



Grant Agreement number: **872113**

Project acronym: **CASPER**

Project title: **Certification-Award Systems to Promote Gender Equality in Research**

Type of action: **Research and Innovation Action**



D6.2

Policy recommendations on the certification/award system

Deliverable leader:	Knowledge & Innovation
Lead Authors:	Marina Cacace, Federico Marta, Francesca Pugliese, Gabriele Quinti (K&I)
Contributors:	Alain Denis, Vasia Madesi, Aart Kerremans, Igor Zivkovic (YW)
Reviewer:	Marcela Linkova (ISAS)
Contractual delivery date:	31 March 2022
Delivery date:	29 March 2022
Dissemination level:	Public

Disclaimer

The sole responsibility for the content of this publication lies with the authors. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

Copyright



The work contained in this document is subjected to a Creative Commons license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).

Document Revision History

Version	Date	Author/Editor/Contributor/Reviewer	Summary of changes
0.1	1/3/2022	K&I, with the contribution of YW and all partners	First draft for internal review
0.2	11/3/2022	K&I	Second draft to be discussed at the CASPER final event
0.3	28/3/2022	K&I	Final version
0.4	29/03/2022	ESF	Final approval by project coordinator



Table of contents

Document Revision History	2
Executive summary	4
List of acronyms/abbreviations used in this document	5
INTRODUCTION.....	7
Certification schemes in the new European policy framework for GE	7
The role of a Europe-wide certification scheme	8
Four scenarios for a certification scheme for gender equality	9
Policy recommendations to optimise the potential of scenarios	10
SHEET #1 Cross-cutting recommendations	12
1. The main challenges of a Europe-wide GECAS.....	12
2. Cross-cutting policy measures	13
SHEET #2 Recommendations for the New Europe-wide scenario.....	16
1. The main features of the new Europe-wide scenario.....	16
2. Recommendations.....	17
SHEET #3 Recommendations for the Gender Equality Strategy for Researchers/GES4R.....	19
1. The main features of the GES4R.....	19
2. Recommendations.....	20
SHEET #4 Recommendations for the European Athena SWAN	23
1. The main features of the European Athena SWAN scenario.....	23
2. Recommendations.....	24
SHEET #5 Recommendations for No direct-action scenario	27
1. The main features of the No direct-action scenario	27
2. Recommendations.....	27
List of Recommendations	30
References	31



Executive summary

Certification schemes and awards are frequently used tools to promote gender equality in a variety of domains. Under the CASPER project, three different scenarios have been set up through broad participatory processes for a Europe-wide GECAS (Gender Equality Certification/Award Scheme) specifically addressing research organisations and higher education institutions. The three scenarios are: 1) A brand-new Europe-wide scheme (EUQUAL); 2) The integration of the HRS4R (Human Resources Strategy for Researchers) award with a twin certification devoted to gender that would be called the GES4R (Gender Equality Strategy for Researchers) award; 3) The Europeanisation of the Athena SWAN scheme. In addition, a “No direct-action” scenario was also devised, where no Europe-wide scheme would be in place, but the European Commission would be incentivising and supporting the establishment of GECAS at the level of the Member States. The four scenarios have undergone a validation process entailing the consultation of relevant stakeholders through online questionnaires and connected interviews, as well as through a series of walkthrough tests at relevant European institutions.

The results of the validation activities, processed to highlight strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each scenario, have been discussed in two workshops within the CASPER consortium, including International Advisory Board members. The objective was to identify those policy measures that could realistically optimise the advantages and minimise the shortcomings of each scenario while maintaining their distinctive identity as alternative, credible policy options, each one presenting a specific trade-off profile. The connection with the Horizon Europe GEP requirement is also incorporated in many recommendations, aiming at harmonising the two policy tools (certification scheme and HE requirement).

The recommendations deriving from this process are presented in this document.



List of acronyms/abbreviations used in this document

ACT	European Project ACTonGender
Advance HE	(Athena SWAN) Advance Higher Education
CASPER	Certification-Award Systems to Promote Gender Equality in Research
CC	Cross-cutting (policy measures)
D	Deliverable
EC	European Commission
ERA	European Research Area
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-based violence
GE	Gender Equality
GECAS	Gender Equality Certification or Award Scheme
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
GES4R	Gender Equality Strategy for Researchers
JUNO	Project JUNO award scheme
HE	Horizon Europe
HR	Human Resources
HRS4R	Human Resources Strategy for Researchers
R&I	Research and innovation
RFO(s)	Research Funding Organisation(s)
RPO(s)	Research Performing Organisation(s)
Sc	Scenario
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
UNISAFE	European project UNISAFE
UK	United Kingdom





Policy recommendations for certification/award system

INTRODUCTION

Certification schemes in the new European policy framework for GE

The European Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Innovation that have succeeded one another over the last decades have shown a **steady progression** towards broader notions of gender equality in science. Over the years, the dimension of gender in teaching and research content has been more consistently included, while gender-based violence has been increasingly in focus alongside gender balance in decision-making and research teams. Policies and support instruments have evolved accordingly¹.

Despite overall improvement, however, **the pace of progress** in achieving gender equality targets has been slow (EC, 2021; She Figures, 2018), leading the Commission to strengthen the focus on Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) as a tool for effective institutional transformation within R&I institutions.

The **transition** between Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe (HE), where gender equality is established as a cross-cutting priority, is particularly significant in this regard. It proceeded in parallel with the process that has led to the definition of the new ERA/European Research Area, which includes gender equality among its founding principles and areas of action (Area 5: Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness, taking note of the Ljubljana declaration) (Council of the European Union, 2021/a), as well as the new Pact for Research and Innovation (Council of the European Union, 2021/b). The Ljubljana Declaration (2021), promoted under the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and addressing “Gender Equality in Research and Innovation” is also to be included in this picture, as it builds on these recent policy developments, particularly stressing the key role of Gender Equality Plans.

Within Horizon Europe, the main and most significant innovation is undoubtedly the introduction of the **requirement of having a Gender Equality Plan** in place to be eligible for funding under the programme (requirement that applies, for now, to public bodies, research organisations and higher education institutions from EU Member States and Associated Countries)². Moreover, the integration of a gender dimension into research and innovation content is now to be evaluated under the excellence criterion, and gender balance among the personnel listed in a proposal is used as a ranking criterion to evaluate ex-aequo proposals.

Two more general shifts can be identified in the new policy framework, which further qualify the GEP requirement and are reflected in all the policy documents mentioned.

The first is the consideration of a broader set of inequality factors through the notion of **inclusiveness**. On the one hand, this is meant to better tackle the many inequality grounds intersecting gender (such as ethnicity, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, dis/ability, migrant status, etc.), while on the other, it addresses the geographical and sectorial levels to ensure that all countries are on board and that the innovation and private sectors are also involved.

