

Cultivating intersectional equality policies and practices in R&I

Second Working Paper KSH3 - Intersectionality

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THIS DOCUMENT IS MEANT FOR ANYONE INVOLVED IN THE PROMOTION OF INTERSECTIONAL EQUALITY POLICIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

1. Introduction

This Second Working Paper of the INSPIRE Knowledge and Support Hub (KSH) 3 on Intersectionality is structured into three main sections. The first section introduces the topic of intersectional equality policies and practices. It reflects on the existing scientific literature on intersectional policies in Higher Education and Research (HE&R) organizations to argue for a more explicitly strategic-political approach to intersectionality in organizational policy-making, and proposes guiding principles for its adoption. This section is based on a presentation given by Patrizia Zanoni on 27 September 2024 at the second Knowledge Exchange Event (KKE) of the INSPIRE project in Vienna, Austria. The second section presents the outcomes of the knowledge exchange among the KKE participants. This included two breakout room sessions that focused on how intersectional equality practices and policies can be cultivated. As these outcomes are based on the shared knowledge and expertise of the participants, we recognize their contributions by including the names and the respective institutions of those accepted to be acknowledged¹. These sessions were developed and facilitated by Lorena Pajares

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Sánchez (Notus) and Joanna Beeckmans (University of Hasselt). The third section presents the reflections of KSH3 experts Ashlee Christoffersen (York University), Barbara De Micheli (Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini), Bruna Jaquette Pereira (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) and Irina Lungu (Technical University of Iasi). Moreover, CoP representatives have provided feedback and added their reflections, based on their work within their respective CoPs. The final version of this Second Working Paper benefited from feedback provided by representatives from each CoP, as well as their reflections based on their CoP work conducted within INSPIRE so far.

2. Setting the stage of the knowledge exchange

One of the most important mandates of INSPIRE is to provide insights into how Research & Innovation (R&I) organizations can move from gender-focused equality policies and/or Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) policies towards more integrated intersectional GEPs that effectively foster equality and inclusion. This ambition is the result of the successful plea from various actors in civic society, with institutions such as the EU, but also the United Nations, and even national institutions (e.g. in the UK and Ireland). These institutions are urging a move beyond existing, often compartmentalized and siloed, single-axis policies that reproduce a hierarchisation of inequality axes. Such policies render the experiences of inequality faced by intersectionally minoritized groups invisible and leave them unaddressed. In this context, drawing on the existing literature, we understand intersectionality as a paradigm, theory, methodology, analytic or critical tool that focuses on the interlocking systems of oppression and privilege, power relations and social inequalities that occur along multiple axes, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity and race, social and economic status, sexual orientation, disability and age (Breslin, Pandey, and Riccucci 2017; Collins 1990; Athena SWAN 2021; Council 2021; Crenshaw 1989).

The existing scientific literature on Higher Education and Research organizations (HE&R) to date has largely emphasized the absence of truly intersectional policies (cf. First Working Paper of KSH3²). Based on various research designs and data sources, it has been argued that such policies do not exist in this type of organization because intersectionality is co-opted and depoliticized by institutions. At the same time, scholars continue to reiterate the necessity to establish intersectional policies to address structural inequalities that are inherently intersectional. This contradiction raises the question of whether intersectional policies are, in fact, a *contradictio in terminis*.

University); Lungu Irina (Technical University of Iasi); Montera Arianna (San Raffaele Hospital & WISE CoP); Obereder Lisa (Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft); Romero Aran (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya); Ryndzionek Monika (National Centre for Research and Development); Sangiuliano Maria (Smart Venice – Nexus); Schiffbänker Helene (Joanneum Research); Xarles-Jubany (Gemma, UOC)

² Beeckmans, J., Pajares, L., Zanoni, P., Van Laer, K., & Caprile, M. (2024, October). *Intersectional policy in Research and Innovation: Translating ambitions into actionable practice First Working Paper KSH3*.

Multiple reasons for the absence of intersectional policies in HE&R organizations have been identified. Often, studies mention the lack of knowledge, expertise and capacity of various organizational actors to transform existing equality policies into intersectional ones. A second reason refers to the more or less overt political barriers posed by opponents of intersectionality and/or intersectional equality. Finally, it is argued that, as institutions are products of the past, they reflect and even reinforce historical power inequalities, and are thus inherently unable to promote equality. In this last argument, the contradiction between institutions and intersectionality as an activist political concept is highlighted.

