

# Intersectional Gender Equality for the Structural Transformation of Research Organizations

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**Abstract:** Evolving from Gender Equality Plans (GEP) to inclusive Gender Equality Plans (iGEP) requires the incorporation of an intersectional approach capable of addressing complex and structural inequalities, attending not only to formal equality but also to the power relations that shape experiences within scientific organizations. Intersectionality, as an analytical and political framework, recognizes that gender does not operate in isolation but rather interacts with other social categories - such as ethnicity, class, age, disability or sexual orientation- producing overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage. In Research Performing Organizations (RPOs), there is often a tension between the scarcity of systematic intersectional data – often caused by personal data protection policies – and the need for evidence to inform institutional policies and practices. However, these constraints cannot obviate persistent inequalities, even in environments that may seem homogeneous. Drawing on the experience of the Institute of Marine Science, this paper presents the various efforts made to obtain intersectional data and evidence of staff perceptions and experiences of discrimination and privilege related to their specific identities. The findings reveal diverse forms of exclusion, as well as dynamics of power, privilege and resistance that continue to shape organisational culture and affect the participation, recognition and career trajectories of specific groups. Addressing intersectional disadvantage requires both methodological sensitivity and ethical accountability. The paper highlights the contextual nature of intersectionalities, repositions marginalised voices within institutional analysis, and reflects on the positionality of those leading the process. It recognises the limits of perspectives and imaginaries constructed from outside marginalised groups, emphasising the importance of reflexivity and validation. The results of this process, shared and collectively validated within the institution, provide the foundation for the formulation of a GEP+ reinforcing its legitimacy and institutional relevance. The iGEP articulates inclusive policies aimed not only at addressing discrimination and inequalities, but at fostering deep and sustainable structural and cultural transformation. Through this comprehensive and intersectional approach, the iGEP advances substantive equality within the ICM, moving beyond compliance towards structural change, enhanced inclusion, and the recognition of diverse identities and lived experiences across the organisation.

**Keywords:** Intersectionality, Inclusion, Gender equality, Positionality, Research performing organizations (RPO), Inclusive gender equality plan (iGEP)

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, academic debates on gender equality in Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) have underscored the limitations of approaches focused solely on the gender gap and formal regulatory compliance. While Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) have played a key role in institutionalising gender equality, growing scholarship argues that they remain insufficient to address the complexity of inequalities (Clavero and Galligan, 2021). Evidence indicates that dynamics of exclusion and privilege do not operate in isolation, but through the interaction of multiple dimensions of social differentiation.

The transition from GEPs to inclusive Gender Equality Plans (iGEPs) therefore requires the integration of an intersectional approach capable of addressing structural and complex inequalities, moving beyond formal equality to engage with the power relations shaping experiences within research organisations. This shift implies moving from single-category interventions towards structural approaches that challenge institutional norms, evaluation cultures, and power dynamics that reproduce inequality (Beekmans, Zannoni and Van Laer, 2025).

This paper presents the process undertaken by the Institut de Ciències del Mar (ICM) to collect data and evidence on staff experiences of discrimination and privilege in relation to their identities, with the aim of informing the design of an iGEP.

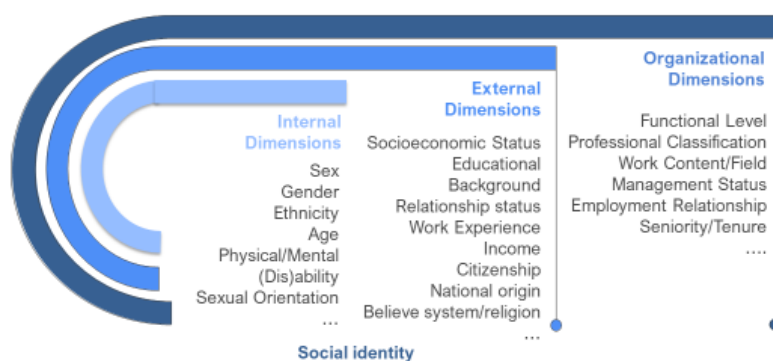
The paper is structured in four sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 briefly outlines the shift from GEPs to iGEPs in RPOs. Section 3 presents data collection strategies – with a focus on the results of a perception survey- and discusses the development of the GEP+ as a strategic tool for institutional transformation towards substantive and inclusive gender equality. Section 4 concludes the paper.

