social sciences
and humanities
for transformation
and climate resilience

Gender Equality & Inclusion

Survey Report

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1. Introduction

As part of the development of the SHiFT Gender Equality and Inclusion Plan, a survey was designed to better understand the perspectives, experiences, and needs of the SHiFT community in relation to gender balance, diversity, and inclusion. The aim of this survey was to provide evidence-based insights that could guide the identification of priorities and the formulation of targeted actions within the plan.

We utilise a diverse range of references, with a particular emphasis on the International Science Council. (2025)[1], UNESCO (2019)[2], United Nations Population Fund (2022)[3], GIA[4]; RESET co-designed a Gender Equality survey[5], GEAM tool (2019)[6] and

[1] International Science Council. (2025). *Survey: Gender equality in scientific organizations*. https://council.science/news/2025-gender-equality-in-scientific-organizations-survey/

[2] UNESCO. (2019). Gender equality in education: Looking beyond parity. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000266145

[3] UNFPA & Equimundo. (2022, June). *International Men & Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)*. Retrieved from https://www.unfpa.org/publications/international-men-gender-equality-survey-images

[4] RESET Project. (n.d.). *GIA Checklist*. https://wereset.eu/gia-checklist/

[5] RESET Project. (n.d.). Gender Equality Survey [Survey]. RESET. https://wereset.eu/gender-equality-survey/

[6] ACT Project. (2019). Gender Equality Audit and Monitoring (GEAM) Tool [Tool]. Advance HE; Notus; Open University of Catalonia. https://geam.act-on-gender.eu

GESI framework (2018)[7], which provides a comprehensive approach to integrate gender and social inclusion principles across activities and policies.

2. Methodology

In line with established methodological guidelines for social research, a structured, closed-ended questionnaire was developed. The survey was designed to take no longer than five minutes to complete, thereby encouraging higher participation rates and minimising respondent fatigue.

The questionnaire was organised into five distinct sections, each addressing a specific area of inquiry.

- The first section, Demographics, collected basic information such as gender, age group, country of residence, and professional background, in order to contextualise responses.
- The second section, Institution, Research and Activities, sought to gather data regarding the respondent's institutional affiliation, level of involvement, and the extent to which gender considerations are embedded within their organisation's structure and research practices.
- The third section, similar to the one before but focused on gender topics within the SHiFT COST Action, assesses participants' understanding, engagement, and perspectives on gender-related themes specifically within the SHiFT network.
- The fourth section aimed to invite respondents to participate in ongoing or forthcoming SHiFT activities related to gender equality and inclusion, aligning with the overall objectives of the COST Action.
- Finally, the fifth section explored whether respondents' professional activities were already connected to gender-related issues, thereby providing insight into prior experience and expertise within the field.

[7] DFID, SDC, & Irish Aid. (2018). *A Common Framework for Gender Equality & Social Inclusion (GESI Framework)*. https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/04/gesi-framework

The survey is provided in the annexe and is available at the following link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1_GPl5q651wJeFVg2xZTyR5i8odV36o5PJSxwbzz6oPo/edit

3. Data Collection & Analysis

Data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire, designed to be completed in a maximum of five minutes. The survey was disseminated electronically to a broad range of participants involved in the SHiFT COST Action, ensuring inclusivity and a diversity of perspectives. Respondents were invited to provide demographic information, details about their institutional context, engagement with gender-related topics, and willingness to participate in future activities.

The survey was conducted in August and September 2025 and sought input from members of the Action across various backgrounds, career stages, and countries. By capturing a diverse range of "voices", the process was intended to ensure that the plan reflects the collective experience of the network and is grounded in the realities faced by its members.

All responses were anonymised and securely stored in accordance with data protection regulations. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise frequencies, percentages, and trends across the five sections of the survey. Where relevant, cross-tabulations were performed to explore relationships between respondent characteristics (such as professional background or institutional role) and engagement with gender-related issues.