While these reasons are highly plausible, they do not automatically advance our understanding of how intersectional equality policies can be developed and effectively implemented. To this purpose, we propose to adopt a 'minimalist approach' to intersectionality, as defined above, providing a heuristic that systematically asks how the current equality policies of HE&R organizations overcome siloed/single-identity policies and how, doing so, they tackle power inequalities. We look for these two defining characteristics in the content and the processes of policy design, implementation and governance, with attention both for policies that manage (top down) and those that curate or set the stage (bottom up) for intersectional equality. Doing so, we produce novel knowledge by dialogically and iteratively:

- mapping: What policy is it? Who does it? What does it do to power? For whom?
- systematizing: How does it relate to the other policies and to the institutional context? What are factors that have fostered it or hampered it?
- theorizing: How does it exactly work? What is the underlying mechanism?
- strategizing: How can it be leveraged to advance intersectional equality policies and intersectional equality?

In this inductive approach, intersectional policy is no longer an analytical pass or fail, but rather becomes a matter of degree and context-bound potentialities and opportunities that call for specific strategies and actions. It requires us to move away from intersectionality as a concept that needs to be faithfully and comprehensively translated into policy in ways that remain true to its activist roots. It rather invites us to rethink intersectional policies as a political strategy, a means to achieve inclusive equality, and to develop a broad repertoire of action to be used to attain intersectional equality and social justice.

3. The reflective discussions to exchange knowledge

As a Centre of Excellence, INSPIRE aims to develop both knowledge and innovative tools for inclusive and intersectional R&I policies, and to provide a cross-cutting forum for continuous dialogue and collaborative action. Building on the acquired insights from the literature and conducted research in INSPIRE, five knowledge exchange events (KEE) are organized to promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences within and across KSHs (and Communities of Practices (CoPs)) during the course of the INSPIRE project. While the first KEE was internally organised by each hub targeting their own CoPs, this second event was the first to be held in person and convened all 12 CoPs to foster cross-fertilization. The decision to have intersectionality as the central topic of this event was based on the internal

KE events held in early 2024, the INSPIRE vision developed and the CoPs needs assessment. The aim was to *provide a space for the crossovers between the main thematic / practical areas of INSPIRE: i.e., what intersectionality means when we work on sustaining change, widening participation, as well as innovation.*

The presentation by Patrizia Zanoni resumed above was followed by a panel reflection session with experts and practitioners (KSH leaders and CoPs representatives), that held a meaningful discussion around two main aspects: (1) examples of policies or practices that successfully made a R&I organisation more intersectional, commenting on their strengths and limitations, and (2) initiatives that have been able to effectively counter opposition to intersectional equality policy.

After this, the second half of the event was devoted to amore interactive exchange through breakout sessions, using a participatory interactive format to share experiences and expertise on “doing intersectionality” in research organisations from different angles. The break-out sessions focused briefly on problems of implementing an intersectional approach, but mainly concentrated on promising practices and solutions. The main aim was to identify examples of practices and policies of intersectionality that can effectively tackle inequalities in higher education, research and innovation organisations and content. The sessions were organised in 5 different rooms and topics:

1. Intersectionality & effective data monitoring
2. Intersectionality & sustainable equality work: pushback and resistance
3. Intersectionality & contextual and local knowledge
4. Cultivating intersectional practices and policies for equality work
5. Intersectionality & inclusive gendered innovations(s) & processes

Each room/topic held two sessions of 40 minutes each to allow contributions from different participants, who were free to join any of the rooms for each session. The breakout room facilitated by KHS3 leaders addressed the topic of *Cultivating intersectional practices and policies for equality work*, more specifically in Research and Innovation (R&I) organizations. The discussed topics were based on the identified barriers in the breakout rooms organized in the first Knowledge Exchange Event of KSH3, and the scoping literature review that was conducted. These identified barriers were briefly introduced by Joanna Beeckmans and Lorena Pajares clustered in three types of problems that were further organised following a SWOT analysis:

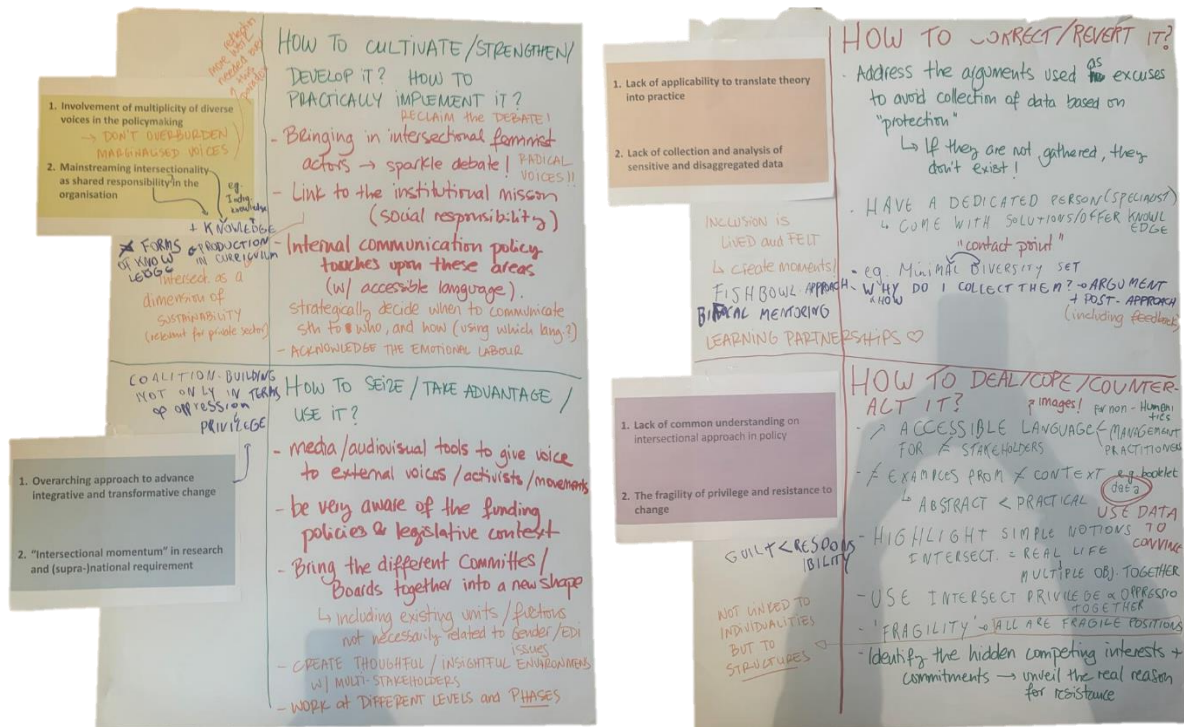
- **Knowledge-related problems** (low levels of understanding of what intersectionality implies and lack of practical knowledge on how to implement it. Still not strategic to use the concept)
- **Approach-related problems** (additive/multiple approach; main focus on gender which already faces the most resistance; calling out privileges also leads to overt resistances; pushed to minorities)
- **Method-related problems** (lack of data and/or knowledge on how to collect/use it; the former also used as an excuse for doing nothing; lack of knowledge on how to methodologically translate it into daily practices & procedures)

The focus in the reflective discussions was to identify concrete practices on how to (1) cultivate intersectionality’s strengths and opportunities in organizational equality policies, and (2) overcome intersectionality’s current weaknesses and threats in organizational equality policies. Participants shared ideas and reflections on the presented matters, based on their

own experience and the activities implemented within their own organizations so far. Specifically, these discussions were structured in four clustered questions:

1. *How to correct/revert the lack of applicability to translate the theory of intersectionality into practices, and the lack of data collection and analysis of sensitive and disaggregated data?*
2. *How to deal/cope/counteract the lack of common understanding on an intersectional approach in policy, and the fragility of privilege and resistance to change?*
3. *How to cultivate/strengthen/develop the involvement of a multiplicity of diverse voices in the policymaking, and how to practically implement the mainstreaming of intersectionality as a shared responsibility in the organization?*
4. *How to seize/take advantage of the “intersectional momentum” in research and due to (supra-national requirements, and how to use an overarching approach to advance integrative and transformative change?*

	HELPFUL		UNHELPFUL	
INTERNAL	Awareness of different voices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider perspective on diversity and inclusion • Used in research & teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eg. Diversity minimal item set Highlight gains of intersectional approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business case next to social justice • Micro, meso and macro • “need all hands on deck” as shared value • Collaboration between people/allyship 	How to cultivate / strengthen it? How to develop / practically implement it?	Not most strategic term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to no application in organizations • Equalized with D&I and/or GEP Lack of data on organization level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excuse or suspicion • No training on collection and analysis • Quantitative/qualitative data Lack of interest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushed to minorities • Time-poor: other priorities on the agenda • Conservatism: why needed? Why beneficial? 	How to correct / offset it? How to revert it?
EXTERNAL	Social justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activism and advocacy for human rights • Political POV in policy Wide usage of intersectionality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As theory, method and/or analytical tool • Broadens gender perspective • Social change 	How to seize / take advantage / use it?	Overall lack of knowledge on intersectionality Resistant culture/ resistance Gender > race <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar for other identities Privilege <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No recognition • No giving up on this in academia/health sector • No witch hunt either → unproductive Lack of data on the national level	How to deal / cope / counteract?



1. How to deal/cope/counteract the lack of common understanding on an intersectional approach in policy, and the fragility of privilege and resistance to change?

The current lack of common understanding of an intersectional approach in policy-making remains a challenge (Barbera et al., 2022; Christoffersen, 2021). Different strategies can be applied to bridge the theoretical complexity and practical application of intersectionality, and to better understand how to cope with resistances to change.