## 2. From Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) to Inclusive Gender Equality Plans (iGEPs) in RPOs

Over the past decade, GEPs have become a central policy instrument for advancing gender equality in RPOs. During this period, their focus has undergone significant evolution: whereas early GEPs largely prioritised achieving representative gender balance –by increasing women’s participation and addressing vertical

segregation—, the persistence of gender segregation and the continued underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making positions (Reuben, Sapienza, and Zingales, 2014), have underscored the limitations of formal equality approaches and the need for deeper cultural and structural transformation (Benschop and Verloo, 2011). The move towards more inclusive iGEPs has been driven by growing recognition that gender inequalities are neither homogeneous nor experienced uniformly, as the factors shaping women’s careers extend beyond gender alone. Organizational structures and processes are not neutral but are embedded with interconnected practices that systematically produce and sustain inequalities across multiple axes of difference (Acker, 2026).

The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw (1989) to capture the complexity of workplace discrimination experienced by Black women, which cannot be adequately understood through a single-axis framework as it arises at the intersection of race and gender. Since its introduction, the concept has been extended beyond gender and race to encompass other social dimensions (Figure 1). Despite its diverse understandings and applications, intersectionality can be understood as a paradigm, theory, methodology, and critical analytical tool that examines how multiple social dimensions intersect to shape identity, and how these unique identities interact with context-specific systems of privilege and oppression —such as racism, sexism, and classism— to produce compounded forms of discrimination, oppression and privilege (Collins, 2019; Beeckmans, Zanoni and Van Laer, 2025).



**Figure 1: Identity dimensions**

These categories are socially constructed and dynamic, rather than fixed attributes. Individuals may simultaneously experience marginalisation and privilege across different axes of identity depending on the context. Positionality complements intersectionality by emphasising how individuals’ social locations shape not only their identities but also how they relate to others, how they are perceived and the degree of agency or vulnerability they hold within specific contexts. Positionality is neither fixed nor individual; rather, it is relational and contextual. Reflexivity involves self-awareness of positionality, interrogation of power and privilege, to identify personal biases and avoid reproducing dominant perspectives (Collins, 2019).

In the context of RPOs, intersectionality provides both an analytical tool and a normative orientation. From an analytical standpoint, it enables the identification of complex and overlapping forms of disadvantage that remain invisible in single-axis approaches, acknowledging that inequalities are neither homogeneous nor uniformly experienced, nor should they be treated separately or additively, while also drawing attention to the cross-cutting forces of privilege and oppression that shape academic career. From a normative standpoint, it calls for structural change that addresses power imbalances embedded in governance systems and organizational cultures.

Thus, intersectionality, by centring power, privilege, contextuality and relationality, provides the conceptual foundation for inclusive iGEPs. Fostering substantive equality, institutional justice and genuine inclusion within RPOs require challenging the institutional norms, power relations and evaluation systems that reproduce inequality. Consequently, inequality must be analysed as context-dependent and embedded within institutional structures (Shields, 2008). Whereas each organization constitutes a unique ecosystem, structural transformation must be thoughtful and specific to each context, employing tailored strategies to address unique institutional challenges (Wroblewski and Palmen, 2022).

Applying an intersectional approach enables the identification of measures that are more effective and context-sensitive in addressing the diverse needs and lived realities of marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Rather than privileging specific subgroups or treating inequalities as isolated phenomena, this perspective adopts a

holistic lens that recognises the cumulative and interacting effects of multiple axes of inequality - in the context of RPOs, organizational dimensions have a key influence (*Figure 1*). In this framework, inclusion extends beyond the mere diversification of representation. It entails the creation of structural conditions that ensure vulnerable and excluded groups can exercise meaningful participation, gain equitable access to decision-making processes, and attain institutional authority. In doing so, RPOs move from symbolic inclusion towards substantive equality grounded in redistribution of power and institutional transformation.

However, it cannot be ignored that these processes will face obstacles, ranging from a lack of data to identify and monitor compound forms of inequality and institutional and policy fragmentation in addressing inequalities through one-dimensional categories (Beeckmans, Zanoni and Van Laer, 2025), to barriers to change and covert forms of resistance —such as “non-performative commitment” where equality is rhetorically endorsed but not effectively implemented (Ahmed, S., 2008)—. Moving toward inclusive equality also means addressing barriers and resistance.

It is important to underline that the implementation of intersectionality in RPOs through iGEP has been driven by robust regulatory frameworks at both European and, particularly in Spain, national levels. At the European level, iGEPs are supported by binding legislation, strategic communications, programme conditionalities and evolving policy agendas that frame intersectionality as both a normative principle and a practical requirement in research and innovation (R&I) governance. Inclusive gender equality lies at the core of the EU’s vision for structural transformation within RPOs and the European Research Area (ERA), while Horizon Europe makes the existence of a GEP an eligibility criterion for RPO funding.