The second shift is the emphasis on **monitoring and evaluation** practices, at institutional level, national and European level (EC, 2021; Ljubljana Declaration, 2021), alongside the hitherto dominant emphasis on implementation, also stressing the need for improving the system of indicators used (GENDERACTION, 2021).

¹ From the many waves of GEP projects funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme and Horizon 2020, to the large projects aimed at making the most of the gained experience and widely disseminating the gained knowledge and tools (such as, for instance, ACT, the Gender Equality Academy, UNISAFE).

² See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en (Last access: 28/2/2022)

The role of a Europe-wide certification scheme

In this evolving policy framework, the relevance of a Europe-wide certification/award scheme for gender equality becomes particularly significant. Four aspects can be stressed, connected to several of the points raised above.

- The first is the possible **connection of a GECAS with the GEP requirement** established under Horizon Europe. Particularly for beginner institutions, a certification scheme – with its structured approach, support tools and community – would represent an invaluable asset, also contributing to inclusiveness (for instance by supporting less experienced institutions and geographical areas to meet the GEP requirement).
- The second is that a certification scheme would necessarily entail the **development of substantial monitoring and evaluation practices**, which is strongly called for and which would focus the attention on **compliance check mechanisms and tools** to prevent the risk that the GEP requirement can be reduced to a simple tick-the-box exercise. The Europe-wide GECAS can therefore be considered a powerful tool to support and harmonise the data collection and evaluation processes and practices on gender equality and inclusiveness in the ERA, contributing substantially to efforts like that of She Figures.
- The third is **the creation of a more level playing field**, in a rather diverse European landscape. Gender equality schemes and other relevant certification/awards schemes already exist in some European countries, other countries are considering their introduction, while others have strict national regulations in place, essentially playing the same role. Having a Europe-wide certification scheme accessible to all would contribute towards a Europe-wide harmonisation process.
- Finally, a certification scheme – which would constantly support a structured and reflexive system of implementation practices and their monitoring – would represent an excellent basis for the identification of innovative approaches and emerging needs and for **keeping the GE policy in R&I evolving**. The practice of **intersectionality and inclusiveness**, now at centre stage, is the first and foremost challenge in this respect.

The Ljubljana declaration establishes an explicit link between the new GEP requirement, the support institutions will need to receive in order to meet it, and the option of establishing a certification scheme.

As the Gender Equality Plans approach is embedded in the new European Research Area, support and resources for their development and implementation are needed at all levels. This is particularly crucial in countries where the institutions are currently without a Gender Equality Plans requirement, to ensure those institutions are ready for the new Horizon Europe eligibility criterion.

We recommend the Plans are tied to the policy coordination mechanism to be established for the Pact on R&I as well as to a dedicated EU network on their implementation, supported by the Commission, Member States and other countries. Such an endeavour, for example, could be linked to a European certification scheme for gender equality to ensure commensurability by building a common framework that recognises national differences.

Based on these considerations, strengthening the legal basis for a Europe-wide certification scheme for European research institutions by including it in the new ERA policy agenda would represent a credible solution, yielding manifold benefits on different levels.

Four scenarios for a certification scheme for gender equality

The [CASPER project](#) was launched in early 2020 with the aim of examining the feasibility of establishing a European award/certification system for gender equality for Research Performing Organisations (GECAS).

From the outset, it was clear to all those involved that designing a certification scheme that could accommodate all types of research organisations in all European countries would be a challenge bordering on the impossible. To address the challenge and identify a credible set of viable solutions, a participatory and co-creative approach to scenario-building was selected.

A **broad mobilisation** of the different types of stakeholders that would be affected by a European certification scheme was therefore pursued (RPO and RFO representatives, national experts and policy-makers, as well as managers of existing certification schemes). To this aim, several consultation cycles and co-creation activities have been promoted, as well as validation and walkthrough tests in European research organisations. In particular:

- 74 persons were consulted in the analysis of needs and expectations for a Europe-wide certification scheme (33 owners of certification schemes, 17 policy makers and experts, 24 RPO representatives/potential users)
- 88 persons were involved in co-creation activities (6 owners of certification schemes, 30 policy makers and experts, 47 RPO representatives/potential users and 5 RFO representatives)
- 91 persons were consulted in validation interviews (18 policy makers and experts, 60 RPO representatives/potential users and 13 RFO representatives)
- 57 persons were involved at 10 RPOs institutions in validation walkthrough exercises.

This made it possible to single out the elements that would play a major role in guiding the decision of research organisations whether or not to join a Europe-wide GECAS, and led to the design of four alternative scenarios.

The four scenarios represent policy options. They were devised after a first consultation process with stakeholders, aimed at collecting their needs, expectations and ideas. They were further developed through co-creation activities, validated again with stakeholders and finalised in their current version at the end the CASPER project ³.

1. The first policy option is starting a GECAS from scratch, leveraging the attractiveness of novelty and high ambitions. The corresponding scenario is the creation of a new Europe-wide scheme that could be called **EUQUAL**. This scenario includes many features which were identified as highly desirable and impactful in co-creation sessions but it requires more resources (financial and human) to be implemented.
2. The second policy option is building on an existing European award scheme, the HRS4R/Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, managed by the European Commission. The corresponding scenario is a parallel and complementing GECAS that would be created, the **GES4R/Gender Equality Strategy for Researchers**, to specifically cover the gender equality and intersectional aspects not included in the HRS4R.
3. The third policy option is building on an existing national scheme (Athena SWAN), that has already started an internationalisation process, with various countries adopting it, including one EU Member State (Ireland), while other Member States are envisaging to do the same (e.g., Denmark, the Netherlands). The corresponding scenario is the **Europeanisation of Athena SWAN**.

³ More information about the specific features of each scenario is included in the dedicated policy recommendation sheets, in the next sections. The full description of scenarios is included in the CASPER project deliverable D6.1.

4. In the fourth policy option, no Europe-wide scheme would be developed. However, the **No direct-action** scenario would not be a scenario without any action at all, because the recommendation to the EC would be to still stimulate and support both the creation of new national schemes and the enhancements of coherence and use of common standards between and by national and international schemes. Moreover, a system of correspondences with relevant national/international schemes would also need to be set.

All scenarios were designed using the following items, describing their basic choices in terms of scheme architecture.

