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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Council

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Subject: Key events and activities held under the Slovenian Presidency  
- Report by the Presidency

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Delegations will find attached a Report from the Presidency on “Key events and activities held under the Slovenian Presidency” with a view to the AOB items at the meeting of the Competitiveness Council on 26 November 2021.

**KEY EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES HELD UNDER THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY**

**REPORT BY THE PRESIDENCY**

General overview

The Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU began on 1 July 2021 with the clear ambition to continue the work set out by the “Trio Roadmap for Research and Innovation” – Building a resilient, sovereign and sustainable Europe, developed in close collaboration with Germany and Portugal. By mid-December, the Slovenian Presidency will have organised 13 events in the field of research and innovation with a very clear overarching objective – to guide and support the joint process of renewing the European Research Area (ERA) in order to facilitate the European vision of knowledge, education and research for a green and digital future. In achieving this objective, the Presidency directly addressed the four overarching priorities of inclusive governance, knowledge and skills, green transition and the digital transformation.

Key events held since September

**1. New ERA Conference - Towards a responsible knowledge driven society of the 3rd Millennium (26 - 27 October 2021)**

The hybrid new ERA Conference hosted approximately 300 online and on-site participants, focusing mainly on key stakeholders of the ERA. The objective of the Conference was to gather recommendations to kick-start the implementation of the new ERA Policy Agenda for the following three years. The Conference centred on stakeholders’ involvement with the aim to formulate and voice existing needs and realistic recommendations that would facilitate implementation of the renewed policy objectives. Additional purposes of the Conference were to improve stakeholders’ understanding of the ERA, to increase linkages between stakeholder communities and develop a common understanding of their needs, which should be reflected in the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (the Pact for R&I) and the ERA Policy Agenda.

## **2. The 2021 MSCA Presidency Conference – Fostering balanced mobility flows in Europe (15 – 16 November 2021)**

Through the online Conference, the Slovenian Presidency provided a platform for 350 participants to hold in-depth discussions on unbalanced mobility flows and the reintegration of researchers. The objectives of the Conference were to raise awareness of the importance of return mobility and reintegration processes to foster balanced mobility flows of Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) researchers and showcase examples of existing good practices, barriers, instruments and policies to promote the return migration and reintegration of MSCA fellows, bringing their research careers, knowledge, and skills, back to their country of origin at the end of their fellowship. The Conference also offered recommendations for the implementation of MSCA return migration and reintegration instruments and policies at EU, Member State, research organization and individual levels.

### Upcoming events

## **3. ESFRI Days (6 – 7 December 2021)**

The Slovenian Presidency and the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) are pleased to invite you to the ESFRI Days that will be conducted in a virtual format from 6 - 7 December 2021. “ESFRI Days” will feature the ESFRI Roadmap launch event, complemented by the 78th ESFRI plenary meeting. After a two-year long process of hard and meticulous work by a great number of scientists and ESFRI delegates, a new ESFRI Roadmap will be published. The Roadmap will include 11 new Research Infrastructure (RI) Projects and report on the development of RIs in the previous Roadmap. The ESFRI Stakeholders Forum, a newly established platform developed by ESFRI with the ambition to instigate an open dialogue among the different European RI stakeholders, in order to reinforce the position of RIs as an essential pillar of the European Research Area (ERA), has been postponed.

## Files and dossiers

A number of legislative and non-legislative acts and files have already been successfully approved or adopted during the Slovenian Presidency, with more to come. In addition to the files adopted or approved by the Council, we would especially like to highlight the **Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation**. 34 parties, including Member States, the Commission, Associated Countries, Accession Countries and third countries, have endorsed the Declaration.

The Ljubljana Declaration refers to shared European values and calls on Member States and other countries to fully acknowledge gender mainstreaming as a horizontal principle and jointly work on improvement in six priority areas of gender equality, which include, for example, gender based violence, monitoring and evaluation of adopted measures or support of gender equality plans. The Declaration was drafted "bottom up", with the support of the current and upcoming Trio Presidencies SWG GRI representatives. We are pleased that the efforts that went into preparing the Ljubljana Declaration will bear fruit in the ERA Action within the new ERA Policy Agenda on promoting gender equality and fostering inclusiveness.

