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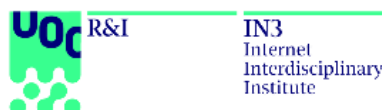| 0.2	17/12/20	Alain Denis	Quality Control, feedback and comments
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List of Figures

List of acronyms / abbreviations used in this document

CAs	Certification Award Schemes
CASPER	Certification-Award Systems to Promote Gender Equality in Research
D	Deliverable
ERA	European Research Area
EUA	European University Association
FUOC	Foundation for the Open University of Catalonia
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
HRS4R	Human Resources Strategy for Researchers
IoP	Institute of Physics
K&I	Knowledge and Innovation Company Limited
LERU	League of European Research Universities
OBU	Oxford Brookes University
RPOs	Research Performing Organisations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SWAN	Scientific Women's Academic Network
WP	Work Package
YW	Yellow Window

Executive Summary

This report outlines the set of key prerequisites (i.e., 'must haves' and 'nice to haves') for an effective award/certification system for gender equality in higher education research and innovation. It is based on the critical review of key debates and considerations for the architecture of a Europe-wide scheme drawing from opinions of 74 stakeholders across Europe and beyond, complemented by discussions from two online expert workshops with Consortium partners. Furthermore, this set of prerequisites is translated into suggestions for building a dynamic architecture of a Europe-wide scheme in gender equality. This report will be a key input for the co-creation workshops in the subsequent CASPER tasks and activities in WP5.

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1.   Introduction

This public deliverable provides a summary report of the outcomes of WP4 by outlining the set of pre-requisites ('must-haves' and 'nice-to-haves') distilled, as well as documenting the process used to arrive at these outcomes (e.g. agenda of the meetings, summary of discussions and contributions, etc.).

1.1.   Background

The aim of the CASPER (Certification-Award Systems to Promote Gender Equality in Research) project is to examine the feasibility of a European certification and/or award system on gender equality targeting universities and research organisations. Based upon an extensive assessment of existing relevant systems and needs across Europe and beyond, the project consortium will develop and evaluate four possible scenarios (including a non-action one) that pave the way for a realistic Europe-wide award and/or certification framework. The project pursues three overall objectives:

- To map and assess existing award and certification systems for gender equality (and related schemes) and to identify existing needs for such a system at the European Union level;
- Design three different award/certification scenarios (plus a fourth no-action scenario) and assess their feasibility along several dimensions with a participative approach;
- Prepare the ground for a successful roll-out of a European award/certification scheme.

The CASPER project focuses predominantly on gender-related inequalities in research and innovation and incorporates an intersectional perspective where possible. It considers not only the EU and its Member States – including the UK – but also relevant countries for gender equality certification/award systems such as Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, the United States and Australia.

Building on WP3 activities and especially D3.3[1], in WP4, the methodology was designed; 31 past/existing CAs were reviewed and key debates and considerations were outlined surrounding the architecture of a potential Europe-wide scheme on gender equality. This report outlines the key prerequisites for a Europe-wide CAs derived from these activities and deliverables informed by internal CASPER workshops, where participants discussed what a Europe-wide scheme should look like.

This report is structured as follows: section 2 sets the scene presenting the key issues regarding the architecture of a Europe-wide scheme on gender equality. It is followed by section 3 which provides a brief outline of the fieldwork and a summary of the internal CASPER Consortium workshops where the agenda and process followed is described. Next, in section 4 the fieldwork evidence is brought together with workshop discussions to outline the key prerequisites for a Europe-wide effective award/certification system, distinguishing between 'must-haves' and 'nice-to-haves' (which will be utilised in the subsequent stages and WPs of the CASPER project). Section 5 suggests a dynamic architecture approach for a Europe-wide scheme based on a reflective synthesis of stakeholders' recommendations and on the outputs of two internal CASPER workshops, followed by a brief concluding summary.

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[1] D3.3. can be accessed here: DOI/10.5281/zenodo.4121873

2.   Setting the scene

2.1.   Definition of GECAS

In this report the term CAs is used as an umbrella term to describe "Certification and/or Award Schemes". Where schemes refer specifically to gender equality, the acronym GECAS is used. This acronym is useful as an inclusive shorthand, particularly since there is lack of consensus and as terms are used differently by institutions administering and/or using schemes. In addition, other terms such as 'standards' and 'label' are also found.

Throughout the CASPER project, a more fine-tuned understanding has been developed as to which terminology to use and when. 'Certification' assesses the process of structural change, and the developmental work associated with it. It also allows for the establishment of a possible link with the new requirement to have a Gender Equality Plan in place as eligibility criterion for future access to EU funding. As such, certification assesses the intention to improve and advance through progressive approaches and renewals/re-audits and is therefore ongoing. In contrast, an 'award' refers to a point in time at which a token of recognition is obtained to recognise achievements in the process of structural gender change or in relation to specific actions. An 'award' can be a one-off while certification and awards can be subject to renewal. It can also apply to gender equality in general, or instead focus on selected aspects of the gender change process. In a few cases, existing certification schemes were combined with one-off awards.

2.2.   Perceptions about a Europe-wide GECAS

A Europe-wide scheme on gender equality is considered necessary for three reasons. First, a Europe-wide scheme is perceived as a way to bring gender equality issues to the forefront and ensure gender mainstreaming in Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) so that gender equality work becomes not only more visible and legitimate, but also more recognised and sustainable.

Second, there is a need for a unitary common framework for gender equality and a standardised approach. A Europe-wide scheme would facilitate the creation of a common basis across diverse national situations and regulatory frameworks. A Europe-wide architecture was envisaged bringing a coordinated set of interpretations, guidelines, indicators and benchmarks, within a singular framework for gender equality work.

Third, a Europe-wide scheme is also seen as a way to address divergences and establish an EU minimal standard of academic working conditions and values across RPOs (that would facilitate academic mobility).

However, there are caveats and concerns that need to be highlighted in relation to the architecture and operationalisation of a Europe-wide scheme in terms of: a) diverse landscape of gender equality work and resources on this topic across organisations and countries and b) engagement by organisations.

Smaller organisations or organisations with less autonomy/resources might not be able to implement structural change measures for gender equality without appropriate support (e.g. knowledge, funding, etc.) that level the playing field and increase organisational capacity. Linked to this, it is important for the scheme to provide an opportunity to "level up", as some member states and/or institutions are way ahead in certain aspects of gender equality, for example in family-friendly policies or dealing with

gender pay gaps. A Europe-wide scheme has the potential to raise the bar across countries, recognising that each is at a different stage for different aspects and can benefit from mutual learning.

While a Europe-wide scheme might seem an excellent idea to address the identified needs, there are concerns regarding the extent to which institutions would be willing to engage with such a scheme, not least due to potential resources required. In response to what would motivate institutions to engage with a Europe-wide scheme, the key message (especially from interviewees with experience of existing schemes) was that it would need to demonstrate greater added-value than existing schemes and/or be less resource intensive. Added-value was found in three main areas: (1) for increased international recognition, prestige and attractiveness, within the remit of a benchmarking process relative to other RPOs; (2) responding to incentives, such as access to funding or reduced workload in the burden of applications; and (3) for mutual learning and support.

Last but not least, there was consensus that the operationalisation of a Europe-wide scheme should be characterised by flexibility, clarity, consistency and simplicity wherever possible. Administration should not be excessively onerous, while the scheme should find a balance between encouraging institutions to do better and challenge themselves with a need to be robust. One of the key take away messages from the assessment of existing schemes was to ensure alignment between principles and objectives of the scheme with assessment criteria and what it aims to certify (processes/outcomes). Existing schemes mainly operate within national contexts thus, before these decisions take place, a Europe-wide scheme needs to define gender equality, diversity, inclusion, intersectionality and related concepts to ensure that there is common discourse and cultural understanding across national contexts. This would be invaluable for ensuring clarity and consistency is built into the assessment process, since stakeholders in various countries may not share the same understanding of the requirements or have the same cultural contexts, for example about what gender equality means. Furthermore, it is important to define what success would look like if a Europe-wide scheme is to operate successfully.

2.3.   Examples of prominent schemes

Two prominent examples of schemes, which had the key characteristics to be explored in relation to the potential introduction of a Europe-wide scheme, are the Athena SWAN Charter and the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R).

2.3.1   Athena SWAN

The Athena SWAN Charter Mark originated from the Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) in the UK, which came up with the idea of a charter to which universities would commit and be accountable to. The Athena SWAN Charter was launched in 2005 and membership of the Charter grew significantly (especially in medical and dental schools) after an announcement in 2011 from Dame Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer for England, that eligibility for funding from the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) would be dependent on achieving an Athena SWAN silver award (this requirement was recently withdrawn[2]). The Athena SWAN charter is currently owned and managed by Advance HE. Over the years, the scheme further expanded in terms of disciplinary and geographical boundaries, as well as scope. While it originally covered STEM, it was expanded to all other subject areas. Athena SWAN has been extended to Ireland and piloted in Australia in a slightly modified form (as the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE). A few European countries have also considered Athena SWAN in their own national context, such as Sweden and Switzerland. The charter also now addresses intersectional inequalities, with Athena SWAN charter members expected to examine their

support for transgender staff and students and their commitment to staff in professional and support roles.

One of the main strengths of Athena SWAN is that it provides a standardised approach, but is flexible enough for institutions and departments to tailor their application and GEP to their context, and use a progressive approach (Bronze, Silver, Gold) to demonstrate and recognise progress along the journey of the institution (taking into consideration their starting point). It is evidence-based and data-driven with a robust self-assessment. Different units (departments, research institutes, faculties and institutions) can drive change in their local context through this charter. The structured process of analysis enables benchmarking and helps RPOs to focus and have guidelines to develop a GEP to assess and monitor their efforts. In Ireland and Australia, the reputation of Athena SWAN in the UK was a strong point for endorsement of the scheme from the wider academic community.

On the other hand, it is criticised for being resource-intensive and lacking consistency in decision-making panels. The focus on gender has taken away attention in RPOs from other inequalities, although Athena SWAN has recently encouraged addressing intersectionality. It has been criticised as not providing enough support and guidance throughout the process. Academic research has reported additional limitations and concerns around Athena SWAN. More specifically, Kalpazidou-Schmidt et al. (2020, p.15) highlighted the limitations with Athena SWAN in terms of not promoting a) the integration of gender and research and b) interventions such as quotas, positions, funding etc., that might be considered unlawful under the UK Equality Act 2010. Furthermore, there are criticisms about its box-ticking character, the unfair burden on women involved with the scheme and how intersecting inequalities are not often considered (Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019, Tzanakou, 2019). Currently, the Charter is under review aiming to address some of these limitations.

2.3.2   HRS4R

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) is a certification system created and managed by the European Commission – supported by EURAXESS – as a tool to streamline human resources management in the European Research Area. Through this certification, institutions report how they align their human resources policies to the 40 principles of the Charter & Code, based on a customised action plan/HR strategy (European Commission 2020). HRS4R is a Human Resources scheme. In terms of reach, HRS4R covers countries where gender equality policies in Higher Education and research are less well-established, and this could perhaps be a good entry point for any potential EU-wide scheme. HRS4R is also popular in countries like the UK where Athena-SWAN is well-established and in countries like Spain and Germany, where gender equality is well-embedded in gender policies (D3.3). Hence, HRS4R may provide a good scheme on which to base any potential Europe-wide gender equality scheme.

The strengths of HRS4R include its contribution to the harmonisation of policies across European countries. The scheme is also adaptable to an institution's individual context and the assessment, monitoring and evaluation is undertaken by recognised experts in their field (but not focused on gender equality). HRS4R's logo also attracted positive feedback from interviewees as a sign of authority, prestige, and quality which, in addition to being regarded as a strength, can also be seen as an incentive to join the scheme. However, one of the main weaknesses of the scheme is that gender is not its main focus. Currently, only one of the self-assessment questions is focused on gender equality. Therefore, whilst the HR focus is not a problem per se, this is not a scheme which focuses on gendered structural change and this will need to be borne in mind should the EU decide to build any future GECAS on HRS4R. As part of the GEARING-Roles projects, some work has already been

undertaken on revising the scheme and making it more gender sensitive. Finally, respondents reported that one of the weaknesses of the scheme was that it has become increasingly bureaucratic and time-consuming to administer, and that there is a lack of guidance and feedback to applicants (especially those with less experience).

3.   Methodology

This report is primarily based on extensive fieldwork with stakeholders across Europe and beyond, complemented by an internal workshop with CASPER partners which are briefly outlined below.

3.1.   Fieldwork with stakeholders

The fieldwork involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, which was collected from 74 participants, (58 women and 16 men), during the course of 67 interviews[2]. Of the 74 respondents who participated in the interviews, 73 completed the quantitative part of the research (i.e. the closed questions). The interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders and policy-makers identified throughout the EU and beyond, national machineries for gender equality (e.g. government policy units), RPOs and other bodies engaged in existing or past CAs. The semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and were split across four partners (OBU, YW, K&I, FUOC), with the process led by OBU. Due to the need to 'socially distance' because of COVID-19, all interviews were conducted remotely, e.g. using Zoom or Skype and their built-in recording mechanisms. Once the interview had been conducted, each interview was written up as a summary or transcript in English and sent to the interviewee for validation and feedback.