FEATURES	EXAMPLES (from different schemes)
Principles	The foundational principles and approaches of each scenario, like, e.g., Holistic approach, Participatory approach, Gender mainstreaming
Content of the certification	What is certified: GEPs (Building blocks and Recommended policy areas), Processes, Outcomes, Policies (with their different combinations), Gender+/Intersectional approach
Procedures	Main functioning of the schemes
➤ Evaluation process	By whom evaluation is accomplished: Self-assessment, Peer review, External assessment (and different combinations)
➤ Validity and renewal	Duration of the certification: variable from two, three to four years; Possibility to renew at the same level or not
➤ Role of national authorities	Including the integration into national policy frameworks, the organisation of support tools and occasions for applicants, etc.
Certified institutions	Who can be certified: only RPOs or also RFOs and /or the private sector
Certifying authorities	Either directly the European Commission, or a separate legal entity
Synergies with existing schemes	Equivalence systems in place with existing certification schemes
Support for applicants	These may include, e.g., formative evaluation approaches, support tools (e.g., self-assessment tools), online webinars, etc.
Incentives for applicants	These may include, e.g., link to funding, public events and ceremonies, networking occasions, etc.

Policy recommendations to optimise the potential of scenarios

Overall project results make the interests of the different actors involved quite clear when it comes to selecting the most suitable scenario for their organisation or country. Indeed, results highlight and detail how **each scenario presents specific trade-offs** for the different target organisations, as also detailed in the SWOT tables that have been derived from validation results for each scenario⁴.

Still in a trade-off perspective, results also show that each scenario is better equipped to meet some of the general objectives of a certification system than others, for instance, supporting innovation and progress vs. promoting harmonisation, or providing centralised support to applicants vs. fostering the autonomy of national systems.

⁴ For more information about project results, please check D6.1 – Validated version of the four scenarios, also including the SWOT tables.

It is on this basis that these policy recommendations have been drafted⁵. Considering different trade-off balances is useful, not only to explicitly disclose the criteria leading to the choice of one scenario over the others, but also to identify the most appropriate support and accompanying measures to deploy, which will be oriented towards optimising the strengths and mitigating the weaknesses of each scenario.

Finally, awareness of the trade-offs can guide the evolution of the selected scenario over time, based on a more comprehensive and realistic assessment of strong and weak points, based on the implementation process, and aiming at rebalancing them.

The recommendations specifically address the European Commission (in cooperation with Member States in the framework of the ERA policy agenda - Action 5) as the policy actor in charge of deciding about the implementation of a certification/award system, and choosing the best scenario to this aim. Some of the included recommendations, however, indirectly address Member States and associated countries.

Recommendations are presented in different sheets:

1. Cross-cutting recommendations to support the implementation of a certification/award scheme in general, whatever the selected scenario
2. Recommendations for the EUQUAL scenario
3. Recommendations for the GES4R as a sister scheme to the HRS4R
4. Recommendations for the European Athena SWAN scheme
5. Recommendations for the No direct-action scenario.

⁵ The results of co-creation and validation activities have been discussed in a workshop with all project partners and members of the International Advisory Board of the project. We wish to thank Eileen Drew, Chris Grieve, Izaskun Lacunza, Gary Loke, Evanthia Kalpazidou Schmidt for their valuable contribution.

SHEET #1

Cross-cutting recommendations

1. The main challenges of a Europe-wide GECAS

All scenarios – whatever their specific setup – are confronted with multiple challenges, which are connected to certification processes in general and to the certification of research organisations from the perspective of gender equality and inclusiveness in particular.

All scenarios try to address these challenges, but a broader, favourable policy environment is needed for them to succeed. Cross-cutting recommendations are intended to provide for this favourable environment, independently of the selected scenario.

The general challenges can be grouped into four categories.

Motivation concerns the interest of the target organisations in getting involved with a certification scheme for GE. Several recurring obstacles to motivation were documented and detailed in the validation process of the four scenarios: work overload, personnel and financial costs, cultural, organisational, and political resistance, lack of expertise, particularly on more technical or newer areas such as gender+ /intersectional data collection and policy⁶.

Harmonisation is one of the main objectives of a certification process in general. Ideally, it should promote an alignment of European organisations at the highest possible level, avoiding convergence on an unambitious lowest common denominator. Harmonisation can be difficult to achieve when starting levels are uneven in terms of available resources and expertise, already existing measures (or certification schemes) in place, as well as when there are unsupportive national attitudes and regulations, or even open opposition from national governments.

Innovation is a difficult challenge for certification schemes, which structurally need stability while they also need to keep up with developments and innovations in their field. This is particularly true for the rapidly evolving field of gender equality in R&I, considering for instance that effective approaches to translate gender+ /intersectional theories into practice are not consolidated yet and further evolution can be foreseen, to the aim of activating structural change processes through inclusive gender equality plans.

Autonomy dilemmas come up because, even if support is needed and requested, applicants and institutional leaders may raise concerns about external parties – involved in certification process – meddling in internal affairs of institutions. The same concerns may come from national authorities for the possible interference of the European Commission in national research systems.

⁶ The “gender+” understanding of intersectionality is aimed at recognising that other axes of inequality always intersect gender (in its broadest sense), which is however maintained as the primary entry-point. See, for instance, Lombardo, E., Meier, P., & Verloo, M. (2017). Policymaking from a gender+ equality perspective. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 38(1), 1-19.

2. Cross-cutting policy measures

Six cross-cutting policy tools are mentioned below that would be instrumental to address the challenges mentioned above and support a successful roll-out of a Europe-wide GECAS.

CC #1 – Integrate the certification system and the Horizon Europe GEP requirement

Rationale The new GEP requirement established under the EC Horizon Europe funding programme plays an ambivalent role in encouraging European research organisations to participate in a GECAS. Based on CASPER consultations, it appears that some institutions would take the occasion of the scheme to access resources and support to fully comply with the GEP requirement, while others might limit their ambition and effort, as concerns gender equality, to meet the requirement at a basic level and just secure their eligibility for funding.

Recommendation In order to support and encourage institutions to follow a progressive path even beyond the fulfilment of the Horizon Europe GEP requirement, the two policy tools (GECAS and GEP requirement) should be fully integrated, as is also suggested in the Ljubljana declaration. Institutions with an entry-level certification of the Europe-wide GECAS (Scenarios 1, 2 or 3) should be considered automatically compliant with the GEP requirement, which would also result in exemption from the associated audits. This would also contribute towards developing contextualised GEPs which would be more likely to create sustainable and meaningful change.

Challenges ❖ Motivation ❖ Harmonisation

CC #2 – Set up an encompassing system of correspondences across certification schemes

Rationale Another consistent result of the consultation process within CASPER is that institutions with a certification scheme already in place and countries with demanding regulations on gender issues (some entailing the obligation to implement a GEP) fear that a European-wide scheme would lead them to a duplication of efforts, while also lowering advanced national standards. This would be one of the main factors that would prevent institutions from participating.