A critical starting point is to make intersectionality more accessible and understandable for diverse stakeholders. Adapting communication strategies and using accessible language are crucial to accommodate diverse stakeholders with different knowledge on intersectionality. This can involve developing different communication strategies towards managers, (academic) staff, and practitioners, towards Research Performing Organizations (RPO's) and Research Funding Organizations (RFO's), and towards fields in the Social Sciences & Humanities (SSH) and outside of the SSH. Tailoring messages to resonate with these groups ensures that the principles of intersectionality are not only recognized but also valued within their respective contexts. Moreover, highlighting simple and relatable understandings of intersectionality can be leveraged to achieve institutional support for multiple policy objectives, such as equity and social justice, rather than treat these goals as separate or competing.

To further demystify the concept, concrete examples and practical guidelines can be helpful. These can be presented through booklets or other user-friendly materials that illustrate how intersectionality applies to real-life scenarios. Statistical data can also play a critical role here, offering evidence of how inequalities intersect and why siloed approaches to addressing social issues are insufficient. By demonstrating that social identities are interconnected and contribute to intersecting inequalities, stakeholders can grasp the importance of an intersectional framework in their equality work.

Resistance to change is often connected to the issue of privilege and must therefore be addressed thoughtfully. An important step to deal with this, is to uncover the hidden competing interests and commitments that an intersectional approach might threaten. Understanding what causes resistance among which stakeholders could help identify pathways on how to approach this. One way to approach this carefully is by highlighting that all individuals working in R&I occupy fragile positions, to a certain extent, due to the structures that shape these organizations. By fostering a more nuanced understanding of privilege, intersectionality should emphasize both oppression and privilege as a shared and systemic issue within R&I rather than a purely individual one. Another possibility involves reframing privilege from being a source of guilt toward a shared responsibility. This approach unites stakeholders around a collective effort to dismantle structural inequalities, making the discussion less about personal blame and more about organizational and systemic transformation. By moving the focus away from individual fault and toward collective accountability, resistance can be mitigated, and stakeholders might be more likely to engage constructively.

2. *How to seize/take advantage of the “intersectional momentum” in R&I, and how to use an overarching approach to advance integrative and transformative change?*

The current “intersectional momentum”, strengthened by (supra-)national calls and/or requirements of the European Commission (2020), the United Nations (2021) and Advance HE (2021), provides a unique opportunity to embed intersectionality into the core of organizational policies and practices. Different strategies can be applied to align this approach with the specific context of each organization, the diverse stakeholders involved and the organizational structures.

A critical starting point is reimagining governance structures. A new shape that brings together different committees and boards, such as HR or equality offices and those that may not traditionally have focused on gender or Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) issues, could foster a holistic approach to addressing intersecting inequalities. This includes building coalitions that extend beyond minoritized groups within the organization. Engaging individuals in privileged positions who hold power within the organization can be an effective strategy to amplify efforts to implement intersectional practices and policies. Creating an environment where different stakeholders can express their needs and find common ground is essential for fostering a shared commitment to intersectionality. At the same time, providing platforms for social movements, activists, and other external actors can allow organizations to learn by a broader array of lived experiences and challenges. Media and audiovisual tools offer another powerful avenue to bring external voices into organizational spaces. These external perspectives can enrich the organization’s understanding of inequality and could bolster its commitment to transformative change.

Meanwhile, organizations must remain sensitive to their national and institutional contexts. Tailoring intersectional approaches to an organization’s history with EDI can ensure that efforts are both contextually relevant and sustainable. For instance, organizations with a long-standing commitment to gender equality may find it easier to incorporate intersectional strategies, whereas those newer to EDI work may first need to build foundational understanding and capacity. Navigating the varying logics of funding policies and legislative contexts is also vital for seizing intersectional momentum effectively. This requires organizations to be aware of the specific requirements and opportunities presented by national

and supra-national funding bodies, tailoring their approaches to align with these frameworks. Awareness of legislative and funding landscapes can also help organizations identify strategic opportunities to embed intersectionality within their existing structures and practices.

3. *How to correct/revert the lack of applicability to translate the theory of intersectionality into practices, and the lack of data collection and analysis of sensitive and disaggregated data?*

The current lack of intersectional practices in R&I and of the collection and analysis of sensitive and disaggregated data, requires different strategies that can tackle both practical barriers and ideological resistance while fostering a culture of inclusivity and accountability.

A key starting point to guide organizations through the process of implementing intersectionality, is appointing a dedicated “contact point”. This person, preferably an expert in intersectionality or EDI with institutional legitimacy, can provide practical solutions and training to those unfamiliar with EDI strategies. Their expertise can bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that the organization’s policies and practices are meaningful and aligned with the principles of intersectionality.