Five relevant stakeholder groups with a perspective on CAs were identified.

- Group 1 includes stakeholders running or managing a scheme;

- Group 2 are stakeholders using a scheme (e.g. Human Resources, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion professionals; academic staff leading gender equality and diversity efforts);

- Group 3 are policy makers and/or gender experts with no involvement in a scheme;

- Group 4 consists of stakeholders within EU policy and;

- Group 5 are policy makers and/or gender experts with involvement in a scheme.

Tailored interview guides were developed for each stakeholder group. A few stakeholders held multiple roles, so interviewers decided the capacity in which they should interview them and, where appropriate, combined questions from the interview guides. The 74 respondents represented all five stakeholder groups (see Figure 1 below) and each respondent has been allocated an individual identity number to protect their identity.

Additionally, a set of closed questions (checklist) was developed about key parameters of CAs, creating a set of quantitative indicators on various CAs dimensions. In this checklist, respondents were asked to prioritise one of two options, bearing in mind that the EU may develop a gender equality scheme. This was included at the end of the semi-structured interview guide. Interviewees' responses and any comments were then compiled into a database. Participants unable to prioritise either option, or choosing both options equally were categorised as 'undecided' because it was not possible to discern what respondents meant from their comments. In some cases, though, it is clear from participants' comments that they prioritised 'both' options and we indicate this in the particular section.

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[2] On occasions two respondents were interviewed simultaneously at their request.

Figure 1 Number of participants by stakeholder group

3.2.   Internal CASPER Workshop

Internal CASPER online workshops were organised for partners to discuss and reflect on the findings of previous CASPER deliverables. The agenda of the workshops is provided below. Eighteen participants took part in the workshops from all partner institutions of the CASPER Consortium. Participants were divided into smaller groups (3 or 4) to facilitate discussions, brainstorming and interaction.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions the workshops were conducted online using Zoom and Miro. Zoom video conferencing was selected because it is possible to combine small groups, in break-out rooms, and plenary sessions. Miro was chosen because it is user-friendly and it allows synchronous online collaborative working via a whiteboarding platform. Miro also enables group participation in activities such as brainstorming, with digital sticky notes and participants can easily move pre-defined digital post-it notes into categories on pre-written tables. There was also an option for participants to add comments to sticky notes and the digital whiteboard remained active for five weeks after the workshop took place, so that participants could add any additional thoughts or ideas.

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Agenda for session 1: 21st October 2020
      1.00 pm   Warming up exercise on Miro
      1.15 pm   Basic scenarios
      1.40 pm   'Must have' and 'nice to have' discussions
      2.45pm   Break
      3.15pm   Thematic discussions

Agenda for session 2: 22nd October 2020
      1.00pm   Discussion about GECAS
      1.15pm   Objectives
      2.00pm   Thematic discussion
      2.45pm   Break
      3.15pm   Value proposition
      4.00pm   GECAS architecture

Before embarking on the discussions there was a brief session about working with Miro platform whereby participants were given basic instructions on its use. Discussions were centred around themes and exercises that aimed to provide a platform for brainstorming and debating various topics such as: directions for development of GECAS scenarios (advantages and disadvantages); 'must have' and 'nice to have' dimensions of the architecture of a Europe-wide scheme and thematic discussions (ways to create a link with the GEP; minimum standards to introduce a Europe-wide scheme as the common denominator across MS; ways to reconcile needs of advanced and less advanced RPOs; hyper-competition of the academic system; involvement of member states; branding of scheme, etc).

This report draws on the discussions about the 'must-have' and 'nice to have' exercise described below. For this exercise, participants were divided into four break-out groups and asked to place digital post-it notes, containing pre-defined dimensions for a GECAS, onto a canvas divided in four categories "must have", "nice to have", "not sure" and "not retained" (see Figure 2 below). There were also sticky dots available to indicate: full consensus (green), partial consensus (yellow) and no consensus (red) between the members of one group. Participants could also add comment boxes, particularly if they used the not sure category to register the reasons why they were 'not sure'. This exercise took 45 minutes and it was followed by a plenary to discuss the main ideas from the break-out groups. See appendices 1-4 for copies of the Miro boards the four groups completed.

Figure 2 Canvas of must have, nice to have, not sure, not retained

Must have	Nice to have	Not sure	*Not retained (= should not be part of the design of an EU GECAS)*

4.   Key prerequisites

This section outlines a set of key prerequisites (i.e. 'must haves' and 'nice to haves') for an effective award/certification system for gender equality in higher education research and innovation. It is informed by critical review of key debates and considerations for the architecture of a Europe-wide scheme drawing from interviews with 74 stakeholders across Europe and beyond complemented by discussions in two online expert workshops with Consortium partners.
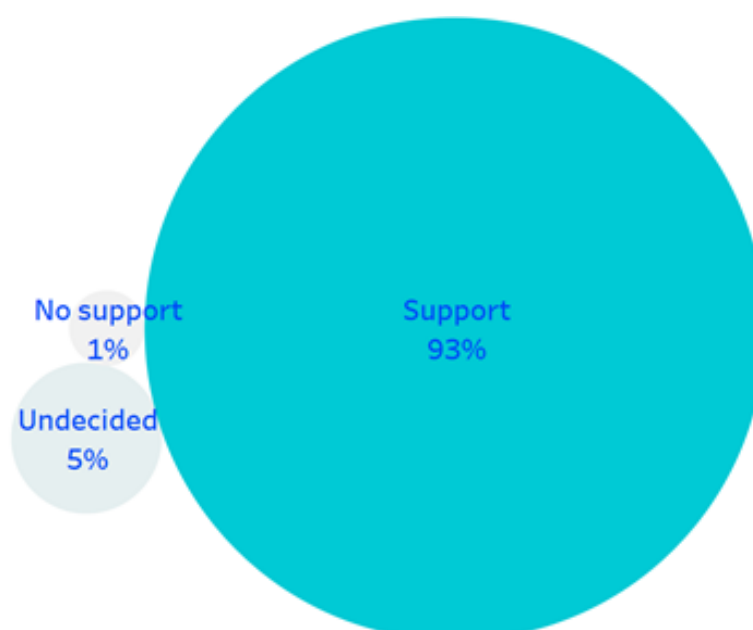
4.1.   'Must haves'

The following section considers the key prerequisites for any potential Europe-wide scheme which were classified as 'must have' by the majority of workshop participants.

4.1.1   Support and feedback

A key prerequisite was support and feedback provided by a potential Europe-wide scheme. Both interviewees, (93% - see Figure 3 below) and workshop participants highlighted organisations' needs for systematic support with the potential to build capacity in a sustainable way, including dialogue and/or space for discussion, reflection and mutual learning. Holistic support is required ranging from preparing the application (e.g., how to collect data) to implementation and evaluation including amongst others: a responsive and accessible helpdesk (national and/or EU contact points) to support and address queries and doubts; well-designed communication and dissemination campaigns; compilation of a wealth of resources and tools based on existing CAs efforts and EU-funded projects on structural change to enable applicants to conduct gender equality work; mechanisms to foster development of networks and communities of practice within/across regions and countries such as online support at national level. Site visits with peers/experts with experience of the certification process were also seen as valuable, although this could form part of either/both support and part of the assessment. Support was seen as imperative for establishing a level playing field particularly for institutions that have limited resources and/or rely on a small number of enthusiastic local actors.

Figure 3 Provide support/feedback or not

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to provide support/feedback or not? (n = 73)

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It was also suggested that a network of 'critical friends' - individuals with experience in gender equality work - could be established across organisations and/or within communities of practice. This network can provide peer feedback and advice to organisations where gender equality is less advanced. This could take place online via video conferencing, email communication or periodic events which would facilitate networking and sharing experiences. A centralised support system at national level was also suggested for countries where gender equality is less advanced.

4.1.2   Gender+

A Gender+ approach was considered a 'must- have' prerequisite that was heavily informed by the debate between 'a gender only or broader in perspective focus' elaborated by interviewees in the fieldwork. The 'Gender+' term was first used in the European research project QUING ("Quality in Gender+ Equality Policies in Europe"). The Gender+ approach *'recognises that gender inequality and other inequalities are connected and are thus best addressed with those possible intersections in mind'* (Verloo et al. 2011, p.4). It is underpinned by intersectionality theory and calls for a conceptualisation of gender equality as intersecting with other factors such as ethnicity, disability, age, religion/belief and sexual orientation. In the European Research Area context and beyond these six grounds, gender equality is also perceived as intersecting with '*health status, occupation, socioeconomic status, migratory status, and geographic location'* (ERAC, 2020,p.4). The Gender+ approach retains a focus on gender equality, which '*must remain a priority in the future European Research Area' (*ERAC, 2020, p.4) but also builds on existing familiar work, activities and discourse that fall under the 'gender' umbrella (ibid; European Commission, 2020a).

A Gender+ approach was seen as the best way forward since it allows focusing on gender with sufficient depth with other axes of inequality addressed (such as race, ethnicity, faith, LGBT inclusion, etc., where possible). This approach ensures that gender is foregrounded rather than targeting simultaneously diverse issues in a superficial way and overcomes complexities in the operationalisation of the scheme (challenges establishing minimal standards across Europe in diversity and managing the scheme; too many areas might lead to superficial approaches). Last but not least, Gender+ needs to be complemented with a flexible approach from organisations, who can decide on which axes beyond gender they would like and/or can focus on, taking into account the status quo of gender equality in different countries and a variety of contexts.

4.1.3   A general scheme (covers all scientific domains)

The vast majority of interviewees (74% - see Figure 4 below) suggested a scheme with a general focus rather than subject-specific since disciplinary variations could be accommodated within the same framework. A generic scheme with consideration for different subject areas allows organisations to work on the varying rates at which different departments or faculties develop their gender equality work. It enables organisations to identify the best (and worst) performing areas in a more granular way, encouraging different fields to learn from each other while taking into consideration their different cultures and starting points. A scheme could combine both, as is currently the case with Athena SWAN, which confers awards at institutional and departmental level thus enabling this dilemma to be addressed. However, at European level this means that substantially more resources would be required for the evaluation and certification process.

Figure 4 General or subject specific scheme?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to be general or subject specific (i.e. discipline specific)? (n = 73)
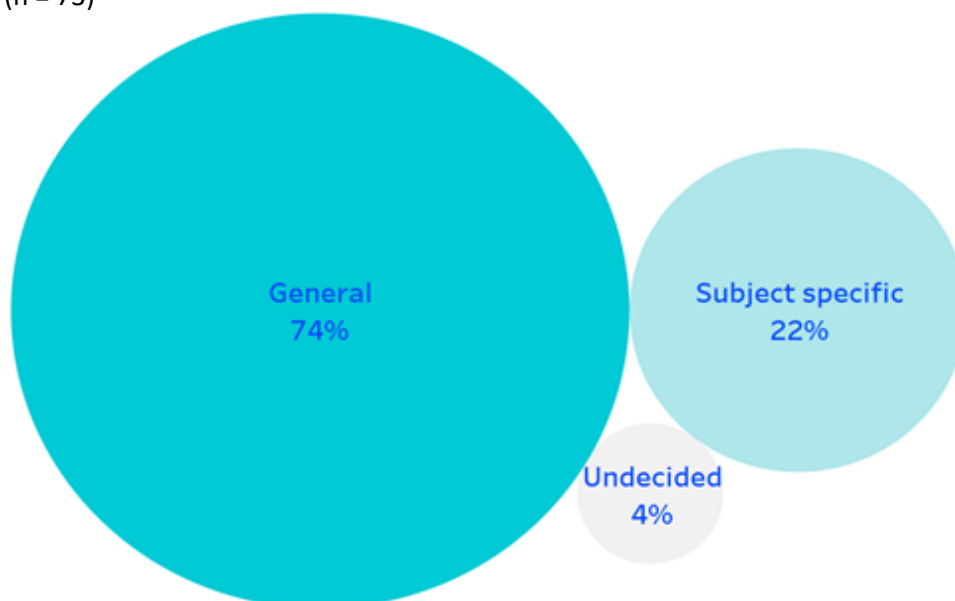

4.1.4   Link with Gender Equality Plan (GEP)

Recently, the European Commission announced that institutions without a GEP would not be eligible to apply for EU funding (European Research Innovation Days, 22/09/2020). Thus, this dimension was discussed during the workshop and all participants decided that it is a must have requirement to ensure that this incentive and funding link will not lead to unintended consequences such as box ticking exercises and developing off-the-shelf GEPs. Many RPOs have pursued or intend to engage with GEPs either due to existing national schemes or as part of a Horizon 2020 funded structural change projects (and possibly many more will do due to the new requirement introduced by the European Commission on accessing Horizon Europe funds). This requirement needs to be accompanied by a dynamic and flexible framework with a comprehensive and standardised (where possible) process, time transition points and support mechanisms to develop a robust and appropriate GEP (see next section for more on the architecture).