Recommendation An encompassing system of correspondences between the Europe-wide GECAS (Scenarios 1, 2 or 3) and existing national and international certification schemes should be established, which would allow acknowledging what more advanced institutions are already doing while encouraging them to join the scheme, contributing to it and to harmonisation efforts, but without being overburdened. Compliance with advanced national regulations could also be considered in assessing correspondences.

Challenges ❖ Motivation ❖ Harmonisation



CC #3 – Build a supportive ecosystem for applicants (capacity building, mutual learning, networking)

Rationale With limited exceptions (in more experienced countries or institutions), the demand (and even the expectation) was massively voiced in CASPER consultations that a Europe-wide certification system must be accompanied by support provided to applicants that would go beyond technical assistance with the application process. Those from countries where gender equality issues are controversial, also expressed the need that support be provided at the European level, considering it unlikely that governments that do not promote gender equality might provide any real support. Gender+/-intersectional aspects should be particularly in focus, considering the widespread request for support on how to translate these approaches into practice.

Recommendation Besides technical assistance from national authorities on the application process (already foreseen under each CASPER scenario), and besides tools and resources already available at the European level (ACT and Gender Academy resources, the new Centre of Excellence established under Horizon Europe, etc.), a support system should be promoted by the EC that would be dedicated to GECAS applicants. It could become an incentive to apply and would foster mutual learning through dedicated networks and communities of practice of certified and applicant institutions.

Challenges ❖ Motivation ❖ Harmonisation ❖ Autonomy

CC #4 – Support the adoption of (self-)assessment tools for monitoring GEP progress

Rationale To support any GECAS, research institutions need to internally monitor their progress towards gender mainstreaming. The assessment tool for gender mainstreaming developed under the project (Impact Driver model/link) is based on extensive experience in the implementation of GEPs and was adapted to serve the purposes of institutions applying to a certification system. The tool is integrated into Scenario 1 but – in its self-assessment version – it can be applied to all scenarios (including the No direct-action scenario) since it allows institutions to develop and monitor a flexible and personalised progression path towards gender equality mainstreaming.

Recommendation The adoption of the Impact Driver model should be encouraged and supported by training (through the support system under CC #3). Introducing the model as a tool supporting GEP implementation in view of the Horizon Europe GEP requirement (even outside the certification context) could further trigger RPOs/RFOs that have adopted it to consider undergoing the application process itself. It would moreover contribute to harmonising compliance check tools and processes.

Challenges ❖ Motivation ❖ Harmonisation ❖ Autonomy



CC #5 – Set periodic reviews of evaluation dimensions and indicators

Rationale Some of the stakeholders involved in CASPER's consultations expressed scepticism towards some existing GECAS because of their assumed tendency to be static, which often makes it difficult for them to innovate and incorporate new developments in the field of gender equality.

Recommendation The European Commission should conduct periodic reviews of the Europe-wide GECAS (Scenarios 1, 2 or 3), to revamp both indicator systems and evaluation procedures.

Challenges ❖ Innovation ❖ Motivation

CC #6 – Promote wide-ranging awareness-raising and communication campaigns

Rationale The communication campaign about gender equality in R&I and the Europe-wide GECAS (whatever the scenario selected), should link to the Horizon Europe framework, presenting participation in the scheme as a way for European research and higher education institutions to get support towards meaningfully addressing the new GEP requirement and advance GE.

Recommendation Awareness-raising and communication campaigns should be designed and implemented about the new certification scheme the European Commission is about to launch, highlighting synergies with the new Horizon Europe GEP requirement (CC #1; CC #2), as well as the many dedicated benefits it would imply for applicants in terms of support, networking, capacity building activities (CC #3), innovative tools and procedures (CC #4) and ability to keep up with the evolving gender equality field (CC #5).

Challenges ❖ Motivation

SHEET #2

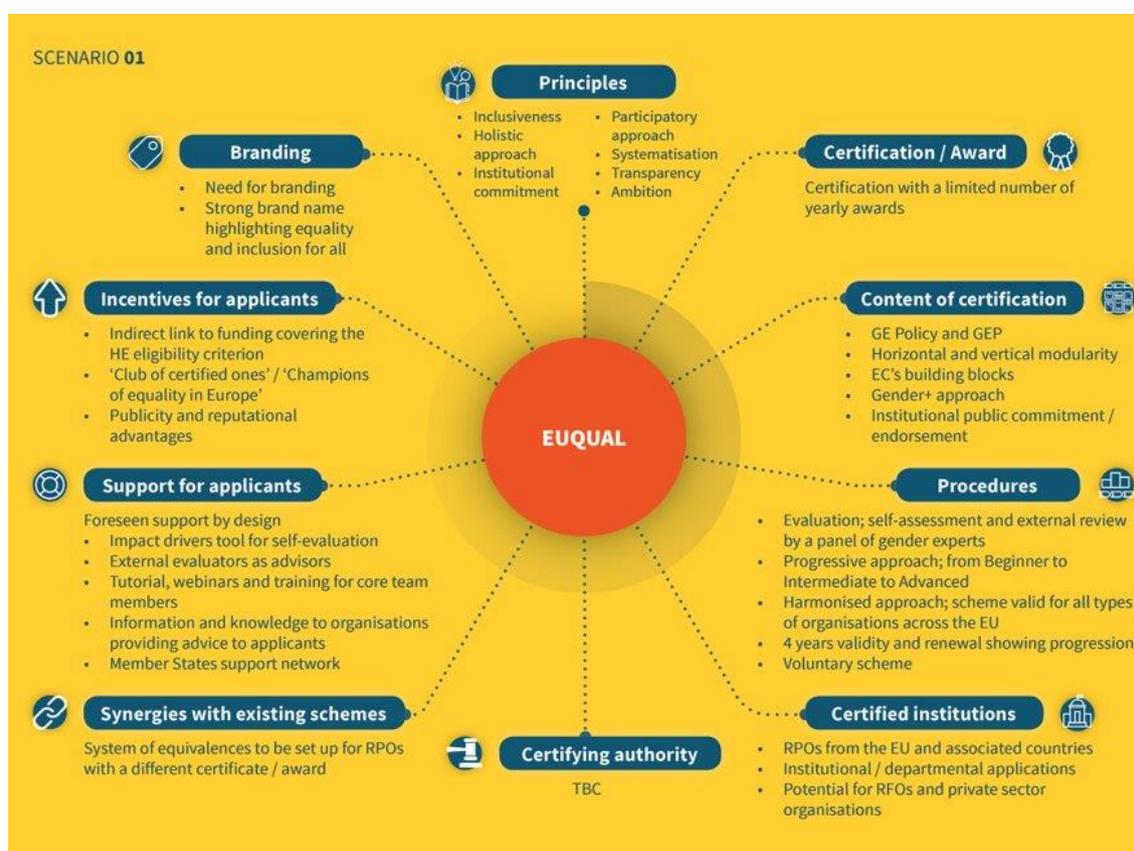
Recommendations for the EUQUAL scenario

1. The main features of the new Europe-wide scenario

This would be a scenario starting from scratch, that is, not based on an existing scheme. Among its features (see Figure below), the most salient can be highlighted, like its focus on both process and outcome in GEP implementation assessment, its combination of low-threshold and progressive approach, creating an incentive to continuously improve in order to maintain and improve the certification level, the strong emphasis on participatory processes around GEP design and implementation, as well as the possibility to apply at the level of the whole organisation and/or at Department/Faculty level. Support in the application process would be provided by national authorities.