In Spain, this trajectory is reinforced by *Organic Law 3/2007 on the Effective Equality of Women and Men*, which establishes GEPs as a key policy instrument, and by *Law 14/2011 on Science, Technology and Innovation* (revised in 2022), which strengthens the role of GEPs in RPOs and mandates the integration of an intersectional perspective in equality policies as well as in research and knowledge transfer activities.

### **3. Institut de Ciències del Mar: Intersectionality in Action**

The ICM — the largest marine research institute of the Spain’s leading public scientific institution, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) —drew up its first Gender Equality Plan (2021–2024) as part of the LeTSGEPs project (Horizon 2020), in accordance with the requirements of the European Commission and Spanish legislation on gender equality. Following the implementation of this GEP, a key challenge emerged: moving beyond a gender-focused framework toward a broader, more inclusive, and intersectional approach through the development of an iGEP, while consolidating and deepening the institutional transformations already achieved. This transition from GEP to iGEP is grounded in two key process: the collection and analysis of intersectional data, and the design of the iGEP.

#### **3.1 Intersectional Analysis: Looking for Data**

At present, the ICM workforce comprises 404 staff members, 55.2% women and 44.8% men. Research staff (senior and postdoctoral researchers and PhD students) represent 54.4% of the workforce (n=220), with marked gender differences across categories: women account for 33.7% of senior researchers, 50% of postdoctoral researchers, and 69.2% of PhD students. Technical research staff (62.9%) and support and administrative staff (61.5%) are likewise feminised (*Figure 2*).

Regarding employment status, 30% are civil servants, 10% hold permanent labour contracts, and 60% are on labour contracts. Age distribution is relatively balanced across broad age groups (20–26%), except for those over 60 (10%). International staff make up 17.6% of the workforce, with approximately 65% from other EU countries, 21% from Latin America, and 8.5% from Asia. Three staff members have a formally recognised disability.

Staff	Women	%/ Staff group	%/T W	Men	%/ Staff group	%/T M	TOTAL	%/ Total Staff
Senior Researcher	30	33,7%	13,5%	59	66,3%	32,6%	89	22,0%
Postdoc	33	50,0%	14,8%	33	50,0%	18,2%	66	16,3%
PhD Student	45	69,2%	20,2%	20	30,8%	11,0%	65	16,1%
Technical Research	83	62,9%	37,2%	49	37,1%	27,1%	132	32,7%
Support & Adm.	32	61,5%	14,3%	20	38,5%	11,0%	52	12,9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>55,2%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>44,8%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

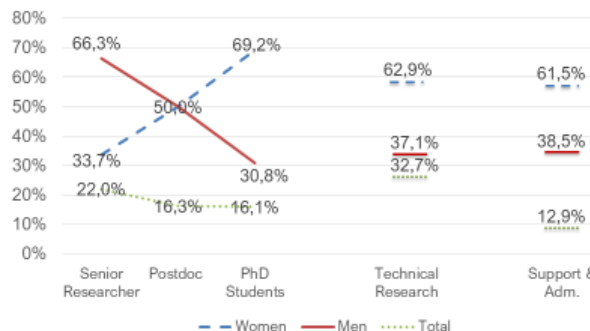


Figure 2: Staff distribution by classification groups

At the institutional level, although the range of individual data has gradually expanded, a tension persists between the protection of personal data and the need for evidence to inform the design of inclusive institutional policies and practices. In seemingly homogeneous environment, the lack of disaggregated data contributes to the invisibility of certain identities and limits the capacity to respond to persistent inequalities. Nevertheless, data alone cannot capture the lived experiences of discrimination faced by individuals with multiple and intersectional identities, which give rise to complex and layered forms of disadvantage.

The Equality and Diversity Task Force (EDTF) monitored the implementation of the GEP by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data through a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, complemented by a final evaluation of the GEP’s outcomes. However, from an intersectional perspective, several limitations were identified. These include insufficient attention to certain groups—given that measures were largely focused on research staff—the top-down design of some actions, which did not fully address the needs of target groups in terms of content and implementation conditions, and the rollout of initiatives without adequately considering participation constraints faced by specific groups (e.g., due to job roles or group membership). Consequently, the benefits of the GEP were not distributed equally across all individuals and groups.