4.1.5   Processes and outputs

A Europe-wide scheme should also focus on certifying processes to structural change (a 'must have') and where possible, combine this with outputs (a 'nice to have'). Just over half of interviewees (55%) – amongst which many stakeholders who are currently managing existing CAs and EU policy makers – prioritise the scheme to focus on processes. As one interviewee said: 'at this stage, at the European level, we have to start with the processes that will produce results rather than starting with the outputs'. Processes would better drive institutional change, while outputs would be challenging to define as a common criterion across the EU.

Figure 5 Focus on processes or outputs?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to focus on processes or outputs? (n = 73)
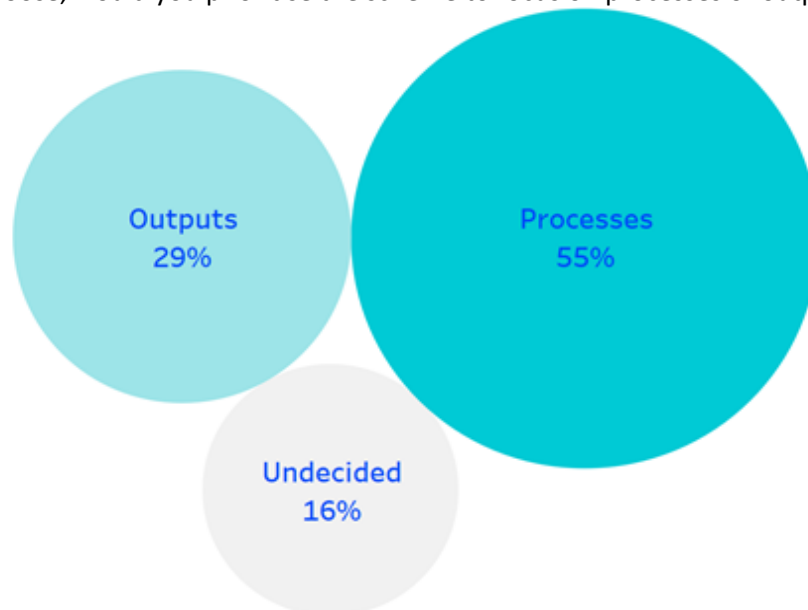

A combination of both processes and outputs was suggested by interviewees – even when they voiced a preference or not – and workshop participants since they are perceived as interconnected. Working on the processes will affect the output. A possible way to combine the two approaches is through a progressive approach that would allow organisations in different starting points of gender equality work to focus on processes and/or outputs in a differentiated way (this is discussed in the next section).

4.1.6   Voluntary character of the scheme with mandatory elements

A further prerequisite, supported by most workshop participants, was for any potential Europe-wide scheme to have a voluntary character. Most interviewees (62%) were also in favour of the scheme operating under a voluntary basis since it was considered "more motivating" and addressed concerns about lack of engagement if it became a mandatory legal requirement. While the overall character should be voluntary, there were suggestions about foreseeing mandatory elements within a Europe-wide scheme in terms of its timing and content. More specifically, introducing a transition phase was highlighted, making the scheme voluntary to start with, and thus giving it the opportunity to demonstrate its value and set up standards with the potential to become mandatory in the future. Secondly, blending mandatory and voluntary elements within the architecture (for example, mandatory modules combined with voluntary modules) to incite organisations to start allocating resources, build capacity and expertise and enable organisations to work towards more complex issues of a CAs. These suggestions will be explored within the architecture in the next section.

Figure 6 Mandatory or Voluntary?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to be mandatory or voluntary? (n = 73)
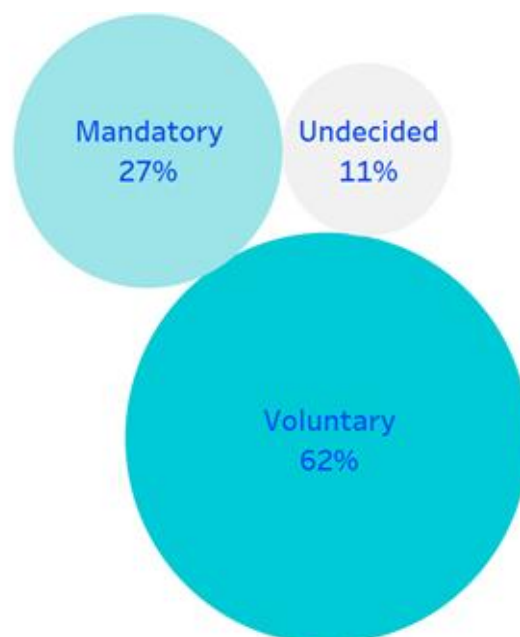
Considering the recent EC announcement that GEPs would be an eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe funding and that the GEP could be an integral part of a Europe-wide scheme, an incentive is established that makes participation partially mandatory (if organisations are interested in applying for EU funding) and partially voluntary (if they can decide not to apply for such funding).

4.1.7   A progressive approach

Most interviewees (77%) supported a progressive approach and it was also considered as a must have characteristic with Athena SWAN seen as an inspiring example, whereby departments and institutions are expected to progress from Bronze to Silver, and then Gold level. This approach provides incentives for organisations to progress and work towards. However, there are caveats with such a progressive approach as one participant commented: 'eventually you plateau and when you get to that plateau people start to lose interest, but it is nice achieving the goals'.

As organisational efforts on equality become more standardised and professionalised, there is a challenge of 'moving' goal posts – which can be discouraging for applicants that might be rejected on an application that would have been certified if it was submitted earlier in the initial operation of the CAs. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that structural and cultural change to address gender inequalities is dynamic and CAs including a Europe-wide scheme need a dynamic character to respond to evolving needs. To address such caveats, a Europe-wide scheme needs to be clear and explicit about what each level means and also consider combining rankings and awards, in addition to certification, to ensure that front-runners continue to innovate (this is operationalised in the next section). The support for a progressive approach was also reflected in the decision of workshop participants not to retain a non-progressive approach, i.e. pass/fail.

Figure 7 Progressive approach or not?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to adopt a progressive approach or not (i.e. Bronze, Silver, Gold)? (n = 73)
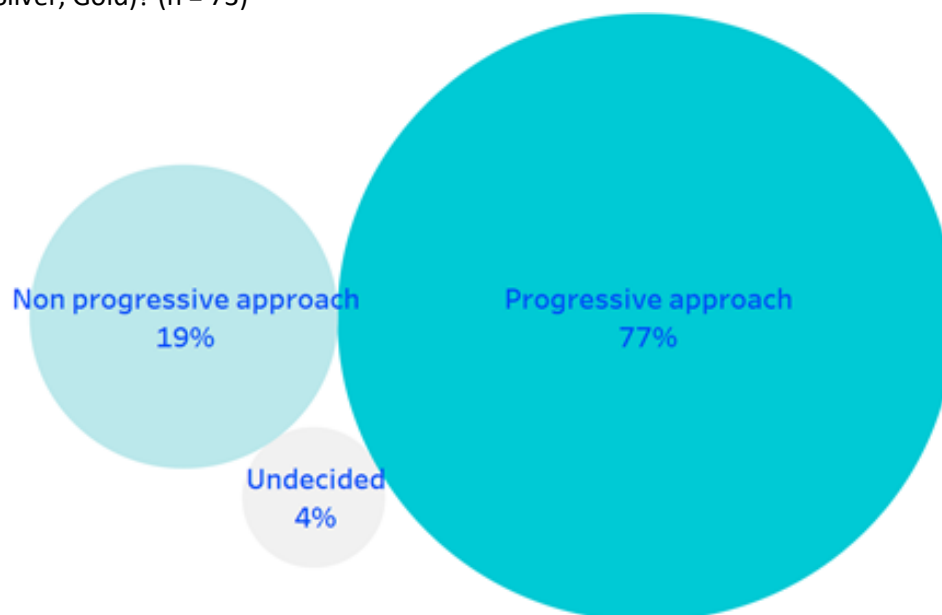

4.1.8   Time-bound

There was consensus amongst interviewees (99%) and all workshop participants regarding the necessity for a time-bound character of a potential Europe-wide scheme ('must have'). The renewal system enables organisations to regularly monitor change and ensure commitment is maintained but also allows to investigate whether measures are implemented, and objectives are fulfilled.

Most of the existing schemes are time-bound, with institutions applying for renewals after a considerable amount of time from one to five years. Interviewees thought that there should be a renewal every 3-5 years, otherwise organisations could stop, or slow down their efforts, especially if they reach a particular level. More time would enable institutions to implement time-intensive actions that demonstrate change (this would be of particular significance if a Europe-wide scheme relies on targets and progress set by the institution).

Figure 8 Time-bound or once only?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to be time-bound (e.g. max 3 years renewal) or once only? (n = 73)
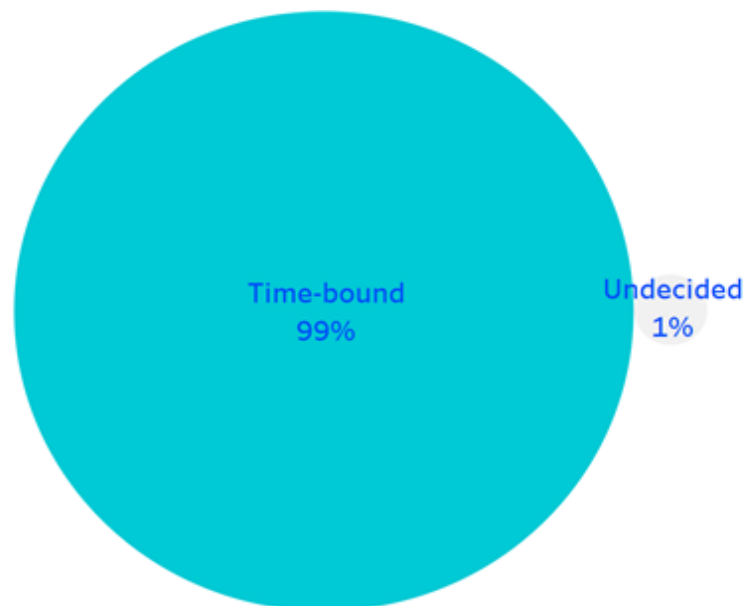

4.1.9   Qualitative and quantitative indicators

A combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators was also considered a 'must have' by the majority of workshop participants groups and by 48% of interviewees. Both are needed because 'one without the other is only just half of the reality', as it was commented by one interviewee. Even when interviewees expressed a preference, for qualitative (34%) and quantitative (18%), they overwhelmingly recognised that it could not be one fully at the expense of the other.

While quantitative indicators can capture a lot of information in a condensed and easy to understand manner, qualitative indicators can provide more in-depth and contextual information. At European level, there are many quantitative indicators in place providing the bigger picture of gender equality but there is a need for a process to be developed for collecting, analysing and presenting qualitative indicators to capture situated lived experiences in a consistent and systematic way and complement quantitative indicators. Quantitative and qualitative information was also perceived as significant for measuring cultural change through both metrics and qualitative evidence on whether/how cultures change.

Figure 9 Qualitative or quantitative indicators?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to focus on qualitative or quantitative data/indicators? (n = 73)
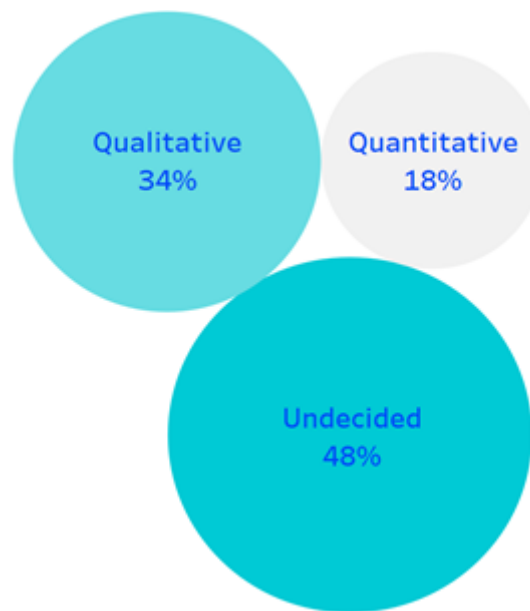
4.1.10 Who should be responsible for certifying?

Most interviewees (56%) – amongst whom more than half of representatives from bodies that manage an existing CAs and almost two-thirds of representatives of RPOs involved with a CAs – and workshop participants highlighted that ownership should lie within an EU institution. A central EU-based authority was perceived as the most appropriate institution to be responsible for the certification as it was associated with providing credibility and legitimacy to the scheme, making it more valuable, prestigious and visible. The EC is seen as a progressive actor that 'can have a soft push and create a catalytic effect' and their involvement would enable linking the scheme with incentives such as funding and encourage countries to take responsibility and support organisations that participate in the scheme.