By the end of September 2025, a total of 56 valid responses had been collected. The sample was estimated based on **Krejcie and Morgan's recommendations** (Almeida & Freire, 2007), which state that for a population of 5,000 individuals and a margin of error below 5%, a representative sample should include at least 350 participants. Within this framework, the number of responses obtained can be considered adequate to provide a reliable indication of the perspectives within the Action, thereby ensuring the validity of the subsequent analyses.

4. Results

A total of **56 individuals** completed the survey, drawn from a target population of **382 members** of the COST Action SHiFT network, corresponding to **14.7%** of the population (Fig 1). This represented a significant contribution from the SHiFT members, providing a valuable foundation for drawing SGEIP commitments.

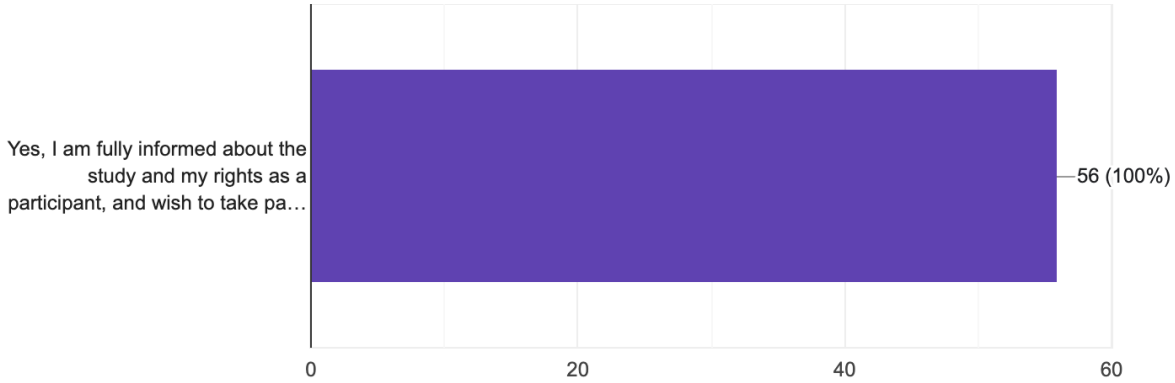


Figure 1: 100% of participants reported feeling informed about their rights as participants and expressed willingness to take part in the survey.

Demographics

Table 1: How do participants in your COST Action describe themselves?

	Participation	Leadership positions	Young participants	ITC participants
Women	77% 46,4	83% 7,1	71% 8,9	67% 3,6
Men	23% 19,6	17% 1,8	29% 5,4	33% 1,8
Non-binary	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Prefer not to say	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Do not identify as woman, man, or non-binary, please specify how you would identify	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0

The results of the SHiFT survey on gender equity and inclusion show that, of the 56 valid responses collected, the majority came from women, who accounted for 77% of respondents (Fig. 2). Within this group, 46% identified as participants, 7% reported holding leadership positions, and 4% were ITC participants.



Figure 2: Distribution of survey responses regarding gender balance within SHiFT.

The majority of respondents are at the senior career stage, with senior researchers representing 42% of all participants, reflecting strong engagement among experienced members of SHiFT. (Fig 4). Young participants presented the most balanced representation in the survey, contributing 5% of the total responses (Table 1). In terms of age distribution, respondents were relatively well spread across different career stages: 32% were aged 50–59 years, 32% were 40–49 years, 23% were 30–39 years, and 7% were under 30. This indicates that participation is not limited to a single age or career stage but includes members from a broad professional spectrum (Fig 3).

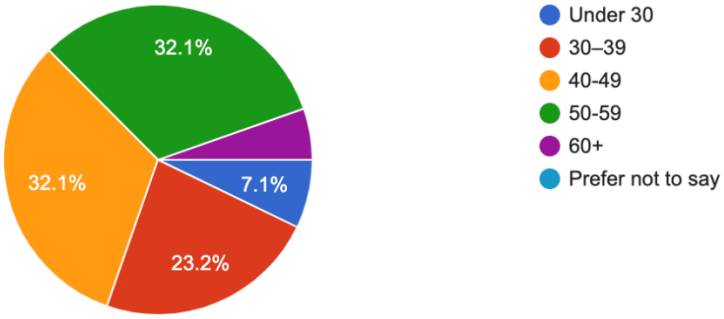


Figure 3: Distribution of survey responses regarding age balance within SHiFT.