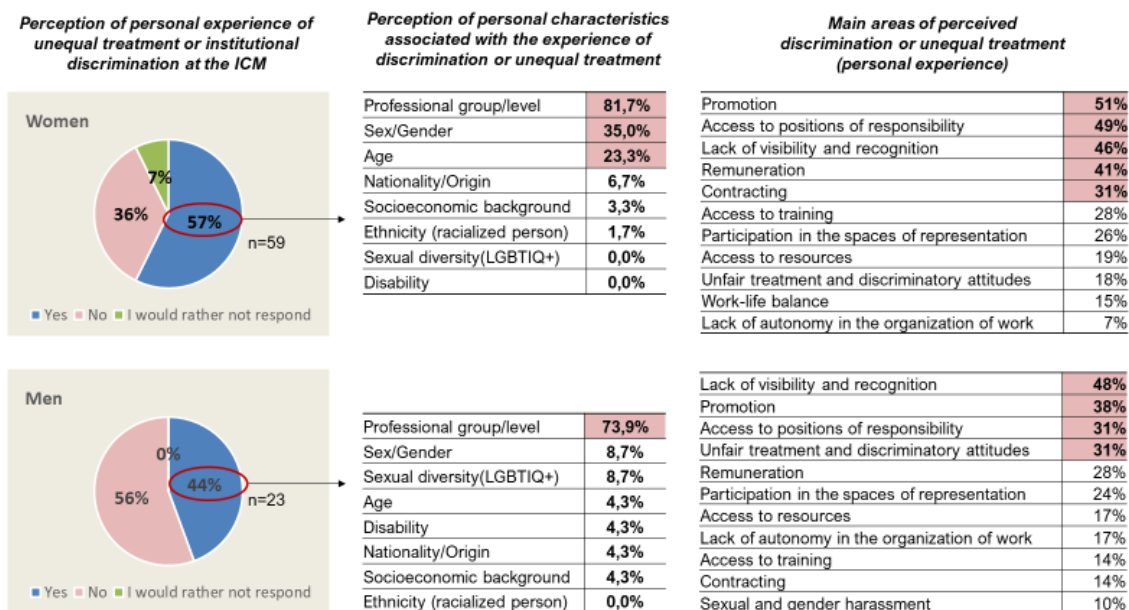
To broaden perspectives and strengthen the evidence base for the iGEP, a multidimensional assessment has been conducted addressing interrelated structural, organisational, cultural, and individual dimensions. This approach has combined research methods, including expert-moderated focus groups, self-reflective focus groups, interviews, and an institutional perception survey). Among the various data collection processes, the survey stands out not only for the volume of data gathered, but also for the discussions it generated. Launched with the aim of identifying staff perceptions and experiences regarding equality, diversity, and inclusion from an intersectional perspective, it was structured into four main sections: institutional performance, organisational culture, individual staff behaviours, and personal experience. It comprised 30 questions, many of which were multiple-choice and/or allowed respondents to provide additional specifications based on the selected options.

Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary, although efforts were made to make it mandatory. A total of 130 people responded (95% confidence level, 7% margin of error), 63% women (n=82), 35% men (n=45), and 2% (n=3) who did not specify their gender. Participation rates varied across age groups, professional categories, and employment status, likely resulting in the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of some groups relative to their institutional weight.

Even taking these considerations into account, the results provided ample evidence on which to base the design of the iGEP. In terms of institutional performance, the ICM scored 7.1/10 for actively promoting equality and inclusion (6.7 among women, 7.8 among men), but 6/10 regarding the adequacy of resources and initiatives supporting diverse groups (rising to 8/10 for gender equality initiatives). However, 60.8% of respondents perceive inequality in treatment and opportunities among staff, and 80.2% attribute this to at least one social or organisational factor, most commonly *professional category/group* (74.3%), *sex/gender* (41.8%) and *age* (22.9%). Other dimensions, including *nationality/origin* (12.4%), *ethnic background* (11.4%), *disability* (9.5%) and *sexual diversity* (5.7%), were mentioned less frequently, but remain significant relative to their representation within the ICM.

Related to these perceptions, half of the respondents (52.3%) reported having experienced institutional unequal treatment or discrimination, most often linked —frequently in overlapping ways— to *professional category/group* (78.8%), *sex/gender* (28.2%) and/or *age* (18.8%). Notably, clear gender differences emerge, *sex/gender* is reported by 35% of women compared to 8.3% of men, and *age* by 23,3% of women versus 8,3%

of men. These experiences span multiple domains, particularly, *professional promotion* (46,9%), *lack of visibility and recognition* (45,9%), *restricted access to positions of responsibility or decision-making* (43,9%), *remuneration* (36,7%), with some gender variation (see Figure 3).