Figure 10 Administered by third party or EU?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to be administered by a third-party organisation (e.g. NGO) or by an EU institution? (n = 73)
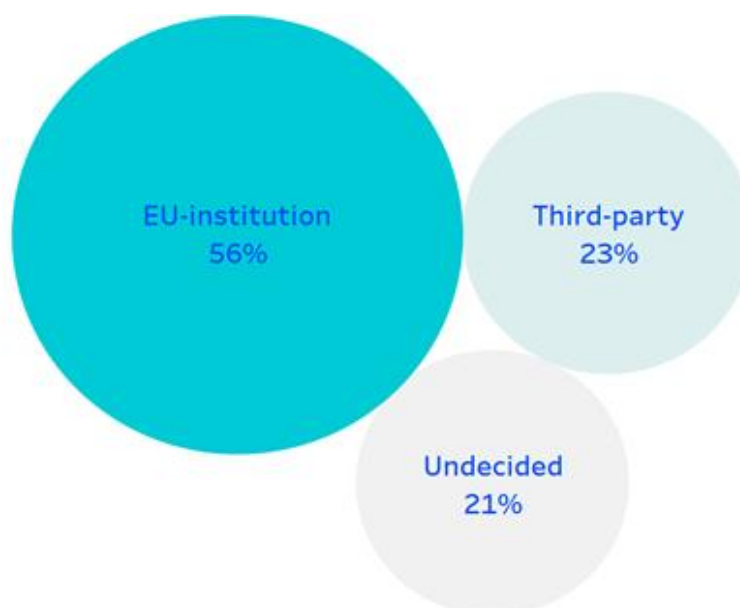
Both interviewees and workshop participants reflected on a combined approach where the scheme is owned by the European Union but managed by a third party, for example an accredited certifying body with expertise on certification and awards. This approach will bring all the legitimacy and prestige benefits from the EU involvement but would mitigate bureaucracy risks and ensure flexibility, operational capacity and agility in the management of the potential Europe-wide scheme.

4.2.   'Must haves' or 'nice to haves'

This section outlines the requirements that fell between the 'must have' and 'nice to have' by the workshop participants.

4.2.1   Harmonised (same scheme operating across all regions)

Any potential Europe-wide scheme would also face the challenge of accommodating differences across national contexts in establishing a shared minimal standard around different priorities. The mapping and assessment of existing schemes (D3.3) has illustrated how diverse the landscape is in terms of the degree of gender equality efforts within organisations in different member states, and the different areas of focus.

While interviewees were divided on whether to prioritise a harmonised approach (52%) or an approach tailored to the geographical context (47%), most workshop participants considered that any potential Europe-wide scheme should, if possible, be valid for all regions combined with tailoring to different contexts (as a 'nice to have'). Difficulties involved in harmonisation were highlighted along with a need for harmonisation, yet building in a degree of flexibility to adapt to different contexts where necessary. While harmonisation was perceived as important, especially if the Europe-wide scheme was connected with EU funding, it might entail risk for stakeholders' engagement. Proponents of tailoring to context – not only geographical but also institutional and disciplinary – argued that allowing this flexibility would 'encourage institutions to work on their specific weaknesses'. It was also

suggested that a Europe-wide scheme should consider a transition period taking into account the efforts that each country and organisation has carried out and allow countries/organisations to join.

Figure 11 Tailored to geographical context or harmonised?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to be tailored to the geographical context or harmonised? (n = 73)
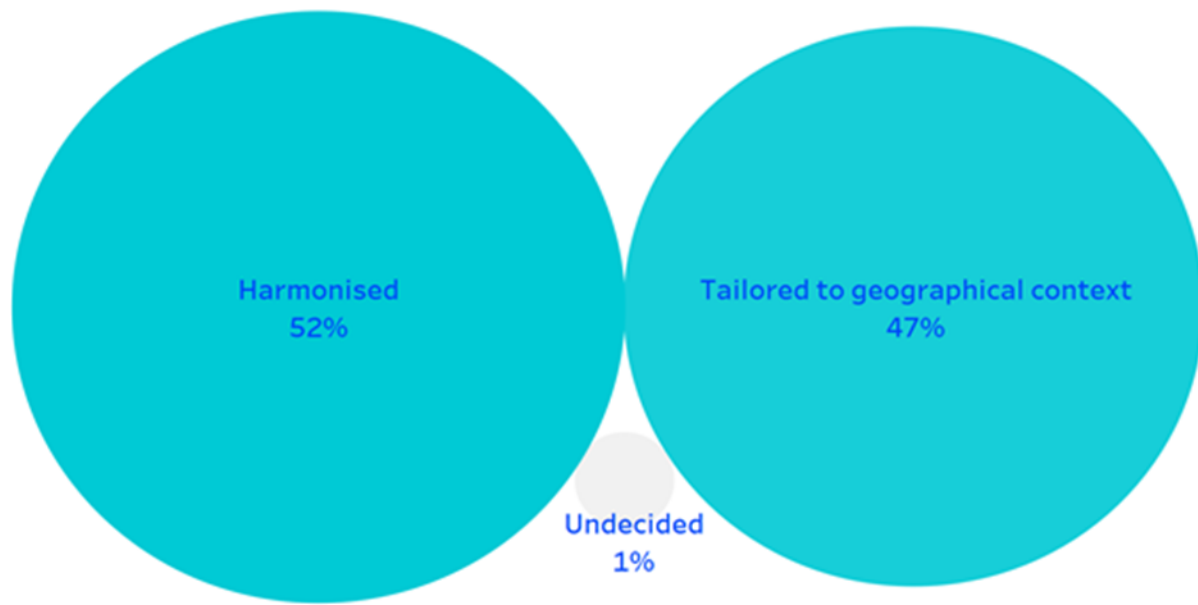
4.2.2   Evaluation using self-assessment and peer review

Linked to the processes vs outputs discussion, the assessment process is a key consideration and could be undertaken by self-assessment, peer review and/or external assessment. Despite the fact that 58% of interviewees favoured prioritising peer review over self-assessment (18%), interviewees found it challenging to choose between these two options, as reflected in the undecided category. A typical initial response from interviewees was "both" or "a combination of the two" since peer review can provide guidance and expertise. Similarly, workshop participants favoured a combination of approaches including 'external assessment' as a 'must have', followed by self-assessment and evaluation by peer review (although there was partial agreement on this). External evaluation (which could be interpreted as peer review or external consultants/experts) was seen as guaranteeing an objective, independent and ultimately fair review.

Figure 12 Self-assessment or peer review?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to rely on self-assessment or peer-review by external stakeholders? (n = 73)

Many existing schemes include a self-assessment process, where institutions conduct a diagnosis of the current situation in relation to gender, identify challenges and develop a GEP to address these challenges. This enables institutions to take responsibility, allocate tasks to respective units of the institution, and monitor and evaluate activities. Furthermore, in existing schemes the evaluation is undertaken by peers (for example academic and administrative staff in other RPOs than the applicant for schemes devoted to RPOs) or in some audit schemes (such as the Family Audit in Italy; Audit Hochschuleund familie in Austria[3]) are conducted by external reviewers (often consultancy companies specialising on this activity or external experts).

Proponents of the self-assessment method highlighted the significance of the reflection that an internal process like self-assessment creates. However, if it is stand-alone, institutions might define moderate objectives that lead to box ticking exercises rather than ambitious goals. Thus, it was highlighted how the self-assessment should be followed by external evaluation that would evaluate implementation, progress and achievements. The latter is considered necessary for veracity, objectivity and encouraging more critical approaches. Furthermore, evaluators should be appropriately trained to develop a common understanding of related concepts and criteria/indicators to ensure consistency of evaluation. A complementary approach that was particularly favoured by interviewees was the use of site visits as part of the assessment process which can provide surprising findings and enable assessors to 'dig a little deeper'.

4.2.3   Who should be certified?

There was a debate amongst interviewees and workshop participants about whether a potential Europe-wide scheme should target RPOs only or all organisations. Most interviewees (55%) and many workshop participants suggested that a certification scheme focused on RPOs could be a 'must have' or 'nice to have' since there is better comparability across countries in terms of working conditions and the scheme would be tailored to the sector and its particular characteristics. This was possibly

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[3] Schemes such as Meritus in Austria have allocated specific resources for the award ceremony, including design of trophy and gala

skewed by a greater number of participants working in RPOs or in schemes targeting RPOs. Many RPOs have pursued or intend to engage with GEPs either due to existing national schemes or as part of a Horizon 2020 funded structural change project (and possibly many more will do due to the new requirement introduced by the European Commission on accessing Horizon Europe funds). This community is also familiar with other EU-wide schemes and tools such as the European Credit Transfer System and HRS4R which aim at promoting mobility of students and researchers respectively and enhance transparency of academic qualifications and labour market conditions in the EHEA.

Yet, a considerate proportion of interviewees (40%) and some workshop participants suggested rolling out the Europe-wide scheme to all organisations including stakeholders in HE and Research, businesses, external stakeholders linked to RPOs and employers like trade unions organisations, professional associations and other social associations. Extending to all organisations was seen as a way to learn from each other, increasing harmonisation and impact, but also increasing collaboration and movement between different organisations.

Figure 13 Cover all organisations or stakeholders in HE and Research?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to cover all organisations (e.g. businesses) or only stakeholders in higher education and research (RPOs, RFOs)? (n = 73)
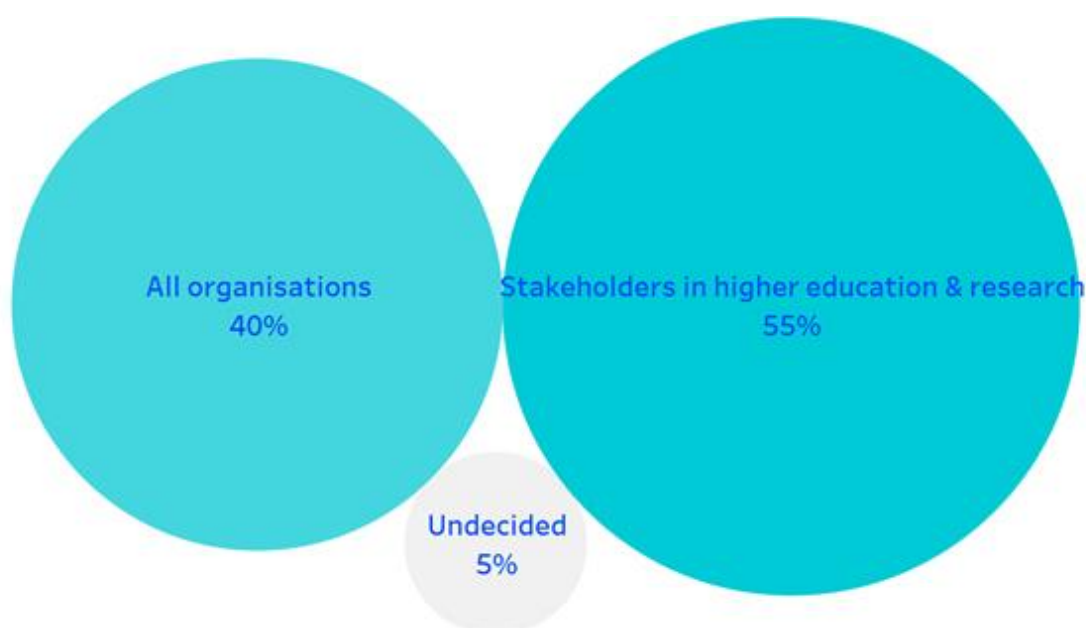
Targeting all organisations will enhance the complexity and potentially dilute the scheme. A transition process was suggested with a focus on RPOs only in the beginning but including stakeholders from all organisations in the consultation to build in considerations and insights with the potential for the scheme to be expanded in the future to all organisations

### 4.2.4   Who should pay?

Interviewees and workshop participants debated who should pay for the Europe-wide scheme, resulting in a combined approach (applicants, member states, EU) falling between 'must have' and 'nice to have'. A shared approach was favoured to ensure commitment from all stakeholders and a level playing field. Applicants should bear the cost because it demonstrates their commitment, and

makes it more likely they will take the scheme seriously and feel ownership over it. Such an approach would be beneficial because it would be self-sustaining. If a third-party organisation – often suggested as national governments and/or EU institutions – bore the cost, then it was envisaged that it would reduce potential obstacles towards engagement with the scheme and would encourage applications. This would also enable RPOs with fewer resources to engage with the scheme, addressing concerns regarding widening institutional inequalities. To reconcile these approaches, a differential fee structure was suggested according to size and resources of the institution, possibly considering national context as well. Several interviewees supported a mixed funding approach where both applicants and a third-party contribute towards the cost to ensure both commitment from RPOs and a level playing field.