One recurring barrier is data collection. Data is an essential tool to unveil the inequality and discrimination faced at the organization, and enhances the accountability to set up actions to counter these. However, the misuse of arguments related to data protection and privacy, particularly GDPR regulations, currently hampers the implementation process. While these regulations are essential for safeguarding personal information, they are often used as an excuse to avoid collecting sensitive data. Ruggi and Duvvury (2022) warn against the problematic nature of the data-driven assumption that if such data is not collected, issues like inequality and discrimination cannot be addressed. Therefore, it is crucial to grasp what the arguments are for not collecting data and find alternative ways to do so. One practical tool to promote intersectionality-informed practices is the Diversity Minimal Set, as proposed by Stadler et al. (2023). This questionnaire involves self-declaration, which allows individuals to share information about their identities voluntarily in order to help organizations identify patterns of inequality and discrimination. For such tools to succeed, it is vital to address concerns about privacy and misuse by emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation and that safeguards are in place. To ensure this, organizations must clarify the purpose and scope of data collection transparently. Explaining how data will be used to address structural inequalities and mitigate discrimination can build trust among stakeholders. Developing a post-approach framework, where respondents are invited to provide feedback on the data collection process, further enhances transparency and demonstrates a commitment to ethical practices.

However, inclusion must also be understood as a qualitative experience rather than solely a quantitative metric. Creating spaces for shared learning and dialogue can help individuals feel more connected and valued. Techniques such as the fishbowl approach (Gilliam Jr & Schall, 2008) and bifocal mentoring (De Vries & Van Den Brink, 2016), enable participants to exchange experiences and perspectives in meaningful ways. These approaches, coupled with learning partnerships as advocated by Baxter Magolda (2012), foster an environment where inclusion is felt and practiced rather than merely measured.

4. *How to cultivate/strengthen/develop the involvement of a multiplicity of diverse voices in the policymaking, and how to practically implement the mainstreaming of intersectionality as a shared responsibility in the organization?*

The current attention given to intersectionality in R&I organizations has cultivated an approach that strengthens the involvement of diverse voices in policymaking (Christoffersen, 2024; Ciccio & Roggeband, 2021). Different strategies can be applied to raise awareness to address structural imbalances, broaden the scope of participation, and embed inclusive principles into organizational practices and communication strategies.

A key starting point is to have effective internal and external communication strategies in place that are tailored to the organization's context. These communication strategies should account for the varying levels of familiarity with intersectionality among different stakeholders, ensuring messages are appropriately tailored to resonate with each group. These communication plans should use accessible language ensuring that intersectionality is not perceived as merely an academic concept but as a practical tool for addressing inequities.

Embedding intersectionality within an organization's mission and aligning it to institutional goals, such as social responsibility or sustainability, can enhance its perceived relevance. This approach is particularly effective in the private sector, where tools like Gender Equality Plans may be less impactful. Integrating intersectional principles into sustainability strategies or other mission-aligned objectives can create a compelling case for transformative policies that address intersecting inequalities.

However, one of the key challenges is that developing these policies, plans and strategies still disproportionately falls on minoritized groups. This sustains the paradox that while intersectionality seeks to amplify diverse voices, the emotional labor of addressing these issues often overburdens marginalized voices. To counteract this, organizations can actively distribute responsibility and create mechanisms that not only aim for the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, but reflect on its sources of knowledge production. Reflecting on knowledge production enables the discussion of how knowledge is produced and whose knowledge is validated in that process. This could encourage discussions on the inclusion of diverse forms of knowledge—such as Indigenous knowledge or experience-based knowledge—into the policies and practices. Moreover, this approach acknowledges the value of varied epistemologies and elevates underrepresented perspectives without relying solely on the labor of these groups.

Another way to avoid this burden is by inviting intersectional feminist actors and more radical voices into discussions. This could provide support in debates and reclaim the discourse on intersectionality, by challenging the status quo and push organizations to address structural inequalities more boldly. This inclusion ensures that policymaking does not merely adapt to surface-level diversity but genuinely interrogates and transforms existing power dynamics.

4. KSH3 experts' and CoPs reflections and emerging questions

Experts' reflections

1. *Bruna Cristina Jaquette Pereira*

This report represents a significant step forward in addressing intersectionality within higher education and research institutions, and I compliment the team for their hard work. I particularly appreciate the pragmatic approach to the acknowledged lack of comprehensive intersectional data. As the report points out, it is unacceptable not to act as far as we have imperfect that. The emphasis on avoiding the exploitation of intersectionally discriminated groups is also crucial and demonstrates a commitment to ethical practice.

However, I have two key concerns that I believe could strengthen the strategies proposed.

First, I wonder if there might be opportunities to further amplify these perspectives within the proposed strategies. At some points, the strategy seems to prioritize the comfort of potentially resistant or resentful majorities over that of people facing intersectional discrimination. I understand and agree with the need for strategic communication and engagement with institutional actors and stakeholders, but I also believe that a truly intersectional approach necessitates prioritizing those facing intersectional discrimination. I recommend exploring ways to more explicitly center these voices, ensuring they are not only heard to understand the problems that need to be addressed but that they also actively shape policy changes, resource allocation, and institutional practices. This could involve developing specific mechanisms for safe and respectful engagement, ensuring that these contributions are genuinely valued and not perceived as tokenistic.