A set of features are unique to this concept scenario:

- A credit system is used to assess the level of achievement, allowing to differentiate the level of the certificate
- The assessment process combines self-assessment and external review from a committee of trained evaluators, experts in the field
- Besides certificates, a limited number of awards related to specific achievements are issued each year
- The Impact Driver model for self-evaluation is integrated
- Mechanisms are foreseen for recognising certifications issued by other schemes.



Trade-off considerations

The EUQUAL concept scenario foresees the introduction of a brand-new Europe-wide GECAS with a very ambitious setup, which is expected to yield significant progress towards gender equality. On the other hand, this makes it less accessible for less experienced institutions or institutions that are less able to mobilise financial and human resources and adequate competences.

Resistances and backlash from some internal stakeholders may be expected because the wide set of requirements makes it difficult to just “tick a few boxes”. The most committed stakeholders, on the contrary, may feel even more motivated and empowered by the possibility to apply for a certification scheme that would credibly speed up change.

These considerations are clearly visible in the validation results. EUQUAL was the first overall choice for stakeholders from all European regions except the Central-East and UK/Ireland. From the perspective of its technical feasibility, however, it ranked second, after the GES4R for all regions.

2. Recommendations

Four recommendations can be formulated to optimise the implementation process and impact of this scenario. Some are broadly connected to cross-cutting recommendations, pointing to the same (or broadly similar) areas of action.

Considering the trade-offs highlighted for this scenario, recommendations mostly aim at reinforcing accessibility and support, while emphasising the low-entry threshold, to balance its ambitious setup and not discourage potential applicants.

Sc1 #1 – Apply the credit system to research institutions adopting other schemes

Rationale Institutions that have been certified under other schemes should be recognised for their progression towards GE while they are joining the scheme. The progressive approach through credits needs to be used as a tool to facilitate and operationalise the correspondence system.

Recommendation The system of correspondences, as recommended in CC #2, should be adapted based on the specific features of this scenario, to enable recognition at the low-threshold entry-level as well as at higher levels, considering the continuous progression mechanism envisaged, which awards credits for achievements in both horizontal (content-related) and vertical (progress-related) dimensions.

Sc1 #2 – Support the Network of certified institutions

Rationale As part of its support system, the scenario envisages the creation of “Clubs of certified institutions” to favour the exchange of good practices. Members of these networks would be encouraged to offer advice and mentoring to prospective applicants, and this would be incentivised through the granting of credits. This feature is meant to counteract the concern that emerged in the validation process, that such an ambitious scenario would leave less experienced institutions behind.

Recommendation The networks, or clubs, of certified institutions, should be supported through direct funding, both as communities of practice and as mentoring practices, particularly dedicated to less resourceful institutions.

Sc1 #3 – Emphasise in communication the low-entry threshold and flexible credit system of the scheme

Rationale Validation results highlighted how the New EU-wide scenario was assessed by the consulted stakeholders as the most promising in terms of delivering substantial results and progress towards more inclusive research and higher education institutions. The negative aspect of this perception is the connected belief that being certified under this scenario would be extremely demanding and virtually impossible for less advanced institutions.

Recommendation The messages to be used in communication should highlight the low-entry threshold of the scheme, coinciding with the satisfaction of the GEP requirement. It should be also highlighted how this scheme is able to acknowledge even smaller achievements through its progressive and fine-grained credit system, allowing institutions to design a flexible and tailored progression path.

Sc1 #4 – Support academic and research staff to take on a key role in certification

Rationale The New EU-wide scenario puts a strong emphasis on an inclusive approach aimed at addressing the needs and embracing the perspectives of all the stakeholders (scholars, staff and students – including temporary ones) at different levels. Participatory approaches are deployed to this aim, to avoid the GE work being confined to HR, administrative or research support departments.

Recommendation To safeguard academics and research staff's motivation in achieving and managing a GECAS at their institutions, fuller acknowledgement of GE/inclusiveness work should be pursued and incentivised. This could be reinforced by making the link with the GEP requirement explicit – particularly as concerns the building block on dedicated resources – by stressing the need that the work of the academic staff is recognised for CV assessment and career progression.

SHEET #3

Recommendations for the Gender Equality Strategy for Researchers/GES4R

1. The main features of the GES4R

This GES4R scenario builds on an already well-known European scheme (the HRS4R) and integrates it with a separate but connected GECAS devoted to gender equality. It would still be possible to apply to HRS4R without also applying for the GES4R, as this would represent a complementary scheme.

This scenario shares some basic features (see Figure below) of the HRS4R scheme, even though, differently from it, it would adopt an intersectional perspective. It shares with Scenario 3 (The Europeanisation of Athena SWAN) the choice of an assessment process combining self-assessment and peer review, but most other features are exclusive to this scenario:

- It foresees a simple pass/fail assessment instead of different levels of achievement
- It is only applicable at the level of the whole institution
- It focuses on process and policy (not outcome) of GEP implementation
- Support would be provided, as in the HRS4R, by national authorities through the Euraxess network, envisaging that Euraxess members are linked to gender experts in each country.



Trade-off considerations

The rationale behind this scenario is its very practical nature, which acknowledges that many institutions throughout Europe are currently engaged with the HRS4R. It would be an accessible choice for less experienced institutions and countries, and could also help to keep resistance and backlash at a manageable level.

On the other hand, the link with the HRS4R setup, while potentially increasing feasibility, may also limit the scope of change, and special efforts would be needed to avoid “tick the box” exercises.

According to validation results, the GES4R was ranked first for feasibility and second for overall attractiveness and the possibility to bring about change. These results are, however, quite polarised across regions, showing clear divides. It was the first choice for respondents in Central-East European countries, while also showing a good reception in Mediterranean countries. It was markedly less attractive for respondents in Central-West and Northern Europe, where the connected HRS4R Award is considered a less attractive brand.

2. Recommendations

Five recommendations can be formulated to optimise the implementation process and impact of this scenario. Some are broadly connected to cross-cutting recommendations, pointing to the same (or broadly similar) areas of action.

Based on these considerations, recommendations mostly focus on strengthening the scenario making it more progressive, at least in perspective, and facilitating the acknowledgement of other certificates, to attract more advanced institutions.