Figure 14 Cost to be borne by applicants or third party?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the cost of the scheme to be borne by the applicants or by a third party? (n = 73)
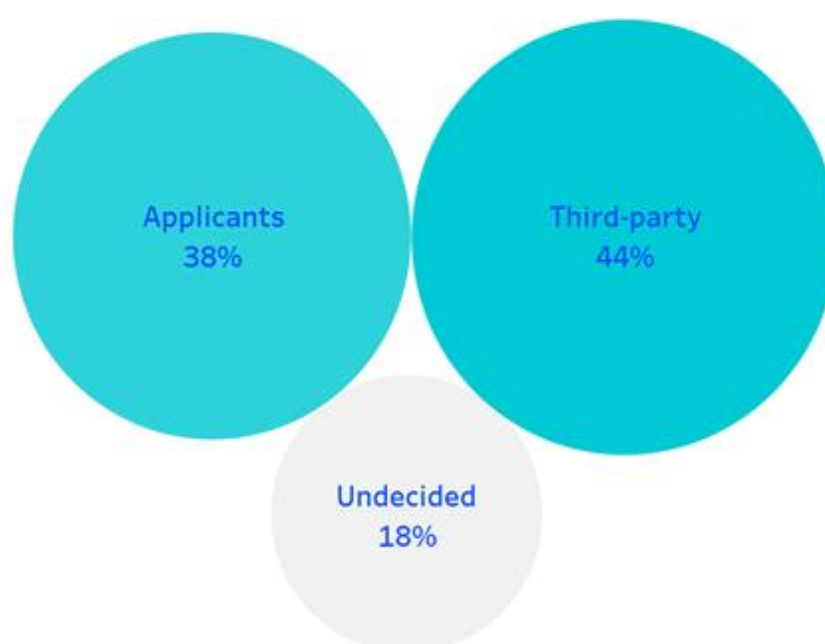
A few participants mentioned a transition phase where a European body and/or national authorities can provide financial support to set up the scheme and develop a baseline, subsequently followed by applicants paying in a 'sliding-scale' approach (differential fee per application depending on resources of organisations) in later stages of the scheme.

4.3.   'Nice to haves'

The following section considers the requirements for a potential Europe-wide scheme which were classified as 'nice to have' by the majority of workshop participants.

4.3.1   Diversity

One of the most contentious topics of the potential Europe-wide scheme was whether to focus on sex and gender, or instead have a broader remit. The majority of interviewees and workshop participants (67%) considered diversity important for a Europe-wide scheme, falling between a must have and nice to have. A wider scheme was seen as an opportunity to raise the importance of looking at intersections with race and ethnicity, faith and LGBT+ inclusion and address the concern that a gender focus can

take away attention, time and resources from supporting work on addressing other inequalities. On the other hand, a diversity focus would not allow to focus on gender as a priority and in a thorough manner, potentially opening up too many complex issues that could lead to challenges both in managing the scheme and in leading to superficial and box ticking approaches. Most managers of CAs reported that if they had a second chance in developing a scheme, they would have integrated intersectionality from the very beginning. While existing CAs encourage an intersectional lens, the primary focus seems to be on gender not only due to the limited availability of data on marginalised groups but also the absence of analytical frameworks that allow for intersectional analysis. The Gender+ approach as a 'must-have' addresses some of these considerations and provides the opportunity for diversity to be considered at first – and possibly integrated with time – in potential Europe-wide schemes.

Considering that many interviewees (67% - see Figure 15 below) supported a broader remit, an intersectional approach should be embedded encouraging organisations to consider intersectionality in collecting and reporting data where relevant issues are identified. Thus, it requires a consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders to lay the foundations for a wider fully-fledged inequalities scheme in the long term without jeopardising critical engagement and momentum required in the introduction of such a scheme.

Figure 15 Focus on sex/gender or broader in perspective?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to focus predominantly on sex/gender or be broader in perspective towards diversity/intersectionality? (n = 73)
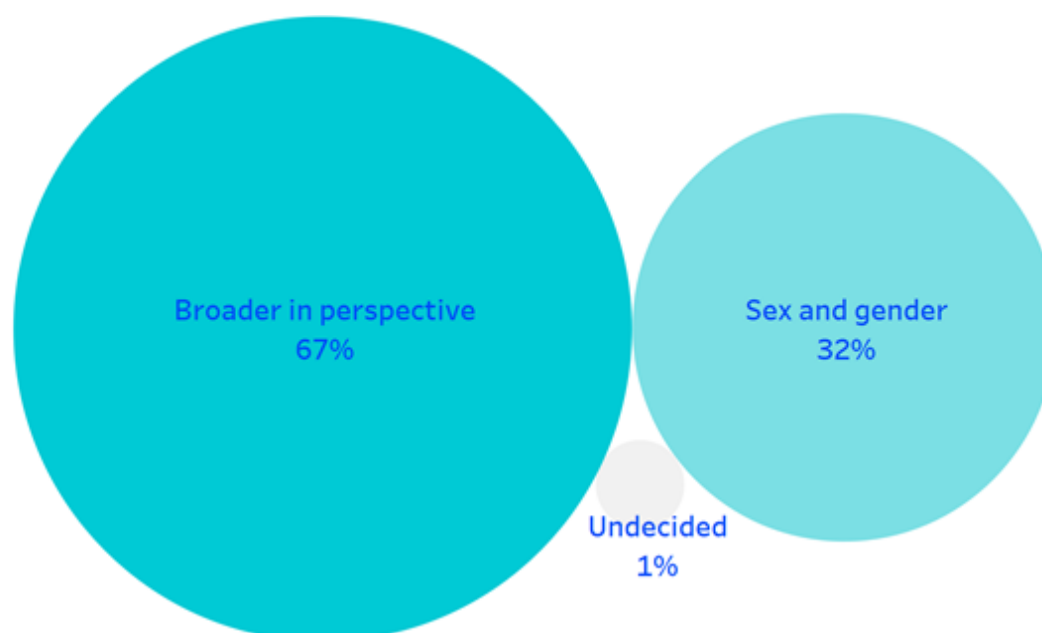
4.3.2   Linked to other schemes or stand-alone?

The majority of workshop participants[4] categorised linking any potential Europe-wide scheme to other schemes as 'nice to have', whilst making the scheme 'stand-alone' was considered less attractive. Interviewees' views were mixed, with 58% prioritising any potential Europe-wide scheme to be linked to other schemes and 37% prioritising any such scheme to be a stand-alone scheme. Several

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[4] Three out of the four groups

interviewees flagged the importance of linking a potential new scheme with the existing schemes they already engage with and participate in, such as the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) but also with national initiatives and/or existing national-level regulations and requirements for gender equality. This would ensure that existing efforts are recognised, and that having to commit additional resources is avoided. However, the supporters of a stand-alone scheme argued that it would not only be complex to integrate with other schemes, but it might also become marginalised, diluted and lose its influence. A few interviewees raised concerns about linking with existing activities arguing that it could disadvantage institutions/countries which have not engaged with gender equality work.

Figure 16 Linked to Other schemes or Stand-alone?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to be linked to other schemes or stand-alone? (n = 73)
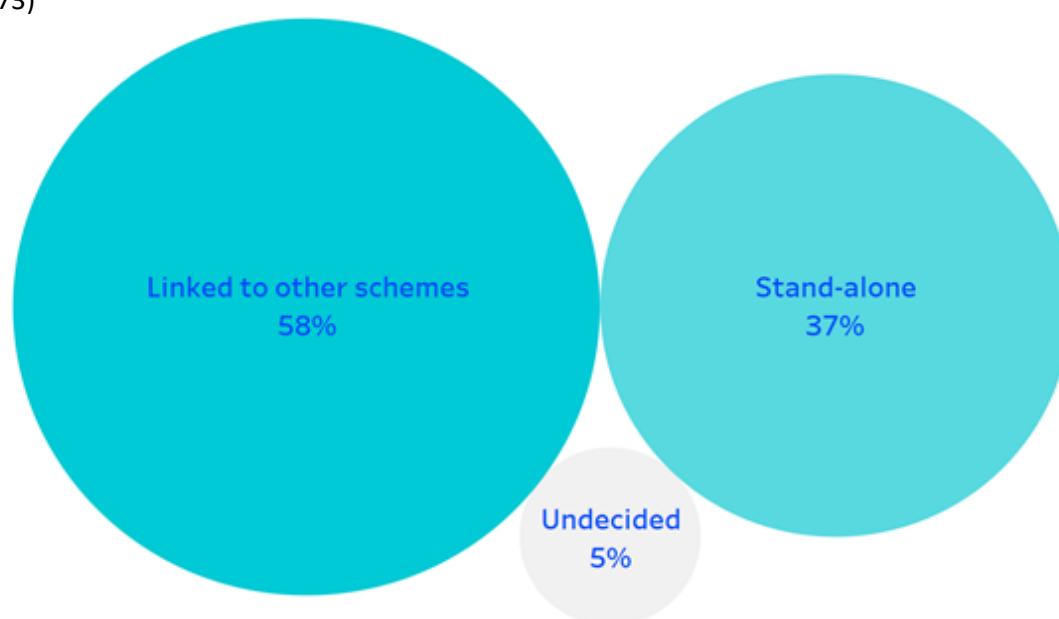
4.3.3   Linked to funding

Most workshop participants considered a link to funding as a 'nice to have' requirement, reflected also by 64% of interviewees. While the incentive of funding can act as a significant pull to engage with a Europe-wide scheme, there are concerns that it might widen existing differences between different institutions (and their respective starting point in relation to gender equality) and unduly hinder their research efforts. The link to funding was also seen as problematic because of its alignment to the business case argument, rather than motivated by creating a fairer and more inclusive working environment. Furthermore, such an approach has been perceived in existing CAs as an effort to regulate and enforce this activity resulting in backlash.

Figure 17 Linked to funding processes or not?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to be linked to funding processes or not? (n=73)
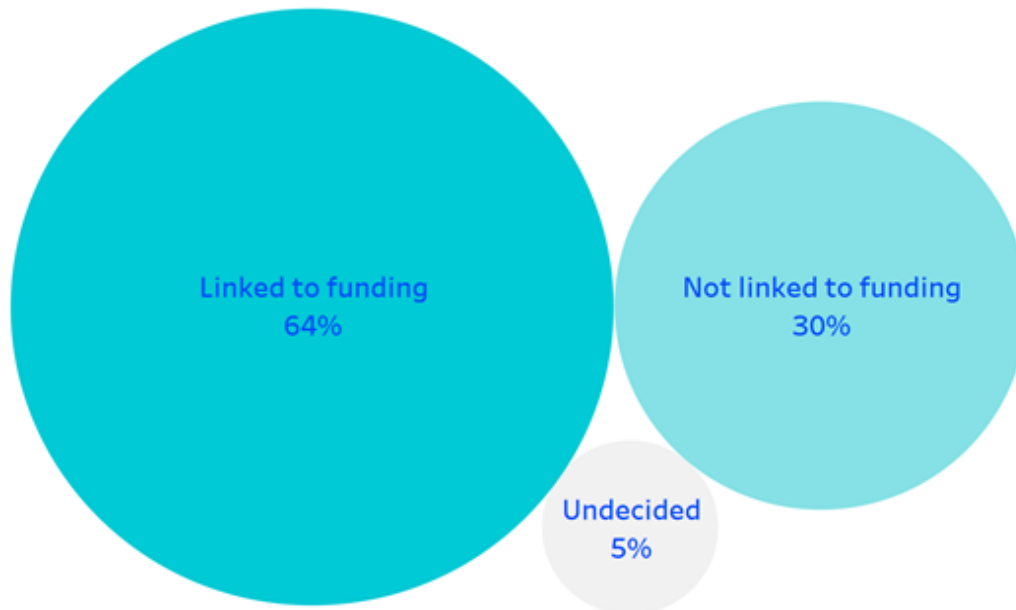
4.3.4   Linked to QA

Half of the workshop participants suggested that it would be 'nice to have' a link between Europe-wide scheme and Quality Assurance (QA) while the other half were not sure about it. This division is also reflected by the interviewees (51%) that would prioritise a link with QA. These different opinions reflect to some extent different understanding about how quality assurance is perceived. Interviewees involved in schemes targeting businesses often interpreted quality assurance in relation to International Standards Organisations (ISO). On the other hand, interviewees experienced with HE schemes raised the quality of science and existing QA schemes in HE. Interviewees raised concerns about complexity when linking with QA schemes, and the need to ensure that the quality aspects do not override gender equality aspects. Furthermore, the reliance of QA on hard indicators might not be appropriate for addressing gender or diversity issues. Finally, apart from different sectors, quality assurance varies across different countries, so it was considered too soon for a Europe-wide scheme to explore the possibility of establishing linkages.

Figure 18 Linked to Quality Assurance or not?