Second, I think it would be beneficial to further clarify the report's approach to identifying relevant systems of oppression. While I appreciate the pragmatism and desire for strategic implementation, I believe that explicitly naming the systems of oppression being considered is crucial for ensuring that no one is left behind. Without a clear articulation of which systems are included as a minimum, there's a risk that those considered more "difficult" or complex to address might inadvertently be overlooked or marginalized in the proposed strategies. Even though intersectionality should be adopted considering particularities of each context, some systems of discrimination are recognized to be at play across Europe. Perhaps we could consider explicitly acknowledging and integrating the systems of oppression recognized by the EU since the late 1990s – gender, race/ethnicity, religion/belief, ability/disability age, and sexual orientation/gender expression and identity – as a starting point.

2. *Ashlee Christoffersen*

'Minimalist' approach to intersectionality

One reflection here is that there are a multitude of ways to operationalize intersectionality. Here it is proposed to identify two characteristics of equality policies:

- That they overcome siloed/single-identity policies
- That they tackle power inequalities.

I would note that other features could be proposed here (for example, that policies take a mutually constitutive approach to inequalities, rather than an additive one; that they incorporate multiple levels of analysis (not merely focused upon individual experiences in a deficit way, but also focused upon structural change within organizations); that they incorporate relationality and focus on those most disadvantaged; that they specifically include attention to race and experiences of Black women as an integral and indivisible part of intersectionality (Hancock 2016)). These are just examples, since there a myriad of frameworks available (see also Collins and Bilge 2020). Such frameworks can be employed not (only) deductively to determine whether a policy is or is not intersectional, but also

inductively to assess the implications of policies for intersectionally marginalized groups (e.g. Christoffersen 2021).

I would suggest that one very important feature of an ‘intersectional’ policy is:

- Whether policies aim to reduce intersecting inequalities and improve outcomes for those most intersectionally disadvantaged.

This may be captured in the above criteria (e.g. through attention to power relations), but not necessarily. Ultimately this is the aim of intersectionality’s operationalization and it is important to not lose sight of this.

Whether or not policies aiming at the above actually do so in practice is a related but different question of their impact. I would also argue that not all policies that claim to be intersectional (through self-identification) further intersectional justice (Christoffersen 2021) – even those that purport to overcome silos and tackle power inequalities.

Approach-related problems (additive/multiple approach; main focus on gender which already faces the most resistance; calling out privileges also leads to overt resistances; pushed to minorities)

While I appreciate that gender often faces resistance, I would suggest that it does not necessarily face the ‘most’ resistance (e.g. compared with work on racial justice), and such comparisons might inadvertently reproduce an ‘Oppression Olympics’.

Knowledge exchange

Important measures to further an intersectional approach to inequalities were identified in the discussions, yet these were limited to those that those present had experience and knowledge of. There are a range of other measures that have been shown to have efficacy in reducing inequalities (see for example <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/good-practice-initiatives>). Some additional measures not mentioned here include for example:

- ‘Reverse’ mentoring (where for example, white people in senior positions of power are mentored by Black or racially minoritized colleagues in order to gain a deeper understanding of and commitment to racial justice)
- Positive and affirmative action (where those who have been systematically excluded are prioritized in order to improve equity and create a more level playing field to counteract systemic discrimination)
- Proper recognition of and remuneration for equity service work (for instance by incorporation into workload models and promotion criteria)
- Remuneration of the participation of those most intersectionally disadvantaged in policy development, implementation and evaluation

Resistance to change

I would note that intersectional approaches can also reveal where interests conceptualized as competing are actually mutual, by demonstrating the overlap between different groups.

3. *Barbara de Micheli*

It would be important to underline that intersectional policies are meant to activate processes and namely complex processes: spaces should be created, within the processes, to have so called *difficult conversations* about potentially conflicting needs and to welcome the possibility of mistakes in defining and implementing the processes. If the intersectional approach misses this opportunity it will risk contributing to the polarization of conflicting positions instead of

using existing conflicts to push changes towards a direction that while questioning existing patriarchal structures may benefit different vulnerable groups. Intersectional policies should entail not only a vision of multiple and intersecting discriminations but also the identification of possible common strategies of actions (alliances?) among groups interested, from potentially different perspectives, to transform existing power dynamics.

The difficulties we face in defining intersectionality is a sign of the fact that it is a *living* concept whose declinations *in practice* are moving and expanding while new subjectivities emerge and find their voices, making visible additional forms of discrimination. As it happened to the whole DEI concept, wording and definitions are constantly moving in order to recognize emerging forms of discrimination and to expand the potential impact of the concept itself (from *diversity management* to *diversity and inclusion* to *equity and belonging*). The attention given to definition should be functional to the need to design the perimeter of the actions and of the expected impacts, it could entail a certain level of ambiguity at this stage. More sophisticated and precise definitions will come when a significant corpus of practices would be available in organisations.