Overall, the findings highlight both strengths and challenges for SHiFT. The high level of female representation indicates that women are strongly engaged in the network's activities.

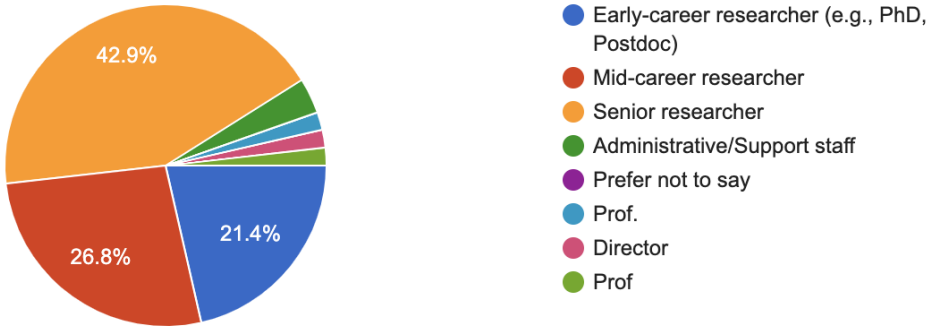


Figure 4: Distribution of survey responses regarding position balance within SHiFT.

Institution, Research and Activities

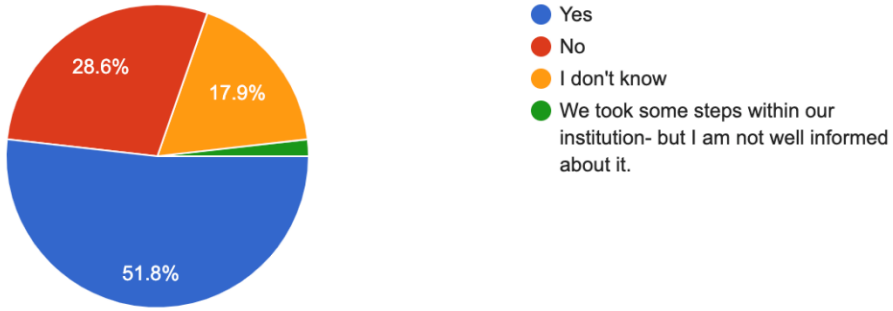


Figure 5: Does your institution, research group, or company have a Gender Equality Plan or similar?

Notably, half of SHiFT members (52%) reported that their home institution has a Gender Plan or a similar framework in place, highlighting a positive baseline of institutional support for gender equality across the network (Fig. 5). However, 18% of participants indicated that they were unsure or did not know whether such a framework exists. There are no significant differences between the responses by gender.

Perceptions and Experiences of Gender-based discrimination across Institutional and SHiFT Contexts

However, when asked whether they have ever witnessed or experienced gender-based discrimination in their home institution or within the COST Action SHiFT environment, the survey revealed a clear contrast. Within their home institutions, 59% of respondents reported having seen or heard about instances of gender-based discrimination (Fig 6). In contrast, in the SHiFT environment, the majority of responses

were negative, with 88% indicating that they had not observed or experienced such discrimination. These findings emphasise the need to complement institutional policies with active monitoring, awareness-raising, and inclusive practices, while also highlighting that SHiFT has been successful in creating a relatively safe and equitable environment for its members. No significant gender differences were observed in either response.