If you had to choose, would you prioritise the scheme to be linked to quality assurance schemes or not? (n = 73)
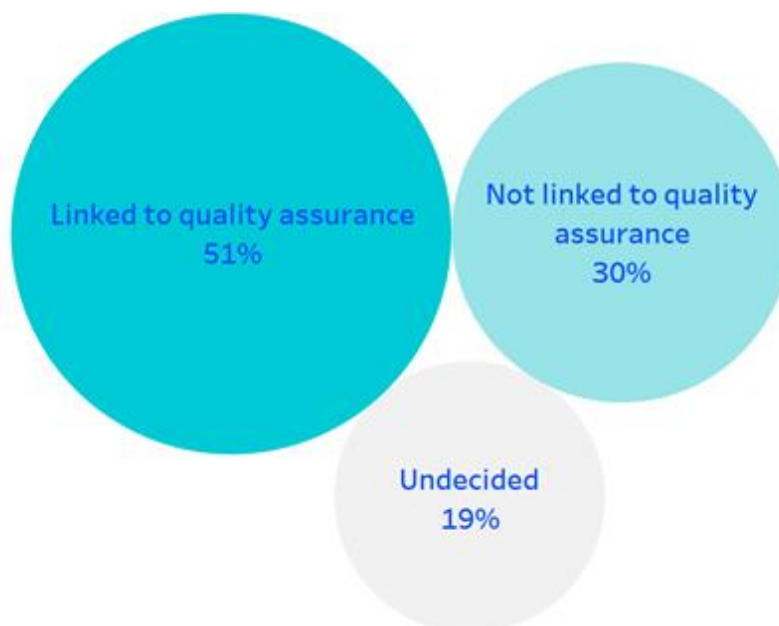
4.4.   Not sure/not retained

There were mixed views about various dimensions of a Europe-wide scheme that workshop participants were not sure about or thought should not be retained. Linking the scheme with rankings was a debatable issue since there are concerns about rankings leading to compliance and box ticking criticisms and measuring achievement relative to other institutions, rather than gender equality improvement in its own right. The mandatory application to a Europe-wide scheme was also considered as a dimension not to be retained to avoid backlash and reinforcement of inequalities across organisations and national contexts in gender equality work.

While specificity to subject domain can be helpful in community ownership and engagement to address collectively specific challenges to subjects, the majority of workshop participants and interviewees supported a general scheme that covers all scientific domains as a must have (mentioned above). Pass/fail approach and specific to subject domain were not retained as a progressive approach and covering all domains were respectively considered as a must have.

4.5.   Other considerations

4.5.1   Branding

An emerging theme from the interviews was the significance of marketing and branding a potential Europe-wide scheme, which was also discussed during the workshop. Branding was considered key to a successful scheme, and the name should be carefully selected so that it can resonate and be accepted. Various suggestions included: professionals in marketing to be involved; connecting visibility of the scheme with fundraising to attract sponsors as supporting organisations; a prolonged marketing campaign tied to roll out and running of a Europe-wide scheme leading up to a ceremony where awards would be conferred. A central awarding ceremony was actually emphasised as a key feature of existing schemes (especially in those targeting private sector organisations) for networking opportunities, enhancing visibility of the scheme and developing a community of practice.

4.5.2   Flexibility and limited bureaucracy

Many interviewees highlighted the importance of flexibility and avoidance of developing a burdensome bureaucratic scheme that would discourage potential applicants from participating and might reinforce inequalities between RPOs depending on their resources. However, several interviewees were quite explicit in their preference for a more demanding and critical certification, rather than something that could easily be 'bought and taken-off the shelf' and hence have no real added-value.

Additionally, any potential Europe-wide scheme should ensure that staff are not required to undertake additional work, without time allocation or incentives. Existing schemes have been criticised for the workload burden being borne disproportionately by women and under-represented groups which should be avoided in any future scheme. Administration of the scheme should not be excessively onerous, while the scheme should find a balance between encouraging institutions to do better and challenge themselves with a need to be robust.

4.5.3   Balance between simplicity and complexity

An associated but more contentious matter was the degree of simplicity/complexity in a Europe-wide scheme. While simplicity could encourage motivation and implementation of the scheme it could also lead organisations to 'ticking boxes'. On the contrary, complexity could make it more appropriate for ensuring solid equality work in a heterogeneous European landscape but would demand more resources and could decrease organisational motivation to engage. There is therefore a need for a balanced system that does not overwhelm institutions with the data and paperwork required, but that at the same time raises critical questions.

Figure 19, on the following pages, summarises where the must have and nice to have requirements and how these can inform a dynamic architecture of a Europe-wide scheme described in the next section.

Figure 19 How the 'must have' and 'nice to have' requirements can inform dynamic architecture

	Must have	Nice to have	Dynamic architecture (how it is considered in the suggested architecture)
WHY?			
Support and feedback	✓		Support and feedback should be accompanied in terms of the process and the module areas in the horizontal dimension. EU structural change projects outputs Gender Academy etc.
Link with funding		✓	Underpinning process is data collection, analysis, reporting and GEP. With the GEP requirement linked to EU funding, this link already exists
Link with QA		✓	This is not foreseen in the architecture due to the complexity it could add to the scheme but it could be discussed whether it could be accommodated within the dynamic architecture.
Link with other schemes		✓	Potential for equivalence pathways between existing CAs and EU-wide scheme (credit based)

	Must have	Nice to have	Dynamic architecture (how it is considered in the suggested architecture)
WHAT?			
Focus	Gender+	Diversity	Gender+ at the centre of the scheme with potential to transition to a diversity wide scheme. Potential for optional diversity modules
Certifying Processes/Outputs	Processes and outputs		With progressive approach and different starting points, it is possible to certify processes and/or outputs.
Link with GEP	✓		Ensuring GEP is a key part of the CAs process.
General – all subjects	✓		Subject specific work can be recognised through awards combined with certification

	Must have	Nice to have	Dynamic architecture (how it is considered in the suggested architecture)
HOW?			
Harmonisation	✓		Progressive approach and horizontal modularity enables both harmonization and tailoring to context
Tailored to context	✓		Data collection +GEP process similar templates but contextualised
Optional/mandatory		✓	While overall character of participation in the scheme should remain voluntary, there could be mandatory and optional modules
Progressive approach	✓		3 Levels with further point system. For example, 10 point ladder system Starting (1-3) Intermediate (4-7) Advanced (8-10)
Time-bound	✓		Renewal – to be further elaborated
Evaluation process	External assessment Self-assessment Peer review		A combination of self assessment, external review by experts and/or peer reviewers
Indicators	✓ Qualitative and quantitative indicators		Qualitative and quantitative indicators should be defined in the data process, collection and monitoring

	Must have	Nice to have	Dynamic architecture (how it is considered in the suggested architecture)
WHO?			
Who should be certified?	RPOs		RPOs with the potential to cover all organisations once established
Who should certify?	EU ownership and management by third party		To be explored whether an EU ownership and management by third party could be combined
Who should pay the cost?	EU pays Members states pay Applicants pay		A transition approach is suggested with the cost paid by third party (EU and member states) towards a combined approach with applicants (Differential approach depending on the national and organisational context of the applicant) and third party paying costs

	Must have	Nice to have	Dynamic architecture (how it is considered in the suggested architecture)
OTHER CHARACTERISTICS			
Flexibility	✓		Flexibility is ensured through the dynamic components between vertical and horizontal components
Balance between Simplicity/complexity	✓		Ensured by the dynamic components between vertical and horizontal components
Branding/Marketing	✓		Branding/marketing campaigns should be carefully designed. The combination of awards and certification with a good marketing campaign can be key for visibility and sustainability of the scheme

5.   Towards a dynamic architecture of a Europe-wide scheme

This section outlines suggestions and options based on views and opinions of 74 stakeholders across Europe and the combined expertise of the Consortium partners regarding key debates and considerations about a Europe-wide scheme on gender equality. These suggestions should inform stakeholders in the subsequent stages of this project and assist them in developing evidence-based arguments for the architecture of a Europe-wide scheme.

5.1.   A dynamic architecture for a Europe-wide scheme

Due to the complexity entailed in a Europe-wide scheme dealing with a multifaceted issue such as gender equality, it is key to introduce a dynamic and flexible architecture in content, approach and its accommodation of the national/cultural context. There is a need for a Europe-wide scheme to define gender equality, diversity, inclusion and related concepts to ensure that there is common discourse and cultural understanding across national contexts. This would be invaluable for ensuring clarity and consistency in the assessment process. Stakeholders in various countries may not share the same understanding of the requirements or have the same cultural contexts, for example regarding what inclusion means. Furthermore, it is important to define what success would look like if a Europe-wide scheme was operating successfully.

The diverse landscape of gender equality and CAs in Europe has highlighted that avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach is pivotal, and finding a pragmatic way to combine the requirements of harmonisation, yet within very different contexts, is essential. A dynamic scheme has the potential to strike a balance between encouraging institutions to do better and challenge themselves with a need to be robust and systematic. Providing different starting points and opportunities to progress further in gender equality work will contribute towards this balance.

If this dynamic architecture is perceived as a useful starting point for a Europe-wide scheme, further considerations are identified below that need to be discussed and elaborated upon to enable its operationalisation. Some of these considerations could be discussed by participants in the co-creation workshops.

The architecture could be designed in horizontal and vertical dimensions facilitated by a credit system. The number of credits would need to be defined: a) in relation to the modules (with potential to change over time if required) and b) to facilitate robust and consistent evaluation through a well-defined system with clear guidelines and a rigorous process. It would be key for the architecture to be underpinned by a robust and transparent conceptual framework, for example using Theory of Change[5].

> **Consideration 1: The credits assigned to building blocks/modules and accompanying support should be further discussed and elaborated upon**

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[5] 'Theories of change (ToC) are models of how change is expected to happen (ex ante case) or how change has happened (ex post case)' (Mayne, 2015, p.157). ToC is a systematic approach to programme design, monitoring, evaluation and learning that is especially useful in complex problems that require transnational responses and multi-stakeholder approaches such as climate change, food security, water management. It enables articulating assumptions behind thinking and strategic choices, challenging gender assumptions, in a contextualised and power sensitive way. It has the potential to enable continuous critical and reflexive practice in programmes and organisations.

Figure 20 Graph on architecture
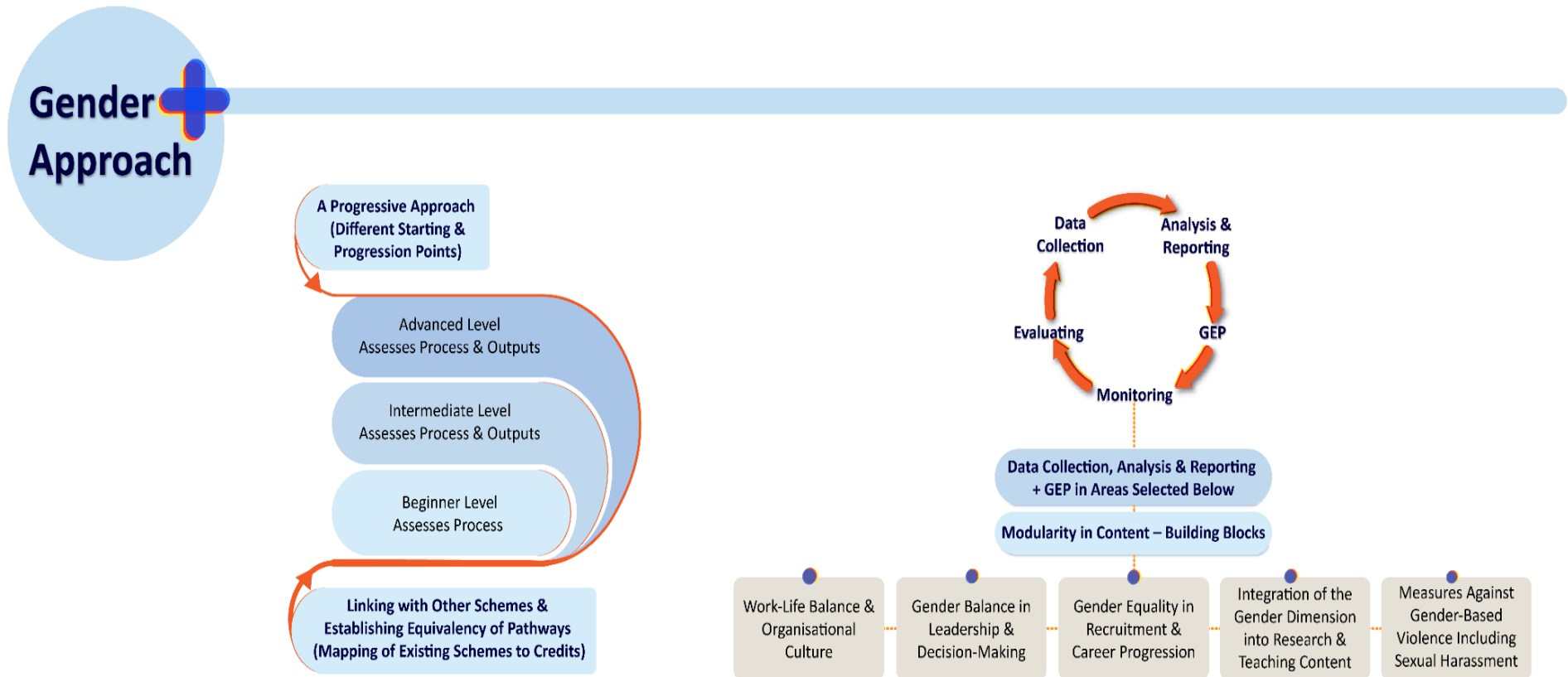
5.2.   A Gender+ approach and diversity considerations

The architecture of this scheme proposes a Gender+ approach at its centre. As mentioned in section 4.1.2, a Gender+ approach allows focusing on gender in sufficient depth with other axes of inequality addressed (such as race, ethnicity, faith, LGBT+ inclusion and others where possible). This approach ensures that gender is foregrounded rather than targeting simultaneously diverse issues in a superficial way. Further, it overcomes complexities in the operationalisation of the scheme (challenges establishing minimal standards across Europe in diversity and managing the scheme; too many areas of consideration might lead to superficial approaches).