## Horizontal activities

**The Plastic Pirates initiative** launched during the Germany – Portugal – Slovenia Trio Presidencies has been one of the flagship initiatives of the new ERA Policy Agenda. Its objectives are in line with the goals of the green transition and rely on the citizen science approach to foster public awareness on both the need for a cleaner and greener future, but also on the significance of research in our everyday lives. The Plastic Pirates initiative featured highly on the agenda of a number of the Slovenian Presidency events. Slovenia will continue to cooperate and help develop the initiative beyond its mandate as the Presidency of the Council of the EU.



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Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

## Ljubljana Declaration *Gender Equality in Research and Innovation*

### Core Principles and Priorities

Achieving gender equality is one of the core, shared values of the new European Research Area (ERA). Combatting existing gender inequalities has the full support of the endorsing parties of the Ljubljana Declaration, to ensure that Research and Innovation (R&I) policies on all levels, European, national, and regional, are fair and inclusive in the broadest sense, through open and transparent involvement of all relevant actors.

We reiterate the importance of gender equality objectives, including gender equality in research careers, gender balance in decision-making, and the integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content. We recognise gender equality as a driver for optimal and sustainable research and technological systems. We therefore must ensure that gender equality and inclusiveness are central to the **Pact for R&I in Europe**, and across its links with complementary European initiatives such as through higher education, innovation ecosystems, international cooperation and Cohesion policy funds.

It is encouraging that in recent years, many Member States and Associated Countries have adopted laws, policies and strategies to achieve sustainable institutional change driving gender equality, inclusion and diversity. However, a gap persists between the adoption of policies and strategies and their implementation at institutional level. This is mainly due to an ongoing reproduction of outdated gender norms, unfair hierarchies and power structures, a limited prevalence of gendered knowledge and a lack of available resources to implement measures on combatting existing gender inequalities.

We need to join forces to strengthen the commitment of Member States and other countries to the implementation of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the new European Research Area and to outline the priority areas to be addressed to foster an inclusive European Research Area for all.

We are committed to the following priorities and activities to ensure all are equally able to participate in the delivery of high-quality R&I to address our greatest challenges:

- Ensure fair, open, inclusive and gender equal career paths in research, and consider intersectional perspectives on gender inequalities;
- Facilitate mutual learning opportunities through form-follows-function robust governance;
- Employ existing and newly developed tools, such as Gender Equality Plans, to facilitate systemic institutional change and remove institutional barriers;
- Address and counteract gender-based violence;
- Support active monitoring and evaluation to ensure continuous improvement; and
- Leverage synergies to enhance gender equality achievements within the European Research Area, but also within complementary fields such as the European Higher Education Area, Cohesion policy funds, innovation ecosystems, as well as in international cooperation.

The need to fully acknowledge gender mainstreaming as a horizontal principle underpins these priorities and activities. Gender equality, together with inclusiveness, social inclusion and diversity, is intrinsic to the shared value of democracy – **a crosscutting issue for the whole of society**. Gender equality contributes to the **integrity and societal responsibility of research**, leveraging scientific and technological quality to higher standards, namely through the gender dimension in research and innovation. Through the new European Research Area, and the forthcoming **Pact for R&I in Europe**, we must provide a structure to address gender equality as a horizontal issue, mainstreaming gender across priorities and facilitating policy coordination, exchange and mutual learning.



### **Inclusive research career paths**

Fair, open, equal and inclusive career paths are essential in the pursuit to mainstream gender equality in research. Through increased understanding of inequalities in career paths, such as by improving our knowledge of intersectionality and of the impact of unconscious bias on research careers, we can foster a balanced flow of talents, assuring career access and progression. Deepening our understanding will enable us to reduce career precarity, address work-life balance issues, improve early career conditions, stimulate intersectoral mobility, foster meritocracy, and adapt systems of remuneration, social security and pensions to non-linear careers. We recognize these as relevant concerns, pivotal to a sustained gender equality path, and thus mainstreaming gender.