Sc2 #1 – Emphasise in communication the accessibility and familiarity of the scheme

Rationale Based on the consultations conducted in the framework of CASPER, the GES4R scheme was assessed as the most technically feasible, because of the familiarity of many institutions with the sister scheme HRS4R and for its relative simplicity (no outcome valuation, simple pass/fail assessment, concentration of efforts in HR departments, etc.). Also, the achievements of the connected HRS4R scheme should be highlighted as evidence of the effectiveness of this certification approach, such as for instance the promotion of the international mobility of researchers.

Recommendation The messages to be used in communication should highlight the accessibility of the GES4R, and the fact that it is connected to a very well-known and already tested sister scheme, and is particularly inclusive and suitable for beginner institutions. In case Sc2 #2 and Sc2 #3 (below) are taken on board, communication strategies about the scheme could be developed accordingly.

Sc2 #2 – Progressively integrate more advanced features

Rationale Familiarity and easy access also have a downside, and the GES4R was assessed in CASPER consultations as less impactful, particularly by more experienced countries and institutions. It risks being perceived as insufficiently demanding, ambitious and participatory, thus exerting insufficient attractiveness towards a relevant share of European research institutions.



Recommendation After its establishment, a development plan should be designed for the GES4R, revisiting its areas of indicators and evaluation procedures to gradually integrate more advanced features, enhancing its impact potential and attractiveness. This process could go hand in hand with a revamping of the sister HRS4R award, to also include students and administrative staff, ensuring consistency.

Sc2 #3 – Make it easier for holders of other certificates to be awarded

Rationale To increase the attractiveness of the GES4R for more experienced countries and institutions, the adoption of simplified or automatic procedures to award those already certified under other schemes can be considered, introducing a correspondence system (see CC #2) also for this scheme. It can be mentioned in this respect that, as emerged in the validation process, the main disincentive for the more advanced to get involved with this scheme was the prerequisite of first obtaining the HRS4R to be able to get the GES4R.

Recommendation When the GES4R is established and renowned, the possibility should be considered of eliminating the prerequisite of first obtaining the HRS4R award, thus making it an independent scheme, even if passing from one to the other would remain a facilitated procedure. The progression, for instance, could also be allowed in the other direction (from GES4R to HRS4R). Another possibility would be that holders of a GECAS would automatically get the GES4R award if they apply for the HRS4R.

Sc2 #4 – Provide centralised support

Rationale The results of the CASPER validation process show that when stakeholders highlighted the advantages of the GES4R, particularly for beginner institutions, they also stressed that the scheme would work with strong, centralised assistance, directly from the European level. The reason behind this is that – differently from the HRS4R – this scheme is addressing gender equality, something that not all European countries support (or have experience about) at the same level, so that support would be insufficient or altogether absent if it were placed on national authorities alone.

Recommendation The system of applicant support through Euraxess, on the model of what is in place for the HRS4R award, should be complemented by further capacity building, exchange and centralised support addressing both the Euraxess dedicated network and applicants. External experts could be made available to support the process on request. Capacity-building and exchange programmes to support the integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content should be particularly considered.

Sc2 #5 – Make academic and research staff allies

Rationale

On the example of the HRS4R award, the GES4R scheme foresees that the certification process is mostly in the hands of HR and administrative staff. This is welcomed by many of the consulted stakeholders within CASPER and is considered as a factor enhancing feasibility. Heavily involving researchers is indeed challenging and risks putting further burdens on them, particularly women and other potentially underrepresented groups, further jeopardising their career opportunities. However, participation in and ownership of the process are necessary, considering that the GES4R scheme addresses all recommended policy areas of GEPs under Horizon Europe, including the integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content.

Recommendation

Consultation tools that would not imply major time investments for researchers should be encouraged, through for instance internal surveys and focus groups, while the active involvement of gender studies departments could be expected whenever possible, as this would possibly be in line with the research interests of the scholars involved. When no gender studies departments are there, the involvement of external gender scholars should be envisaged. Particular emphasis should be put on encouraging and supporting researchers' involvement with the integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content (see also SC2 #4).

SHEET #4

Recommendations for the European Athena SWAN

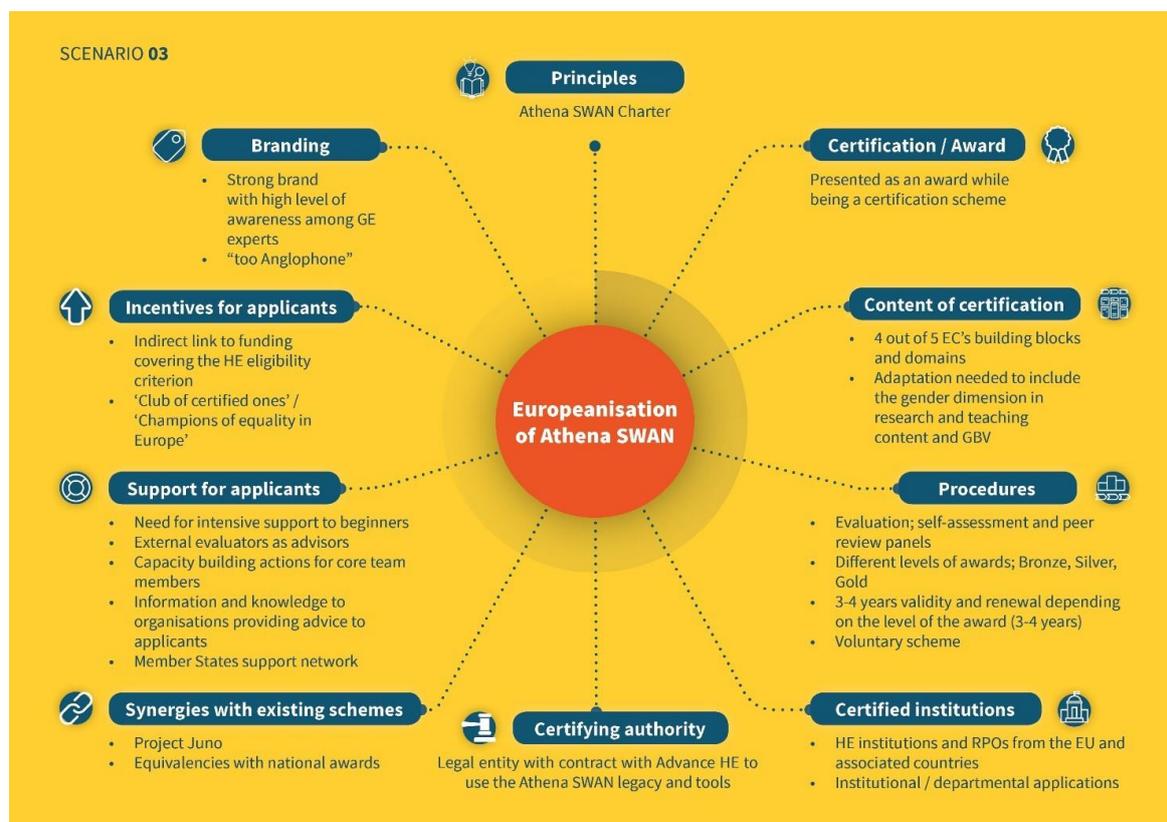
1. The main features of the European Athena SWAN scenario

This scenario builds on the Athan SWAN/Advance HE Charter and Award, from which many of its features (See Figure below) are derived.