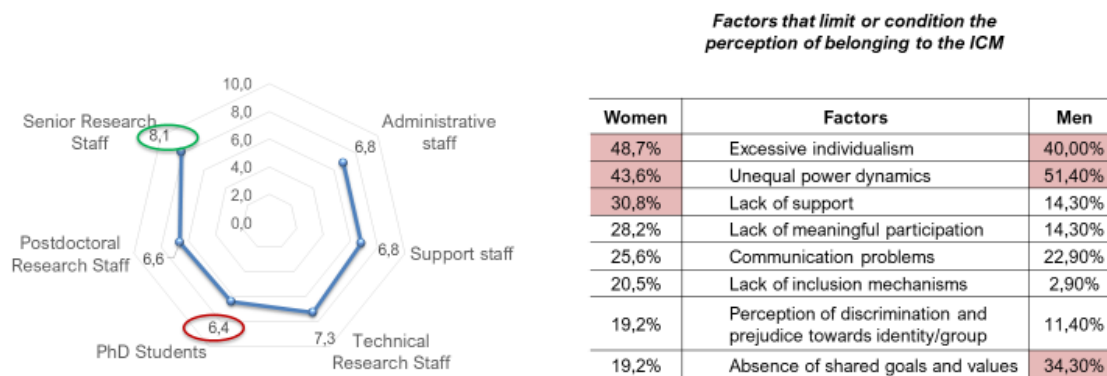
**Figure 3: Perceptions about personal experience**

Perceptions regarding ICM staff commitment to equality and inclusion reveals a mixed picture. Whilst half of respondents (48.5%) believe that *the majority* of staff are committed, 23.8% think that only *half* are, and 10% believe it is a *minority*. Significant differences are also observed between different groups: whilst the perception that *the majority* are committed reaches 70% among senior research staff, it drops to 29% among PhD students, and whilst it stands at 64.4% among men, it falls to 40.2% among women.

This perception is consistent with the fact that 63.8% of respondents affirm have witnessed discriminatory attitudes or hostile behaviours on the part of staff (almost 70% of women and 53% of men), directed at people from the specific *category/professional group* (77.5%), *sex/gender* (64%) and/or *age groups* (31.5%), followed, some way behind, by the *sexual diversity community* (12.4%). The expressions observed cover a very broad spectrum and reflect a wide range of experiences: *invisibility/lack of recognition* (53.9%), *unequal treatment* (51.7%), *paternalism* (47.2%) and *belittlement* (46,1%). Additional manifestations include *derogatory comments* (30.3%) and *sexist, racist or classist jokes* (36%). *Sexual harassment* is reported by 4.5% of respondents, although its low prevalence does not diminish its seriousness.

In this context, 85% of respondents identified at least one factor that limit inclusiveness, with *classism* emerging as the most prominent (65.7%), followed by *resistance to change* (52,8%), *power dynamics* (51.9%), *strong hierarchical structures* (49,1%), *unconscious gender bias* (47.2%) and *prejudice and stereotypes* (44.4%). It is worth noting here the differences in perception by gender regarding *unconscious gender bias* (women, 54.2%; men, 27.8%; others, 66.7%); and, by professional group/category, the disparity in perception regarding *classism*, reported by 73.3% of support staff compared with 45.5% of senior research staff.

Respondents rated their sense of belonging to the ICM at 7.2 out of 10. This value varies moderately by sex (7 among women, 7.5 among men, and 6.7 among those who did not report their sex), but more pronounced across professional category/groups, ranging from 8.1 among senior research staff (staff with greater decision-making power and job stability) to 6.4 among PhD students, likely reflecting contractual precarity and career uncertainty. The sense of belonging is shaped by structural (power distribution, cohesion, inclusion) and relational factors (communication, support, recognition). Among those who identify some factors (n=116), *unequal power dynamics* and *excessive individualism* (both of them, 45.7%,) emerge as the main constraint, followed by *lack of support* and *meaningful participation* (both of them, 25%), *communication problems* (24.1%), and the *absence of shared goals and values* (23.3%) (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Sense of belonging

In light of this context, there is broad consensus on priority measures to foster a more egalitarian and inclusive institution, building on and reinforcing the previous GEP. *Awareness-raising* is the most frequently cited action (68.6%), reflecting the need to advance cultural change and address unconscious biases, stereotypes, and prejudices. *Enhancing visibility* (61%) and *expanding participation in decision-making* (50%) point to demands for greater representation and more inclusive governance. *Training* (45.8%), *targeted measures for specific groups* (40.7%), and *mentoring initiatives* (22%) further highlight the importance of capacity-building in addressing persistent inequalities.

These results are consistent with previous analyses. Progress and resistance to change coexist within an organisation still undergoing structural transformation, confirming that scientific institutions are not neutral spaces: institutional routines, informal norms, and dominant discourses continue to reproduce power hierarchies, even within seemingly cohesive and homogeneous context.