### **Form-follows-function governance and mutual learning**

Mutual learning can accelerate the pace of gender mainstreaming across the EU and broader Europe, through stimulating exchange of best practice and lessons learnt at policy and institutional levels. Mutual learning not only relies on policies but also on a European Research Area governance structure that will enhance stakeholder engagement, with the Commission, national authorities, Research Funding Organisations, Research Performing Organisations and their umbrella organisations, gender equality experts and practitioners and their networks at EU as well as national levels, civil society organisations and of course citizens. Furthermore, European Research Area governance can facilitate gender mainstreaming through aiming to achieve gender balance and the inclusion of gender expertise in its structures.

We must continue policy coordination, networking and exchange on inclusive gender equality policy in research and innovation through the new European Research Area governance framework, interfacing with the Commission. Existing evidence shows that disparities among Member States remain. Therefore, a dedicated platform involving national and Commission representatives and increased cooperation with other European Research Area stakeholders, most notably with the umbrella organisations, should be an important part of the new European Research Area governance.

### **Gender Equality Plans for sustainable and inclusive institutional changes**

Together with wider policies aimed at providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions, and making brain circulation a reality, promoting institutional change through Gender Equality Plans is among the most transformative policy developments to achieve long-term, sustainable advancement towards gender equality in R&I. To achieve meaningful policy coordination it is essential we develop a common understanding of Gender Equality Plans as a policy instrument, to support institutions in the development and implementation, while recognising the need for flexibility in the concrete instruments used at national level and the self-responsibility and autonomy of the institutions.

As the Gender Equality Plans approach is embedded in the new European Research Area, support and resources for their development and implementation are needed at all levels. This is particularly crucial in countries where the institutions are currently without a Gender Equality Plans requirement, to ensure those institutions are ready for the new Horizon Europe eligibility criterion. We recommend the Plans are tied to the policy coordination mechanism to be established for the Pact on R&I as well as to a dedicated EU network on their implementation, supported by the Commission, Member States and other countries. Such an endeavour, for example, could be linked to a European certification scheme for gender equality to ensure commensurability by building a common framework that recognises national differences.

Improved capability and capacity for developing, implementing and monitoring Gender Equality Plans should be supported, for example through specialised European training for R&I sector civil servants and for Higher Education Institutions and Research Funding Organisations leaders and managers, through which we can build communities of competence and practice.



### **Gender-based violence**

Gender-based violence in higher education and research, including sexual harassment, is a serious and under-recognised issue with severe negative impacts on study and career outcomes in research and higher education. A cohesive infrastructure and procedures for preventing and tackling gender-based violence and harassment in academia in the Member States and other countries are missing.

There is a prominent lack of relevant policies, legislation/regulations, responsible authorities, gender-based violence/sexual harassment experts, gender-sensitive protocols and reporting procedures and up-to-date prevalence data. To this end, we welcome that gender-based violence is included as part of data collection practices for She Figures, and as a thematic area to be addressed in Gender Equality Plans. Furthermore, we recognise there is need for additional policy coordination and action from Research Funding Organisations, Research Performing Organisations and other relevant stakeholders in the European Research Area.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation of gender equality policies has received less attention than policy design, and this may be one of the reasons why progress has been slower than it should. We underscore the need to develop tools for the monitoring and evaluation of national gender equality policies in R&I and gender equality actions, including Gender Equality Plans. Such tools are essential to evaluate actions aimed at achieving institutional change, collect information on Gender Equality Plans uptake rates at national level, and consider intersectional data. Indicators and measurable goals need to be established to assess progress in achieving gender mainstreaming as a strategy.

Sex and/or gender disaggregated data should be the default for reporting and monitoring in the European Research Area especially with respect to European Research Area careers, mobility and brain circulation. Where possible, gender statistics should be broken down by the intersection of gender with additional conditions of vulnerability or marginalisation, developing, as needed, new indicators for monitoring in the context of intersectionality, expanding on the pioneering work of She Figures. Gender equality should also be an important element of new European Research Area reporting, to monitor progress towards the European Research Area Policy Agenda objectives at national and Union level.