Among the most significant features of this concept scenario, its focus on both process and outcome in the implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) can be singled out, as well as its participatory approach to GEP design and implementation, with the representation of all levels and categories of staff, the (recently introduced) adoption of the intersectional perspective, broadening the set of potential inequality grounds that are actively addressed, the possibility to apply at the level of the whole organisation and/or at Department/Faculty level. The assessment process is accomplished through self-assessment and external assessment, the latter from peer-review panels.

A set of features are unique to this concept scenario:

- It predefines three levels of progressive achievement (bronze, silver, gold)
- It foresees that support is mostly provided to applicants by national-level structures to be created ad-hoc, with the support of the European Commission.



Trade-off considerations

The Athena SWAN represents one of the most advanced models at the international level, with high levels of participation and a rich set of resources, tools, and materials, as well as a continuously growing capital of experience. Another advantage of this scenario is that it is already in the process of internationalisation, having been adopted in other countries. This concept scenario integrates both ambitious objectives and practical solutions, based on its extensive implementation.

On the other hand, the risk is that a scheme tailored to the characteristics and features of the Anglo-Saxon higher education and research system (which is also the prevalent area of its expansion) might be more limited in terms of feasibility and attractiveness in different national contexts. In addition, it shares with EUQUAL the risk that its ambitious setup triggers resistance and backlash, and make it less accessible for some countries in terms of resources (financial, human, expertise-related).

The validation results show that this scenario is ranked third (behind EUQUAL and GES4R) in terms of both the overall attractiveness and feasibility. Feasibility assessments are particularly affected by political considerations, connected to the fact that it is a national scheme, and to the context of Brexit. Nordic and Central-West countries (and above all UK and Ireland respondents) are the most positive about this scenario.

2. Recommendations

Four recommendations can be formulated to optimise the implementation process and impact of this scenario. Some are broadly connected to cross-cutting recommendations, pointing to the same (or broadly similar) areas of action.

Considering the mentioned trade-offs, recommendations are centred around making the scenario less Anglo-Saxon and more European, while making the most of the experience gained by the original Athena SWAN over the years.

Sc3 #1 – Apply the three-level system to research institutions adopting other schemes

Rationale As with the other scenarios, institutions that have been certified under other schemes should already be recognised for their progress towards gender equality. The three-level system (Bronze, Silver and Gold) should be the basis of the correspondence system.

Recommendation The system of correspondences (see CC #2) should be adapted to ensure that the holders of a Bronze award are considered compliant with the Horizon Europe GEP requirement. On the other hand, being compliant with the GEP requirement should be considered in the application process to the Bronze level award. Furthermore, more advanced institutions should be allowed to get recognition of their higher levels of achievement while joining the scheme through a simplified procedure, without the obligation to necessarily start at the Bronze level.

Sc3 #2 – Build national-level umbrella organisations to provide tailored support and tools

Rationale Although the Athena SWAN awarding system has been adopted in countries other than the UK, these are mostly Anglo-Saxon countries at present, which therefore share several important features of their higher education system. For this reason, although there are many resources and support tools that have been developed over the years within Athena SWAN, representing a valuable starting point, these need to be adapted to examples and case studies that engage with the diversity of European countries and their legal frameworks and organisational arrangements.

Recommendation The European Commission should provide adequate resources to set up umbrella organisations at the national level that – as it happened in Ireland when the Athena SWAN scheme was adopted – can offer support and guidance tailored to national contexts and needs, also by establishing national communities of practice. National leaders of the Higher Education and Research sectors should be actively involved.

Sc3 #3 – Leverage the strong “Athena SWAN brand” and stress its accessibility

Rationale One of the most important advantages of developing a European scheme based on a well-known, successful model like Athena SWAN is that it has already proven its effectiveness and appeal. Trust in the scheme has been expressed by both Anglo-Saxon and non-Anglo-Saxon stakeholders consulted in the CASPER validation process. Non-Anglo-Saxon stakeholders, however, also voiced the concern that the needed effort to get an award would be too much, inaccessible to less-resourced institutions.

Recommendation Communication campaigns should highlight proven success without discouraging potential applicants, by reassuring on its accessibility even by beginner or less-resourced institutions and pointing to the nationally-tailored support measures that would be available.

Sc3 #4 – Convey in communication a sense of European ownership of the scheme

Rationale In addition to what was stated in Sc3 #3, the very identification of the Athena SWAN brand with the United Kingdom could be a discouraging factor for some potential applicant institutions. The Brexit political context was very frequently evoked by the consulted stakeholders in the CASPER validation process, and political feasibility was assessed as the lowest for this scenario.

Recommendation The process of tailoring the scheme to the broader European context should be reported and emphasised in communication campaigns, as well as its connection to the Horizon Europe Framework Programme and GEP requirement (which by the way are still including the UK). The availability of national- and European-level support should also be strongly highlighted.



	Showcasing the Ireland case, where the scheme was successfully adopted and tailored to meet the particular characteristics of the national research system is also recommended to this aim.
--	---



SHEET #5

Recommendations for No direct-action scenario

1. The main features of the No direct-action scenario

The “No direct-action” scenario is interpreted as a scenario where no Europe-wide GECAS is developed. In this scenario, the European Commission would pursue its gender equality objectives through the proactive stimulation of initiatives to launch new national certification/award schemes and foster the adaptation of existing national and international schemes to the GEP requirement in Horizon Europe.

In this framework, the activities in this scenario would concentrate on:

- Stimulating the creation of national schemes
- Stimulating cooperation, harmonisation and exchange among national and international schemes, including recognition of correspondences among them.

Trade-off considerations

One of the advantages of this approach is the flexibility to have schemes adapted to the national contexts

The scenario however entails two major risks:

- It would potentially reinforce existing differences in levels of application of GE measures and institutional change in EU Member States and associated countries
- There could be major differences in the design and quality of the schemes developed at the national level.

2. Recommendations

Six recommendations can be formulated to support the development of national schemes and their coordination, and to avoid this scenario being perceived as not mobilising, not progressive, and perpetuating the current landscape of fragmentation, depending on the goodwill of individual states⁷.