This approach encourages a wider consultation of stakeholders on issues of race, sexual orientation, disability, faith from the very beginning to lay the foundations for a scheme that could transition to a wider equality focus of the scheme in the future once it is established in addressing gender issues and has ensured a smooth and efficient operationalisation.

5.3.   Horizontal modularity

There is a plethora of themes that have been covered by existing schemes: recruitment, promotion and career progression; leadership and decision-making; the gender pay gap; work-life balance; gender bias(es); gender-based violence and sexual harassment; and organisational culture. In contrast, the gender dimension in research and teaching is not often included in current schemes despite being a priority in EU policies and contributing towards 'fixing the knowledge'. Horizontally, the content of the Europe-wide scheme is outlined in a modular approach with each module representing an area of interest. These themes have been organised in five module blocks: work-life balance and organisational culture; gender balance in leadership and decision-making; gender equality in recruitment and career progression; integration of the gender dimension in research and teaching content; and measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment.

To facilitate engagement from organisations that have not had experience in these areas, the scheme could encourage the compilation of a wealth of resources, tools and workshops already produced as part of EU-funded projects and activities on this area. This would help organisations to design and implement pertinent and effective actions on gender dimensions in research and teaching (as part of the wider support required for all modules and processes in the architecture).

It should be decided how this modularity would work in a Europe-wide scheme, to enable bringing together harmonisation along with contextualisation (which fall within 'must have' and 'nice to have'). As part of this approach, it should also be considered whether and which some of these modules can be mandatory and/or optional. The mandatory character of modules can be beneficial in encouraging organisations to build capacity and expertise in various areas and invest in meaningful change, establishing a minimal standard and contributing towards harmonisation. However, it will probably require more resources and thus potentially limit engagement from organisations. The optional character of modules can provide more freedom and flexibility to organisations to pick and choose which are relevant to their context (identified areas for action, organisational objectives and vision) and slowly build upon different aspects of gender equality, an approach that will enable a smoother transition to organisations that have not engaged with gender equality work. Similarly, this might lead organisations to compliance and box ticking exercises rather than engaging meaningfully with the CAs. A combined approach should be considered since it can complement the benefits from both mandatory and optional character and mitigate some of these concerns. Nevertheless, the decision

about which modules should be mandatory/optional can have wide reaching implications since it could drive organisations in prioritising gender equality in particular topic areas, neglecting others.

Both approaches are in alignment with the dedicated resources that the European Commission requires as part of the GEP (such as funding for staff posts like Gender Equality Officers and workload planning and recognition for staff working on gender equality in the organisation).

> **Consideration 2: It should be considered whether and which modules can be mandatory and/or optional, and how these might be linked with the different levels in the vertical progression that would need to be further defined.**

It should be considered whether efforts and actions to address wider equality issues beyond Gender+ might also be enhanced by dedicated modules horizontally (for example there is a diversity add-on module in the German TEQ scheme). More specifically, there can be modules devoted to race, disability etc. with credits assigned to them. This approach can enable organisations to establish equivalence pathways between different schemes with recognising existing efforts of organisations towards other CAs on these topics (for example, Race Equality Charter Mark, Diversitas, Stonewall, Disability Standards etc). In the long term, this would facilitate learning and sharing and potentially lay the foundations for a transition towards a more diversified equality scheme. Establishing equivalency pathways and credits requires a systematic and robust mapping of existing CAs that could rely on D3.3 as its starting point.

> **Consideration 3: The building blocks/modules can overlap so explicit guidelines should be developed to outline the boundaries between the questions/issues these modules focus upon and/or identify an approach to recognise efforts in overlapping areas.**

It is key to establish that this modular approach needs to be underpinned by a simultaneously standardised and contextualised approach in data collection, analysis and reporting (in a self-reflexive way) and an associated Gender Equality Plan (GEP) targeted at addressing challenges identified through the data within the respective areas-modules selected by the institution. This is envisaged as a continuous cyclical approach starting with data collection, analysis and reporting, leading to GEP design and implementation, followed by recurrent data collection for monitoring and evaluation. This approach needs to include: sex-disaggregated data across all staff categories, annual reporting of gender imbalances across job categories and leadership positions and a comprehensive evaluation approach potentially including organisational culture data. This will enable organisations in establishing a baseline and a minimum standard across organisations.

> **Consideration 4: This standardised approach could be further elaborated upon to define a template and/or a checklist of data questions and indicators (quantitative and qualitative) with guidelines on how to collect, analyse and report findings. Similarly, a template for designing a GEP could be developed along with conditions regarding its publication and ensuring commitment of senior leadership (see building blocks from EC). A Europe-wide scheme could add value by compiling resources and tools to enable institutions to integrate evaluation processes and outputs during the design of the GEP.**

While some quantitative indicators already exist at national and European level (for example She Figures), there is a need to develop a common qualitative approach in data collecting and reporting

to complement quantitative indicators. Qualitative indicators will be pivotal for a robust assessment and evaluation process in a Europe-wide scheme.

> **Consideration 5: More efforts should be focused on developing a common qualitative approach in data collecting and reporting to complement quantitative indicators. Thus, there is an opportunity for a Europe-wide scheme to provide added-value in assisting organisations to bring together quantitative and qualitative indicators and highlight the significance of understanding situated lived experiences.**

5.4. Vertical progression

Engagement with a Europe-wide scheme plays out differently for organisations based in countries that have more or less developed experience of, and attitudes towards, gender equality and structural change. In addition, it must be recognised that RPOs within any given country are heterogeneous, and can start from very different points, notably those that have already participated in an existing CAs or have been engaged with structural change projects under FP7 or Horizon 2020, for example. The dynamic architecture suggested can accommodate this heterogeneity of starting points and the different levels that organisations are at in terms of their gender equality efforts and achievements.

A Europe-wide scheme could be composed of different levels for organisations to join such as beginner, intermediate and advanced corresponding to certain content related modules and respective credits required. In terms of process and scope, "Beginner" could focus on initial diagnostics and awareness raising, "Intermediate" could focus on more advanced measures and the "Advanced" certificate could focus on the sustainability and institutionalisation of measures and involve specialisation in certain areas by, for example, integrating more intersectional perspectives or providing good practices in multiple modules. To accommodate a wide-ranging landscape of efforts even within these three categories, it could also be combined with a ladder system. For example, a 1-10 points ladder system could comprise 3 levels in Beginner (e.g., 1-3), 4 levels in Intermediate (4-7) and 3 levels in Advanced (8-10).

> **Consideration 6: The progression levels could be defined in relation to the number of modules and credits required to reach each level.**

This approach needs to be combined with a time-bound character - identified as a 'must have' - with organisations applying for renewal of their certification in different levels.

> **Consideration 7: How often organisations should renew and how many times they can renew in the same level needs to be discussed.**

Figure 21 Different starting points, engagement from organisations (why, what, how)

WHY?
- Learning
- Support
- Capacity building
- Incentives

WHY?
- Benchmarking
- International recognition
- Rewarding their achievements

Inactive organisations in GE work

Very active organisations in GE work

WHAT? HOW?

A learning tool, an instrument of change to provide support towards certification

Establish benchmark to later evaluate progress

Certify processes

Assess on the basis of:
- plans to be implemented in the future

WHAT? HOW?

A learning tool, an instrument of change to provide support towards higher levels of certification

A certificate to reward and recognise existing work (publicity tool)

Evaluate on-going progress and achievement

Certify processes and outputs

Assess on the basis of:
- what has been done in the past
- plans to be implemented in the future

This dynamic approach promotes the participation of organisations that not only want to learn and use the Europe-wide schemes as an instrument of change to support them towards certification, but also enables the rewarding and recognition of organisations that have already made achievements in GE work. Thus, the scheme can evaluate both progress and achievements, and certify processes and outputs with the potential to enable benchmarking in the future.

This progressive component would allow for recognising achievements already made in some organisations and would support those with less experience in CAs to start the process. Therefore, in terms of what organisations would be evaluated on, different levels should be defined in terms of certifying processes, outputs, or both. A focus on outcomes is more appropriate and useful for organisations and contexts where there is already a longer track-record of gender equality work (so

this would be more suitable to be linked with the "Intermediate" and "Advanced" levels). In contrast, organisations which are at an earlier stage could focus on putting processes in place, with a view to progressively integrating outcomes in the longer term (linked to "Beginner" levels). Evidence of processes for gender change can thus be considered as a minimum standard, with the dynamic introduction of outputs as work advances.

Consideration 8: The minimum standards need to be defined and elaborated

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The assessment and evaluation process needs to be clearly defined and elaborated upon with criteria and indicators that correspond to the principles and/or objectives of the scheme. This misalignment has often been criticised in existing schemes raising concerns regarding the robustness and transparency of CAs. In a complex Europe-wide scheme with various levels and modules, it is pivotal to invest time and effort to develop a transparent assessment and evaluation grid or rubrics[6] with levels of performance/achievement being defined in advance.

Consideration 9: An assessment and evaluation scoring grid should be developed which would include: a) which criteria should be included, how these should be weighted and scored underpinning different levels; b) which indicators should be present and how they should be defined in detail (e.g., quantitative indicators and qualitative indicators demonstrating levels of performance and/or achievement) and c) how these indicators should be related to the scoring system and different levels.

To ensure sustainability and avoiding the 'plateauing' of gender equality work for advanced organisations, the 'advanced' levels could reflect amongst others: a) a greater degree of embedding and institutionalisation of actions and measures within organisations; b) transformative and sustainable activities that advance gender equality and/or Gender+ work; c) engaging and impacting on the wider societal context in which the organisations operate (e.g. reflecting on the social value of their external activities and relationships with other organisations) and d) leading activities and programmes to engage the sector for systemic change in gender equality. The Europe-wide character of this CAs can become the catalyst for more collective action of organisations in gender equality to transform not only the institutions but the wider research performing system (if it focuses on RPOs).

In terms of evaluation processes, this approach could require the combination of self-assessment (data collection, analysis, reporting and GEP) in selected building blocks/modules with external experts of external peer reviewers with expertise in respective modules). Site visits have been highlighted both as a particularly useful form of evaluation but a resource intensive and challenging one at the same time. While some might argue that site visits would be more important in the more advanced levels to monitor achievements and ensure accountability towards achievements, in a couple of existing schemes they were also used to raise awareness and ensure senior leadership commitment at starting levels.

Consideration 10: It should be further discussed where and how site visits should be used considering their usefulness and their resource intensiveness.

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[6] "Rubrics are tools that help to formalise processes of evaluation or assessment by outlining agreed upon criteria that mark different levels of performance. Rubrics can be tailored to meet context specific needs rather than referring to seemingly 'objective' outside criteria, i.e., type and degree of change between the different criteria can be chosen on a case by case basis." (UNIFEM, 2010:45)

5.5.   Support and feedback

There was overwhelming consensus over support and feedback to be provided by a potential Europe-wide scheme. In this dynamic architecture, support could also follow a flexible approach, providing resources on how to fulfil the mandatory module (training, templates and resources on collecting quantitative and qualitative data) and the optional modules (training, resources). In this effort, EU-funded projects on structural change can become an important source of learning and support and lay the foundations for a European community of practice potentially building on efforts of GenPort and ACT projects. A review of the resources, tools and guidance developed through the EU funded projects and existing CAs would be key to bring together and develop a comprehensive database of support (structured around the different modules of the Europe-wide scheme) instead of reinventing the wheel. Tailored feedback to applications was considered a strength for various existing schemes, thus this parameter should be considered potentially by building a register of experts (which could be combined with the EC expert database already in place and/or the community of gender trainers at the GE Academy) in different modules which could provide specific and constructive feedback to applicants. Furthermore, such an approach could operate using centralised administration with relevant resources and support, which would coordinate a network of 'national contact points' for mutual learning and exchanging information.

5.6.   Awards co-existing with certification

In the current CAs landscape, awards are perceived as highly visible and promoted in the media but criticised for their temporal character and not allowing for follow up. On the other hand, certification is perceived as more appropriate for continuous improvement.

