on expert groups. This will include setting the broad orientation for the group, overseeing that the methodology is adequately implemented, defining meeting agendas, ensuring that the overall timetable is respected and ensuring the quality control of findings and deliverables. The Chair shall, in cooperation with DG RTD, direct the meetings and, in particular, at the outset of the group's work:

- Structure the work and deliverables of the group in organising the work of the group, summarising the main conclusions and actions arising before closing each meeting;
- Develop an operational and methodological work plan, including a calendar of meetings, a list of key priority questions that the group shall address, the tasks and responsibilities of the individual members, etc. The plan may be adapted in the course of the work of the group.

The Chair will be the main contact person with DG RTD, with whom consistent and continued communication will be required. For any of these tasks related to working methods, the Chair may also ask upon the assistance of the rapporteur.

Each member (including the Chair and rapporteur) will contribute to the work by:

- Taking active part in the meetings of the group. Contributions in these meetings should include:
 - a) collecting, reading, analysing and summarizing relevant information (reports, papers, surveys, interviews);
 - b) preparing written and oral individual or joint contributions on agreed topics and presenting them prior to or during the meetings for discussion;
 - c) taking an active part in deliberations, commenting on presentations, documents or policy papers;
 - d) submitting written comments, when appropriate, on the contributions of other members and on the deliverables after a meeting and in preparation for the next one.
- Participating in and/or organizing workshop(s), in particular to solicit additional and diverse views, as agreed with DG RTD.

The final report and factsheet shall be drafted and discussed according to an agreed timeframe and subsequently published on the Europa website. Upon submission of the report and the factsheet, the authors should remain in close contact with DG RTD to ensure timely and high-standard delivery of the final study.

9. SUB-GROUPS

1. DG RTD may set up sub-groups for the purpose of examining specific questions on the basis of terms of reference defined by DG RTD. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the horizontal rules and shall report to the group. They shall be dissolved as soon as their mandate is fulfilled.
2. The members of sub-groups that are not members of the group shall be selected via a public call for applications, in compliance with point 6 and the horizontal rules¹².

10. INVITED EXPERTS

DG RTD may invite experts with specific expertise with respect to a subject matter on the agenda to take part in the work of the group or sub-groups on an *ad hoc* basis.

11. RULES OF PROCEDURE

On a proposal by and in agreement with DG RTD the group shall adopt its rules of procedure by simple majority of its members, on the basis of the standard rules of procedure for expert groups, in compliance with the horizontal rules¹³. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the group's rules of procedure.

12. PROFESSIONAL SECRECY AND HANDLING OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

The members of the group, are subject to the obligation of professional secrecy, which by virtue of the Treaties and the rules implementing them applies to all members of the institutions and their staff, as well as to the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of Union classified information, laid down in Commission Decisions (EU, Euratom) 2015/443¹⁴ and 2015/444¹⁵. Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission may take all appropriate measures. In addition, members will need to respect the confidentiality rules described in the Code of Conduct annexed to their contract and be subject to the contractual measures in case of their breach.

13. TRANSPARENCY

1. The group and sub-groups shall be registered in the Register of expert groups.
2. As concerns the group and sub-groups composition, the name of individuals appointed in a personal capacity shall be published on the Register of expert groups.
3. DG RTD shall make available all relevant documents, including the agendas, the minutes and the participants' submissions on the Register of expert groups. In particular, DG RTD shall ensure publication of the agenda and other relevant background documents in due time ahead of the meeting, followed by timely publication of minutes. Exceptions to publication shall only be foreseen where it is

¹² See Articles 10 and 14.2 of the horizontal rules.

¹³ See Article 17 of the horizontal rules.

¹⁴ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/443 of 13 March 2015 on Security in the Commission (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 41).

¹⁵ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

deemed that disclosure of a document would undermine the protection of a public or private interest as defined in Article 4 of Regulation (EC) N° 1049/2001.

14. SPECIAL ALLOWANCES

Members of the group shall be granted a special allowance of EUR 450/day for each full working day spent assisting the Commission, in accordance with Article 21 of the horizontal rules. The expert group will be financed according to the provisions of the 'Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area' 2021-2022 Work Programme under Horizon Europe¹⁶.

15. MEETING EXPENSES

Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by participants in the activities of the group shall be reimbursed by the Commission. Reimbursement shall be made in accordance with the provisions in force within the Commission and within the limits of the available appropriations allocated to the Commission departments under the annual procedure for the allocation of resources.

Done in Brussels, on 27 October 2021.

¹⁶ Commission Decision C(2021) 4200 of 15 June 2021 (Expert contract actions, page 154).