Sc4 #1 – Provide assistance to support the development of national schemes

Rationale	As emerged from the mapping activities conducted under CASPER, only a limited number of European countries currently have national schemes in place that can be considered GECAS for the R&I sector, and some might lack the resources and gender expertise to set up one.
------------------	--

⁷ The encompassing correspondence system developed within the CASPER Project (Benchmarking Report and Recommendation - D3.5) would be instrumental to this aim.

Recommendation The European Commission should set up a technical assistance mechanism to assist European countries in developing their own scheme. Financial assistance should be established to cover part of the initial investment for the development of the scheme.

Sc4 #2 – Support the ongoing internationalisation process of Athena SWAN/Advance HE

Rationale The Athena SWAN award is a scheme that has proven successful in its internationalisation process and that is still expanding, even beyond Anglo-Saxon regions. In the framework of the No direct-action scenario, it would make sense to support this ongoing process, which would be contributing to harmonisation, by addressing those countries that already expressed an interest in it.

Recommendation The European Commission should cooperate with national scheme organisers in adapting Athena SWAN to national contexts and support exchange and mutual learning processes for its roll-out among member States and associated countries, also keeping in mind the recommendations formulated above about the European Athena SWAN scenario.

Sc4 #3 – Sustain the establishment of a community of practice of scheme developers

Rationale To support the quality and coherence of the national scheme, mutual exchanges could be promoted among national bodies involved with scheme development. This could also provide the basis to mobilise practitioners and stakeholders in the promotion and enhancement of national certification schemes.

Recommendation A community of practice of scheme developers should be established on a national, regional or disciplinary basis and facilitated to promote the harmonisation of the schemes under development.

Sc4 #4 – Promote standards for national schemes

Rationale Another tool to promote the harmonisation of the national schemes is through the definition of standards to be integrated into the scheme design and procedures.

Recommendation The European Commission, in cooperation with Member States, should set standards representing a common basis for the definition of the national schemes. These standards would integrate the GEP requirement established under Horizon Europe (so that the certified institutions would be automatically eligible for funding) and be inspired by scenario 1 principles, including: the inclusive approach (with an emphasis on gender+/intersectionality); the holistic

approach (assessing both process and outcomes and working in parallel on all domains); the progressive approach (the certification is used to stimulate progress); the sustainability approach (with the focus on the notion of institutional change). The tool for the benchmarking of compatibility against the HE requirement, developed under CASPER⁸, would be supporting this effort.

Sc4 #5 – Provide dedicated support to institutions in non-active countries

Rationale It can be expected that not all countries will be equally active in developing a national certification scheme for gender equality in R&I, despite the support given by the EC to national governments (see Sc4 #1, above). Institutions in these countries will therefore run the risk of lagging behind, with gaps increasing over time.

Recommendation Dedicated support should be provided to those countries where governments are not active, by decentralising and directly assisting institutions through networking and horizontal exchange. The support system could avail itself of existing resources such as the new Gear Tool, the newly-funded Centre of Excellence and the materials from recently concluded EC-funded projects such as ACT and the Gender Equality Academy.

Sc4 #6 – Emphasise the coordination effort in communication

Rationale In terms of communication, this scenario should be all but inactive, to express the effort of coordination and harmonisation between national research systems around the theme of gender equality and inclusiveness.

Recommendation The European Commission should connect its communication campaign about the GEP requirement with the effort to design and coordinate national certification systems for gender equality and inclusiveness in research, publicising its support and the tools that would be made available to Member States and Associated Countries.

⁸ Benchmarking Report and Recommendation - D3.5

List of Recommendations

CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

- CC #1** – Integrate the certification system and the Horizon Europe GEP requirement
- CC #2** – Set up an encompassing system of correspondences across certification schemes
- CC #3** – Build a supportive ecosystem for applicants (capacity building, mutual learning, networking)
- CC #4** – Support the adoption of (self-)assessment tools for monitoring GEP progress
- CC #5** – Set periodic reviews of evaluation dimensions and indicators
- CC #6** – Promote wide-ranging awareness-raising and communication campaigns

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEW EUROPE-WIDE SCENARIO

- Sc1 #1** – Apply the credit system to research institutions adopting other schemes
- Sc1 #2** – Support the Network of certified institutions
- Sc1 #3** – Emphasise in communication the low-entry threshold and flexible credit system of the scheme
- Sc1 #4** – Support academic and research staff to take on a key role in certification

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY FOR RESEARCHERS/GES4R

- Sc2 #1** – Emphasise in communication the accessibility and familiarity of the scheme
- Sc2 #2** – Design a development plan of the scheme
- Sc2 #3** – Make it easier for holders of other certificates to be awarded
- Sc2 #4** – Provide centralised support
- Sc2 #5** – Make academic and research staff allies

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN ATHENA SWAN

- Sc3 #1** – Apply the three-level system to research institutions adopting other schemes
- Sc3 #2** – Build national-level umbrella organisations to provide tailored support and tools
- Sc3 #3** – Leverage the strong “Athena SWAN brand” and stress its accessibility
- Sc3 #4** – Convey in communication a sense of European ownership of the scheme

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NO DIRECT-ACTION SCENARIO

- Sc4 #1** – Provide assistance to support the development of national schemes
- Sc4 #2** – Support the ongoing internationalisation process of Athena SWAN/Advance HE
- Sc4 #3** – Sustain the establishment of a community of practice of scheme developers
- Sc4 #4** – Promote standards for national schemes
- Sc4 #5** – Provide dedicated support to institutions in non-active countries
- Sc4 #6** – Emphasise the coordination effort in communication



References

Council of the European Union (2021a). *Conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA)*. Brussels, 19 November 2021, available [here](#)

Council of the European Union (2021b). *Council recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe*. Brussels, 19 November 2021, available [here](#)

EC (2018). *She Figures 2018. Gender in Research and Innovation Statistics and Indicators*. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, available [here](#)

EC (2020). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *A new ERA for Research and Innovation*. Brussels, 30 September 2020, available [here](#)

EC (2021a). *European Research Area Policy Agenda. Overview of actions for the period 2022-2024*. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, available [here](#)

EC (2021b). *She Figures 2021. Gender in Research and Innovation Statistics and Indicators*, Luxembourg. Publications Office of the European Union, available [here](#)

GENDERACTION (2021). *Monitoring of ERA priority 4 implementation. Update and final assessment*, available [here](#)

Lombardo, E., Meier, P., & Verloo, M. (2017). Policymaking from a gender+ equality perspective. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 38(1), 1-19, available [here](#)

Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (2021). *Ljubljana Declaration. Gender equality in research and innovation*, available [here](#)