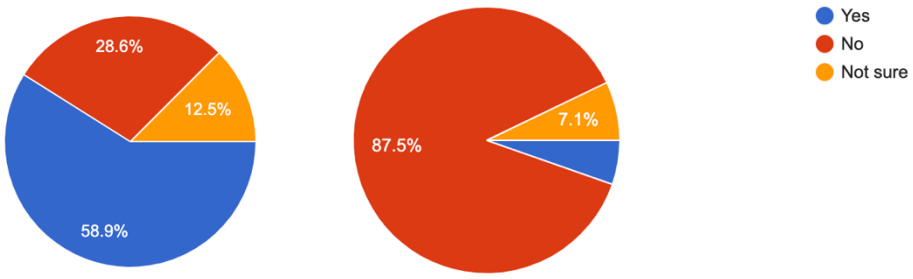


Figure 6: Gender-Based Discrimination: Home Institution (Left, 59%) versus COST Action SHiFT Environment (Right, 5%)

When respondents were asked, *"What do you see as the main barriers to achieving gender equality?"*, the survey revealed a complex landscape of challenges within the SHiFT community. Structural and institutional obstacles emerged as the most prominent barrier, reported by 61% of participants, highlighting the enduring influence of organisational frameworks on gender parity. Implicit biases were also widely recognised, with 57% of respondents acknowledging their impact, while 54% identified difficulties in balancing family and work responsibilities as a significant constraint (Fig. 7). Furthermore, 45% of participants pointed to a general lack of awareness, underscoring the need for continued education and dialogue on gender issues.

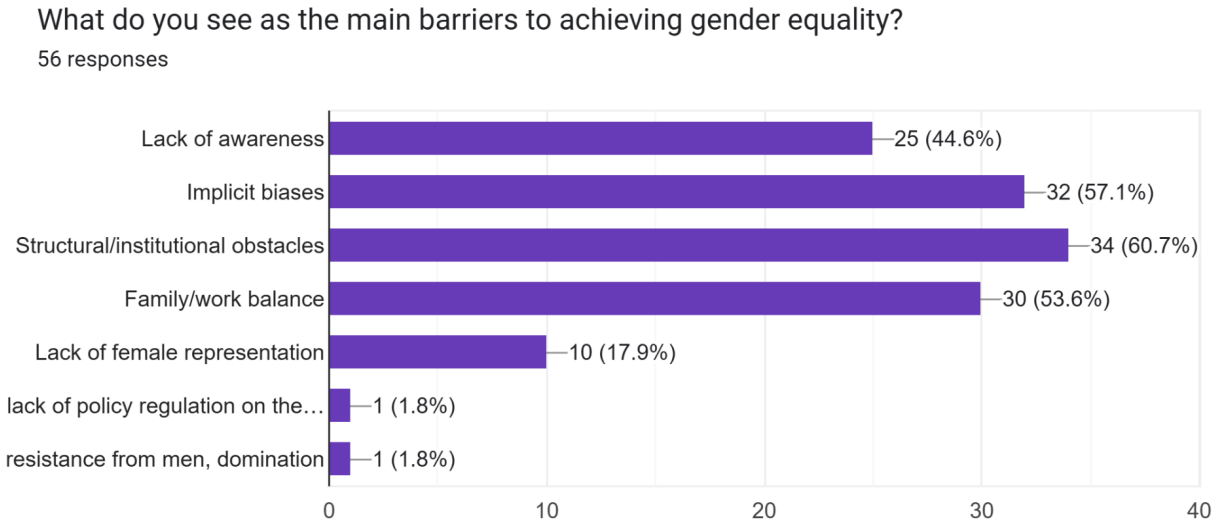


Figure 7: What do you see as the main barriers to achieving gender equality?

An examination of the responses by gender provides valuable insights into the perceived main barriers to achieving gender equality. The primary response among male participants (54%) was balancing family and work responsibilities, alongside a lack of awareness, whereas female participants most frequently identified structural and institutional obstacles (70%).

These findings illustrate that barriers to gender equality are multifaceted, spanning both systemic structures and cultural attitudes. They point to the necessity of implementing targeted strategies, including awareness-raising initiatives, bias mitigation measures, and institutional policies that actively support work–life balance, to cultivate an environment that is truly equitable and inclusive.