Recurrently, reference is made to classism as a structural factor that positions individuals in differentiated status hierarchies, distinguishing between those who participate in the production of knowledge —research staff— and those who remain at its periphery —support and administrative staff, and even technical research staff—, thereby generating inequalities that shape, among other aspects, access to resources, recognition, and participation. Discrimination related to dimensions such as disability, ethnic origin (racialised status), or nationality/origin is primarily identified by those affected, yet often remains invisible to others. This asymmetry highlights both the importance of amplifying minority voices and the persistent invisibility of their experiences within dominant frameworks. Moreover, such invisibility may sometimes be strategic, when individuals weigh the disadvantages associated with disclosing certain aspects of their identity.

Thus, complex and overlapping forms of disadvantage emerge, with experiences of discrimination that are neither uniform nor equally perceived. By contrast, the self-perception of privilege remains limited.

In all data collection processes, the internal roles held by the Deputy Director of Equality and Diversity and the Gender Officer —a senior researcher and a support staff member respectively, both members of the Equality and Diversity Task Force (EDTF) and participants in different decision-making bodies— combined complementary institutional positions with different degrees of influence. This positioning enabled them to navigate between institutional neutrality and situated empathy, facilitating a more nuanced interpretation of experiences of discrimination and privilege within the ICM (Collins and McNulty, 2020). Equally important was the availability of interlocutors for dialogue, as institutional action has been just as crucial to progress as the mobilisation of groups and individual action.

The capacity to identify discrimination, raise awareness, articulate demands, and push for action appears to depend largely on the level of organisation and leadership within each group. Smaller groups far removed from positions of power, face greater difficulties in being recognised and heard. In this context, creating alternative spaces for dialogue is crucial. These spaces enable the articulation of lived experiences, counteract invisibilización, and foster recognition. Making inequalities visible is a key step in challenging their normalisation and advancing claims for recognition and justice.

Collectively shared and validated, these findings provide a foundation for the co-design of the iGEP, reinforcing its legitimacy and institutional relevance. They support informed decision-making to address and reverse identified situations, enabling the prioritisation of key intervention areas and the design of targeted measures

tackling underlying causes. Moreover, the data establish baseline values for indicators to monitor and assess progress over time.

### **3.2 GEP+ Design: From Formal Equality to Structural Transformation**

In response to this complexity, the ICM has developed a 360° Equality Strategy that articulates policies to foster a working environment where all individuals feel valued, supported, respected, and included, while recognising the diversity of identities and trajectories within the organisation. This strategy includes, among other instruments, the iGEP, the LGBTBI+ Plan, and additional inclusion measures targeting specific groups (such as persons with disabilities). These instruments are coherently embedded within the institutional framework and reinforced through their articulation with initiatives led by diverse groups, as well as through individual engagement.

Evolving from a GEP to an iGEP represents a significant challenge. Unlike the first GEP, which focused primarily on research staff, the iGEP broadens its scope to encompass all staff at the ICM. However, adopting an intersectional approach does not imply that the iGEP can address every individual circumstance or eliminate all barriers. Rather, it acknowledges existing limitations, seeks to ensure that institutional practices do not create new obstacles, and actively advances towards substantive and inclusive equality.

Within this framework, the iGEP is conceived as a comprehensive and tailored instrument providing a strategic institutional roadmap. It is structured around eight areas of intervention, each linked to specific objectives and outcomes, and operationalised through seventeen interrelated measures conceived as mutually reinforcing components for structural change. Particular attention has been given to areas where the most significant challenges have been identified, as well as to structural factors of discrimination that cut across all interventions, such as classism; while also addressing the demands and needs of different groups—responding to expectations raised throughout the process—and incorporating measures proposed during the consultation and co-creation phases (Figure 5).

In response to the identified challenges, the iGEP adopts a dual approach: cross-cutting measures to ensure equality and inclusion across all staff—so that no action, directly or indirectly, leaves anyone behind—and targeted interventions (including quotas) to address specific situations of inequality and discrimination. Measures respond both to practical needs (immediate improvements in working conditions) and to strategic needs aimed at transforming power relations and addressing both discrimination and privilege. Through this integrated architecture, the iGEP seeks to advance coherent and sustainable transformation at both the institutional level (norms, procedures, and accountability mechanisms) and the organisational culture level (shared norms, dominant imaginaries, and informal practices), while placing the recognition of diverse identities and lived experiences at the centre and promoting targeted actions at both individual and collective levels.