4. Irina Lungu

Tackling power inequalities is an important issue in the context of European widening countries where a hierarchic institutional culture could approach a top-down decision-making process that may be ineffective for a significant engagement of the community members during the implementation phase. The need to economic development of these communities/societies at a fast pace, in the early 90's, to overcome the political stigma, cannot ensure the development of social conscience for their individuals, hence the reaction, if the management makes the decision alone, it is the management job to do the work later". A large consultation process to address participatory transformative policies would be necessary, acknowledging the opportunities to change for all range of identities including the underrepresented groups and minorities, based on the lessons learned from the past social and political experiences.

International experiences embedded in the education cycles are effective in broadening social perspectives, fostering inclusive mindsets and overcome the resistance to change, especially in those that feel constant discrimination. Being discriminated, most of the time nurture equal discrimination practice towards others, ignoring your own blind spots consciously or subconsciously.

Designing institutional policies that reduce intersecting discriminations would need a consultancy service outside the institution that have access to the entire community and practice engagement at the largest scale possible. In the next phase, inclusive learning environments supported by specialised training staff in each university would be an ideal situation. The realistic approach would need constant care from the top management to carefully plan for the recruitment of this adequate personnel and later on, periodically look for providing opportunities for its up-skilling in social changes and EDI best practices.

Moreover, focusing more on a continuous education for active citizenship that would embed responsible contribution from each of the community members would foster the learning environment for equity, diversity and inclusion practices.

CoP's reflections

1. *WISE CoP*

General reflections on its content

Re: Setting the stage of the knowledge exchange section

When discussing institutions vs activism, we suggest that it is important to mention the lack of diversity within the power structures in the institutions, in the research team and in the institute-adjacent other professional sectors (e.g. in health institutions, physicians).

We suggest that it is important to not only impart knowledge but to encourage personal reflection on individual situations and privilege.

We have discussed approaches within institutions that are not open to new positioning and agree that the term intersectionality should not be introduced within policy without significant EDI ground work – starting directly with intersectionality could quite easily become unproductive and create misconceptions.

Re: Expert's reflections section

We support Bruna's comment that, whilst the application of intersectionality will of course be context-dependent, it is important to take this opportunity, of a visible wide-reaching working paper, to contribute to conceptual clarity by explicitly naming some intersectional axes of oppression. For our European health institution context this may include, for example: black women with chronic diseases, LGBTQ+ people with caring responsibilities...

We support Irina's comment that a consultancy service outside of the institution may be best positioned to maximize engagement, but that it is essential that the communications are context-dependent to receive any traction e.g. avoiding the use of the term intersectionality in some contexts, rather choosing examples and/or case studies.

To what extent does the content reflect the CoP work

Definitions and use of the term intersectionality

As part of our CoP work, we have been discussing for several months how/if it is possible to reach a consensus approach to considering intersectionality in health research institutions that i) all CoP members are comfortable with and ii) can apply in practice. Many organizations struggle to understand how different dimensions of identity interact with gender inequalities. Several of our members do not want to move too far away from the term's activist roots but generally agree that some form of minimization is necessary to be able to effectively i) map the current statuses of policies and practices in our institutes and ii) impact and communicate changes in our (generally conservative and biological diversity-oriented) working contexts. Without a shared understanding, policies risk being superficial or ineffective. Through these INSPIRE knowledge exchanges we are empowered to raise the challenge of bringing concepts from the social sciences or social movements to the health sciences for a better understanding.

Data collection

"Personalized medicine" is a key current agenda for our institutes and is perhaps a good positioning opportunity to recognize the need for practical steps to consider diversity (and intersectionality?) at a high-level. In some national contexts, the scope of our health research is particularly limited by strict national legislation around "sensitive" clinical data collection from

study participants, leaving little space for consideration of power imbalances, which often must be inferred. The section of the working paper discussing how to counter these limitations with, for example, the use of the Diversity Minimal Items set, the need to transparently emphasize the scope of any data collection exercise, and to follow-up directly, are very helpful practical strategies towards mapping and acting towards intersectionality in our contexts.

In contrast, in other national contexts, the “health” records environment may offer opportunities to move beyond voluntary participation of diversity data which, if properly anonymized, may be used for epidemiological and sociological purposes e.g. the Italian National Plan for Gender Medicine

(<https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/donna/dettaglioPubblicazioniDonna.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=2860>) by the Ministry of Health promoting collection of multiple diversity domains (sex, gender, age, ethnicity, education, religion, sexual orientation, social and economic conditions). However, currently there is no shared practice to acquire information about sex and gender in health records in EU countries, meaning that national Health policy makers and EU bodies need to be more actively engaged to make this a useful exercise.