This dynamic architecture enables the co-existence of certification with awards. Various award categories can be established to recognise gender equality work with credits assigned to them. These awards could feed into the certification process. For example, awards assigned for the best practice under each module, but they could also be stand-alone:
-    Awards for individuals/ networks beyond organisations leading gender equality work
-    Awards for good practices in modules specified that advance Gender+ work
-    Awards for methodologies and tools
-    Intersectionality award
-    Organisational mentoring award (organisations mentoring other organisations)
-    Sustainability and transformation awards

5.7.   Architecture considerations and transitions

The architecture requires a dynamic combination of dimensions and characteristics that could change over time e.g., the focus of the Europe-wide scheme (from Gender+ to diversity) or the target audience of the scheme (from RPOs to all organisations), the content, weighting and choice of optional and mandatory modules. The aims, objectives and goals of the scheme should be clearly set out initially together with ways to tackle resistances and misunderstanding towards the scheme.

National governments can play a key role in facilitating and supporting organisations to engage with a Europe-wide scheme in various ways: align national policies and priorities with the objectives of the scheme, link national quality assurance schemes with the Europe-wide scheme, ensure involvement of national stakeholders such as national Ministry representatives as part of the Advisory Board of the

scheme, establish and fund national support networks (potentially through research funding organisations) for knowledge exchange and sharing) and pay for part or all of the cost.

In terms of responsibility for the costs, a transition phase was also recommended that comprised of a third-party providing financial support to set up the scheme and free participation for piloting, followed by a 'sliding-scale' approach (differential fee per application depending on resources of organisations) covered by applicants as this is seen as important for applicant organisations to take the scheme seriously. Several stakeholders proposed that national governments also need to demonstrate commitment and provide resources to support organisations within their national context to build capacity for engaging with a potential Europe-wide scheme.

Branding was considered key to a successful scheme, and a central awarding ceremony would be an ideal opportunity for networking opportunities, enhancing visibility of the scheme. A ceremony to mark the opening of any potential Europe-wide scheme would also be a good opportunity to set out the aims, objectives and goals of the scheme. A ceremony linked with a conference would also enable sharing and learning from each other's practices and knowledge. Schemes such as Meritus in Austria have allocated specific resources for the award ceremony, including design of trophy and gala dinner, to develop a recognisable brand for sponsors and applicants.

6.   Conclusions

To conclude, we suggest a dynamic architecture for a Europe-wide scheme that should form the basis for a series of co-creation intensive workshops to define in detail what a Europe-wide scheme on gender equality should look like and how it should be operationalised.

As key components, we recommend that this scheme should be foregrounded by a Gender+ approach and should be underpinned by a process that would enable organisations in developing realistic, meaningful and transformative GEPs. A Europe-wide scheme should bring together certification and award aspects to enhance its flexibility and enable recognition of continuous institutional change along with celebrating different types of achievements in terms of context, content and time-horizon.

The dynamic architecture combines a horizontal modularity (comprising different building blocks and modules) with a vertical progressive approach that would enable not only a level of harmonisation (establishing a minimum standard) with contextualisation requirements but would also facilitate engagement from organisations at different starting points of their gender equality work, as expressed by the stakeholders consulted in this phase of the project.

While this architecture appears complex, a much more complex undertaking is now in sight. Co-creation, consultation and an evidence-based approach are required to define in detail the objectives, processes, mechanisms, assessment/evaluation criteria and indicators required. Only in this way a dynamic architecture for a Europe-wide scheme will be transparent, robust and attractive for organisations and stakeholders to engage.

7.   Acknowledgements

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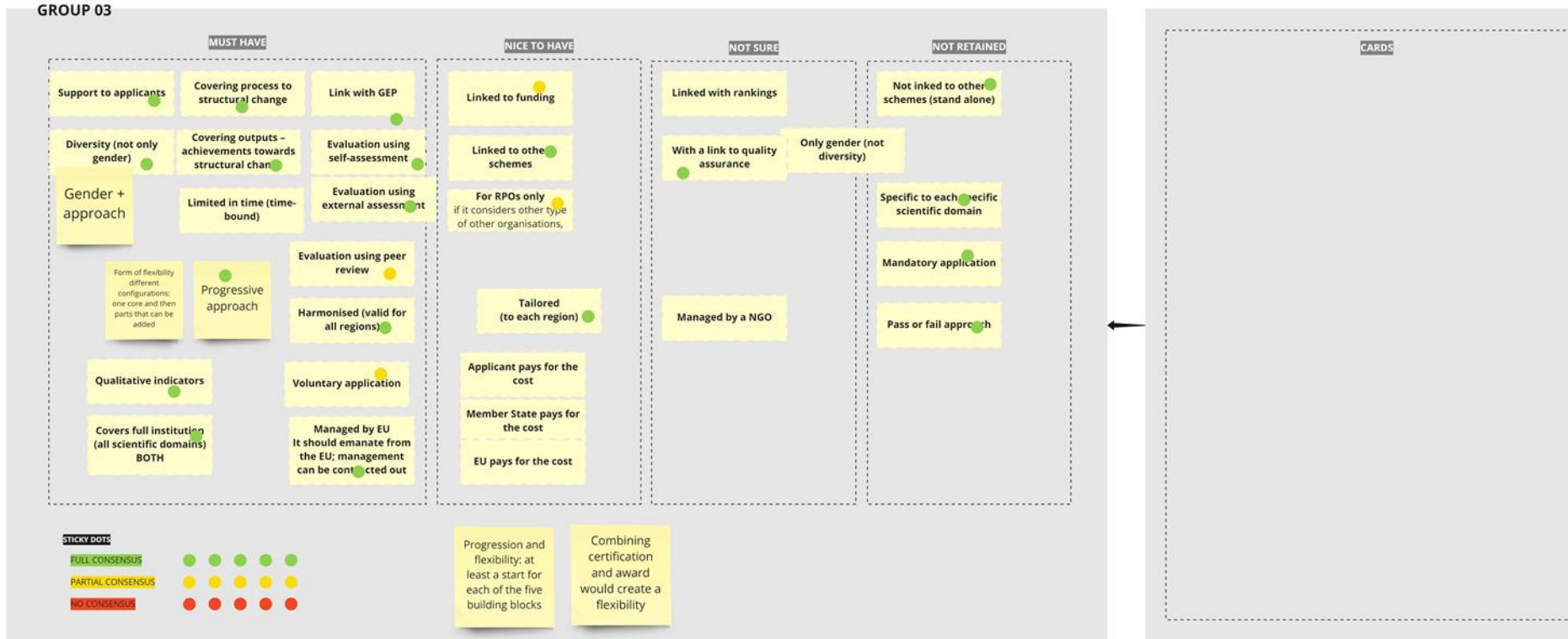
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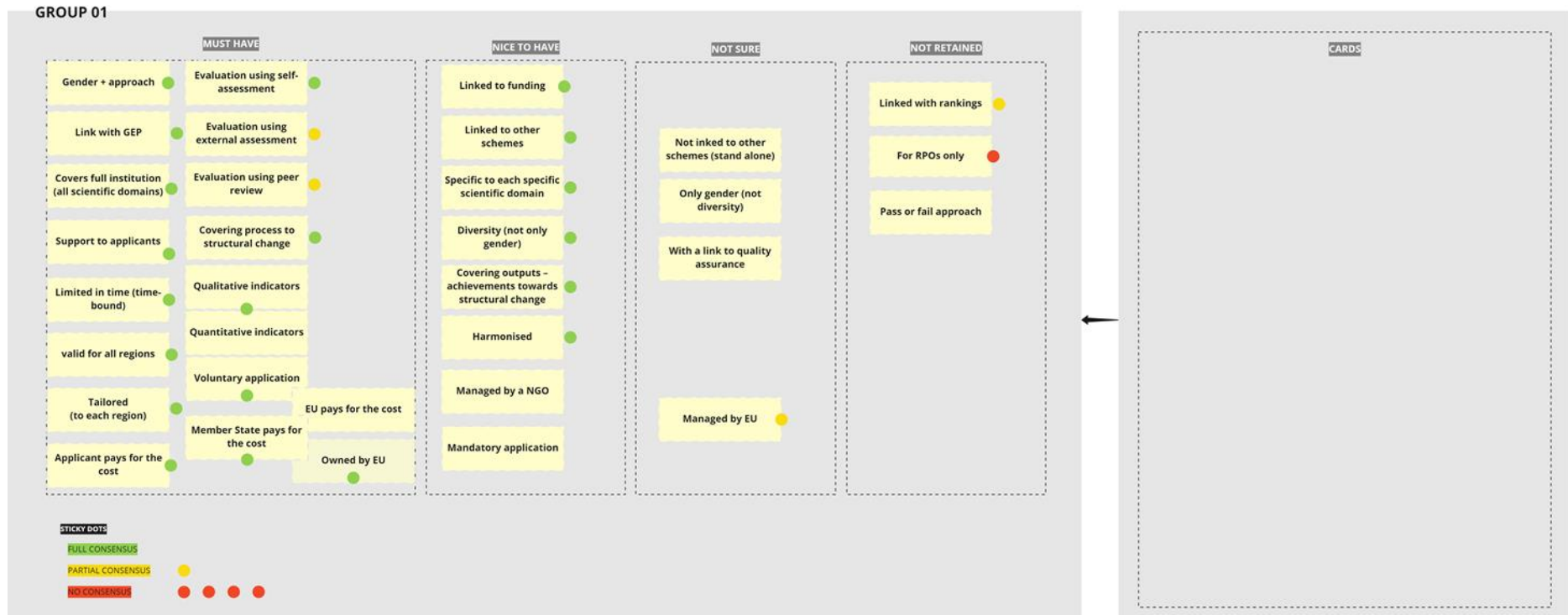
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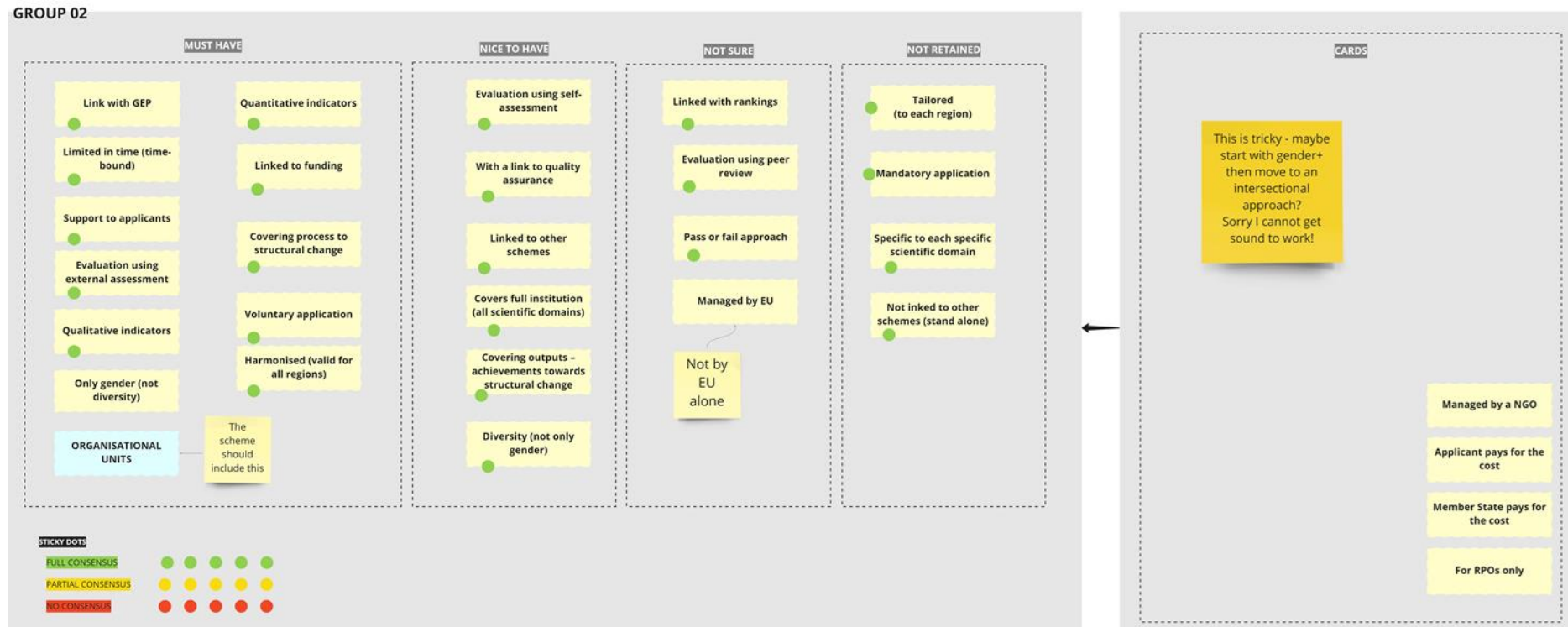
11.   Appendix 3 – Group 3 Miro board

12.   Appendix 4 – Group 4 Miro Board