Numerous measures will be accompanied by ex-ante and ex-post impact assessments to ensure that implementation conditions and eligibility criteria are not exclusionary and do not generate unintended gaps. Where necessary, quotas will be established for traditionally underrepresented groups, recognising that these groups are not homogeneous and that discrimination often emerges through the intersection of multiple identities—such as gender, professional group, and age—rather than along a single axis.

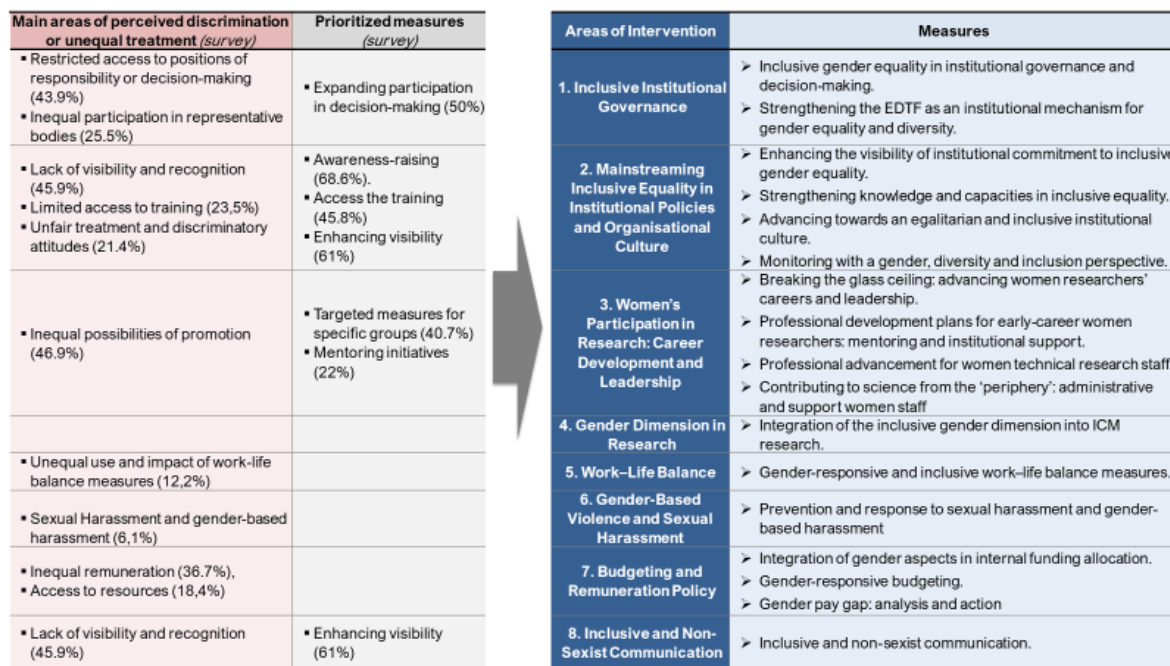


Figure 5: iGEP: From challenges to answers

With this iGEP, inclusive gender equality is embedded within the institutional structure and strategy, functioning both as a catalyst for accelerated transformation and as a lever for organisational resilience and competitiveness. Its articulation with the other instruments reinforces the 360<sup>o</sup> Equality Strategy.

The iGEP is, necessarily, conceived as a living and dynamic document, adaptable to evolving institutional context and staff integration. To support this adaptability, it incorporates a monitoring and evaluation system (M&ES) designed as a continuous and cross-cutting process to assess progress toward its objectives and expected outcomes, while ensuring quality and accountability.

#### 4. Concluding Discussion

The experience of the ICM provides a useful lens through which to examine the transition from a GEP to an iGEP framework. Rather than constituting a simple broadening of scope, this shift can be understood as a qualitative transformation in how inequality is conceptualised and addressed within research-performing organisations (RPOs). From an intersectional perspective, gender is no longer treated as an isolated axis, but as operating through mutually constitutive relations with other dimensions of social differentiation. Inequalities thus appear as relational and structural phenomena, rather than additive ones. This analytical framework enables institutions to identify patterns of discrimination and privilege that remain obscured in single-axis approaches, thereby enhancing their interpretive capacity.

In this regard, the ICM experience suggests that embedding intersectionality within RPOs entails not only the adoption of new tools, but also the reconfiguration of institutional practices, organisational epistemologies, and governance mechanisms. Building on this case, several analytical dimensions can be identified as central to the effective integration of an intersectional approach.