### **Importance of synergies**

Through leveraging synergies and stimulating mutual learning, gender equality can be mainstreamed. The European Research Area has the opportunity to influence the European Higher Education Area and Cohesion policy, as well as international cooperation achieved through the EU Global Approach. International cooperation, one of the cornerstones of EU R&I efforts, allows for benefitting from strategic technological areas and critical infrastructures, and learning from experiences of the implementation of gender equality policies for institutional reform.

We must do better to integrate core European values and principles, including research integrity, gender equality and academic freedom, in international Science, Technology and Innovation cooperation actions and instruments. Equal, full access of all researchers to broad international networking, mobility and cooperation in frontier research, in innovation initiatives and multilateral research alliances is key for achieving gender equality, and delivering Agenda 2030's Sustainable Development Goal 5 (as well as other relevant Sustainable Development Goals).

More Cohesion policy funding could be used by Member States to support Research Funding Organisations and Research Performing Organisations in advancing gender equality actions in R&I, and specifically support them by funding institutional audits, developing and implementing Gender Equality Plans or funding gender research.

We underscore the need for further intertwined relations between education and research, mutually and continually nurturing excellence, and ensuring they are less prone to unconscious bias. To this end, all human capital in R&I must be nurtured to join and be retained in the workforce, and supported



in their career path progression, through joint actions of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

Intertwined relations across the whole R&I ecosystem are integral in acting as main drivers for a European way of life. We underline the importance of gender sensitive policies and synergies with gender equality in the innovation sector and gender-responsive innovation. Through these measures we can enable an increased involvement of researchers and innovators of all genders in knowledge transfer processes, effectively affirming their role as drivers of innovation that are responsive to and inclusive of the needs of all segments of society. In this context, we also underline the importance to strengthen the participation of all genders in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics fields.

### **Conclusions - Research and Innovation for a just transition in Europe**

Through gender mainstreaming, we enhance European resilience globally, especially in a post-pandemic world. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of gender equality gains, with adverse effects hitting women disproportionately, threatening to erode the advances of recent years. Assessment of the impact of COVID-19-careers of researchers of all genders is essential and it is vital that the resulting policy solutions include gendered and intersectional analyses as a default. This is essential to combat the economic downturn and increased poverty within Member States, broader Europe and globally, making sure resources are distributed in a gender equitable and inclusive manner.

Through the European Semester and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Member States should ensure fair and equitable reforms and investments to counteract the negative gendered impacts on women and other underrepresented groups. Public research, and publicly-funded private companies, in all disciplines should therefore be required to address the gender dimension whether concerned with health, socio-economic inequality or development of technologies and applications.

Embedding these practices, we can achieve our stated goals and ensure Europe and the new European Research Area are best placed to be proactive with emerging issues. We commit to addressing the challenges of the digital and green twin transition in a gender equal and inclusive manner, to ensure this transition is also just, triggering new inclusive ways of life for all, and new opportunity for jobs and for research. There is a broad change on the competences profile required by the digital and green society. We should strive to put in place gender sensitive policies so that gendered competence gaps may not damage the fruits of a just transition and allow all researchers to fully reach their potential, without leaving anyone behind.

**We are committed to achieving these goals, leveraging the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the Gender Action Plan III. We will work together with stakeholders in setting ambitious targets and goals to support the advancement of gender equality in the new European Research Area.**

### **The following parties have endorsed the Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation:**

The Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Austria, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Republic of Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, the Kingdom of Denmark, the Republic of Estonia, the European Commission, the Republic of Finland, the French Republic, Georgia, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Hellenic Republic, Iceland, Ireland, the Italian Republic, the Republic of Kosovo, the Republic of Lithuania, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Republic of Malta, Montenegro, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Kingdom of Norway, the Republic of Poland (Statement), the Portuguese Republic, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Slovenia, the Kingdom of Spain, the Kingdom of Sweden, the Swiss Confederation.

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