Monitoring implementation

As there are no quality assessments for iGEPs, particularly in evaluating intersectionality, organizations lack accountability. Establishing clear evaluation criteria (linked to funding!) would encourage greater compliance and ensure that intersectionality is integrated into gender equality strategies rather than being treated as an afterthought.

Anything missing

See above reflections - some key examples of intersectionality would be welcome, along with an acknowledgement that application measures will vary by sector.

2. *Open EU CoP*

General reflections on its content

Definitions and use of the term intersectionality

Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, acknowledges that individuals experience overlapping systems of oppression and privilege based on race, gender, class, disability, and other social identities. Integration of intersectionality into practice foresees overcoming structural barriers, promoting inclusivity, and institutionalize equity-driven frameworks.

Implementation practices

The practical steps for implementing intersectional policies in higher education institutions, can be adapted to various country contexts. Key actions include raising awareness of structural imbalances, broadening the participation of disadvantaged and marginalized groups, embedding inclusive principles into organizational practices and communication strategies, and inviting experts and role models from institutions with advanced inclusivity practices to the discussion table. These actions can help push organizations to address structural inequalities while at the same time, creating spaces for shared learning and dialogue, fostering a sense of connection and value for individuals.

For institutions with underdeveloped inclusive policies, the initial step should be a comprehensive evaluation of existing policies and practices to identify areas where intersectional disparities may persist. This assessment should critically analyze institutional

policies for inclusivity, examine the lived experiences of diverse marginalized groups within the academic environment, and conduct a systematic review of institutional climate to pinpoint areas requiring improvement. Following this analysis, policies should be revised to ensure they effectively address the needs of all community members.

Consultation practices

To facilitate this process, institutions should implement consultative mechanisms such as forums, workshops, and focus groups to gather input and promote discourse on intersectional issues. Engaging external experts can provide broader perspectives on inclusion, ensuring that policy modifications are informed by interdisciplinary insights. Additionally, a targeted exploration of challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities should guide institutional policy and practice revisions, ensuring that structural barriers are addressed and mitigated effectively.

Commitment to integrative and transformative change

Intersectionality in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) can be implemented by including intersectionality in the curriculum such as the courses, where these academic discussions can take place. HEI's can consider implementing guidelines and equitable policies that investigate at how numerous forms of discrimination such as sexism and racism can affect students and staff physically and emotionally and from then on make conclusions and decide which areas need to be improved. Developing integrative and transformative change in HEI's requires a systemic, inclusive, and forward-thinking approach. It requires bold vision of the management and sustained institutional commitment. Advancing integrative and transformative change in regional universities requires even more: a strategic, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach. Regional universities often serve diverse communities, act as economic and social anchors, and face unique challenges such as resource constraints, demographic shifts, and evolving workforce needs. To foster meaningful change, universities must integrate interdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, equity-driven policies, and innovative governance models. Integrative and transformative change in regional universities is not a one-size-fits-all process. It requires deep engagement with local communities, a commitment to equity, and a forward-thinking approach to governance, education, and research.

Communication strategies

Applying an intersectional approach to communication strategies means actively recognizing and addressing how various social identities (such as gender, race, class, disability, and more) intersect to shape individuals; experiences, perspectives, and access to information. By integrating intersectionality into communication, organizations and individuals can foster inclusivity, enhance engagement, and ensure that diverse voices are acknowledged and empowered. Applying intersectionality to communication is not just about avoiding exclusion—it is about actively fostering equity, amplifying marginalized voices, and ensuring that research, policy, and institutional discourse reflect the realities of diverse communities. This requires intentionality, self-awareness, and an ongoing commitment to learning and adaptation. In the era of rapid technological advancement, modern communication strategies and digitalization work together providing new opportunities for efficiency, engagement, and inclusivity. HEI's and organizations use these tools to enhance collaboration, outreach, and decision-making. Modern communication strategies and digitalization unlock unprecedented opportunities. Using all these should be an integral part of communication strategies nowadays.

3. *Intersectionality for Change CoP*

To what extent does the content reflect the CoP work

We, being our partners and collaborators on this project, all face very similar challenges challenging the status quo in our organisations, though some of us are further along on our gender equality journeys than others. This is related to the wide breadth of jurisdictions represented and some countries have different requirements than others. For example, in Ireland, every HE has to have a dedicated EDI Unit, which might not be the case elsewhere. I understand LOSU is also bringing in significant changes for Spain.

In terms of expertise, Bruna was a wonderful speaker at our meeting at Duesto; it was one of the best presentations we've ever heard on intersectionality. The communication was clear and straightforward.

In terms of this project, it should be highlighted that CoP work is relying on unpaid time of (mostly) women academics, researchers and practitioners to achieve research goals. It would be more sustainable, inclusive and impactful for gender balance to be part of the project design vis-à-vis the contributors (experts, facilitators, COP members) and engaged audiences.

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