First, the production of institutional knowledge through intersectional data systems emerges as a key element. Incorporating multiple identity dimensions into data collection makes it possible to capture complex and overlapping forms of inequality. However, this practice raises significant ethical challenges, particularly in relation to individuals' reluctance to disclose sensitive information due to fears of stigma or professional repercussions. Trust-building is therefore essential, grounded in transparency, confidentiality, anonymisation, and participatory validation processes. At the same time, limited data availability should not be invoked to justify inaction; rather, it calls for a careful balance between evidence generation and data protection.

Second, an intersectional approach requires questioning assumptions of group homogeneity and foregrounding the perspectives of those whose experiences of inequality are often marginalised. This involves not only creating formal and informal spaces for listening, but also ensuring meaningful participation in problem definition and solution design. Such processes also demand reflexivity regarding the positionality of those leading the analysis,

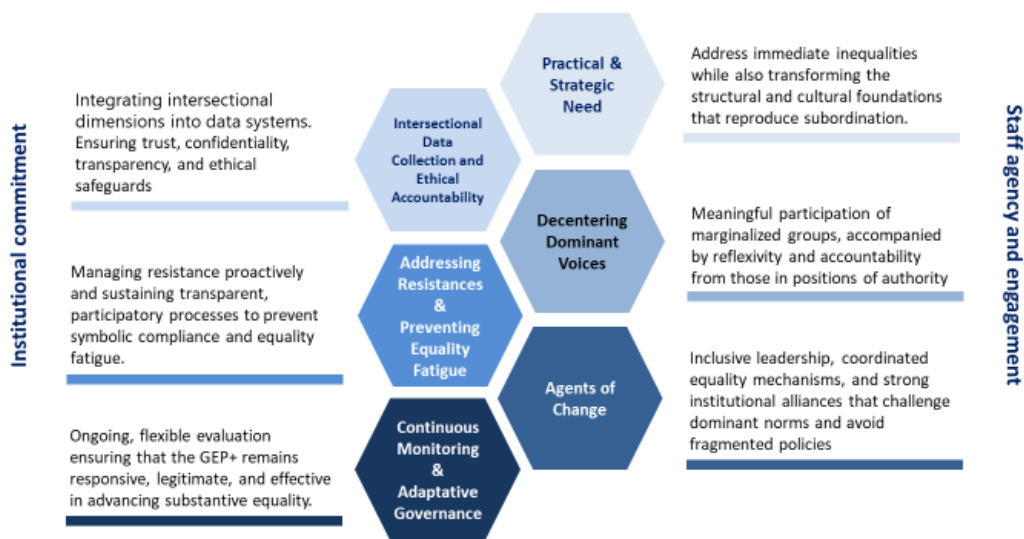
recognising the limits of perspectives shaped outside marginalised groups and linking awareness of privilege to accountability.

Third, the distinction between practical and strategic needs provides further analytical depth. While practical measures address immediate inequalities, strategic interventions seek to transform the structural foundations of subordination. This entails revising evaluation cultures, challenging androcentric or ableist assumptions about productivity, and redefining merit beyond narrow metrics. At a cultural level, it also involves interrogating dominant imaginaries of excellence, leadership, and scientific authority.

Moreover, institutional transformation depends significantly on the mobilisation of agents of change and the development of internal alliances. In the case of the ICM, structures such as the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Task Force (EDTF) and the Deputy Vice-Direction for Equality and Diversity have played an important role. However, inclusive leadership extends beyond representation to encompass practices, decision-making processes, and cultural influence capable of challenging implicit norms about who belongs in science. Ensuring coherence among different equality and diversity instruments is equally important to avoid fragmented or competing policies and to foster synergies.

At the same time, institutional change processes are often accompanied by forms of resistance, both explicit and implicit. These may take the form of dilution, bureaucratisation, or symbolic compliance. Sustained attention to such dynamics is necessary to prevent “equality fatigue” and to maintain organisational engagement over time. Transparent expectation management and well-designed participatory processes are also critical for preserving legitimacy.

Finally, the governance of an iGEP informed by intersectionality should be understood as an ongoing and adaptive process. Continuous evaluation—combining qualitative and quantitative indicators—enables institutions to respond to evolving staff dynamics and external conditions. Such flexibility allows for the assessment of whether measures effectively reach the most marginalised groups and supports the adjustment of strategies accordingly. Embedding intersectionality within an iGEP thus strengthens both analytical depth and institutional legitimacy.



**Figure 6:** Strategies for embedding intersectionality in an RPO

In sum, the challenge is to design policies that respond appropriately to both the majority and minority groups and different individuals. The implementation of iGEP cannot be reduced to formal compliance, but rather involves advancing deeper structural and cultural transformations. The success, however, ultimately depends on sustained institutional commitment and the active engagement of staff, which shape both their feasibility and their transformative potential.

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