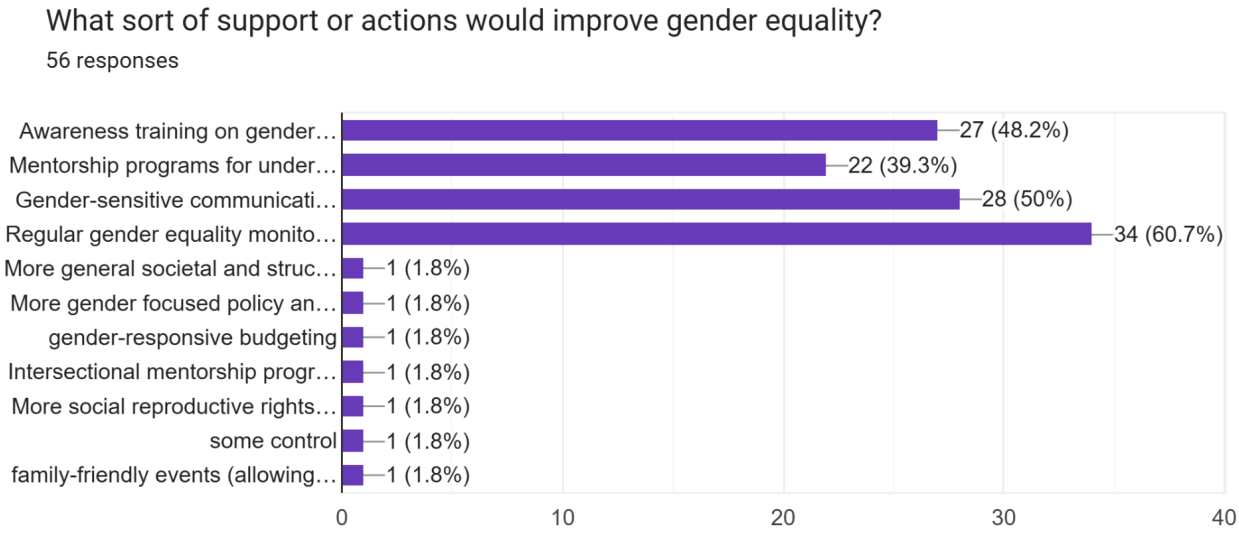


Figure 8: What sort of support or actions would improve gender equality?

When asked, "What sort of support or actions would improve gender equality?", respondents identified several complementary measures. First action, with 61%, was gender equality monitoring. Second, with a half of the respondents (50%), gender-sensitive communication and careful planning of events; followed by 48% of responses with recommended awareness training on gender bias as a critical step. Mentorship programmes for underrepresented genders were also considered valuable, with 39% of participants identifying them to support career progression and foster equal opportunities.

Analysing the responses by gender reveals that for men, the top strategies are awareness training on gender bias (70%), while for women, the main strategy is regular gender equality monitoring (65%) and gender sensitive communication and event planning (58%).

Participants also suggested additional strategies. Some of the responses included organizing family-friendly events (to allow young parents to participate, e.g., providing childcare services at conference venues), developing intersectional mentorship programs, creating peer-to-peer support networks, and promoting broader societal and structural changes that enable female researchers to fully dedicate themselves to their

work when needed. Other suggestions focused on improving social and reproductive rights and providing stronger support systems.

Participation in SHiFT activities related to gender equality and inclusion

When asked about their willingness to participate in ongoing or forthcoming SHiFT activities related to gender equality and inclusion, most respondents expressed interest in getting involved. The purpose of this question was to evaluate participants' level of engagement and motivation to actively contribute to the implementation of the COST Action's objectives. The responses, which are available in Table 2, provided valuable insight into the potential for collaboration and capacity building within the SHiFT network, as well as future involvement.

Table 2: Willingness to participate in ongoing or forthcoming SHiFT activities related to gender equality and inclusion

In the near future, would you like to actively participate:	% (n)
As a participant in the webinar?	68% (38)
As a presenter on the webinar?	38% (21)
In the working group to prepare the webinar?	50% (28)
In the gender equality Open Letter?	50% (28)
As a representative of early-career researchers of SGEIP?	16% (9)
As an independent expert of SGEIP?	29% (16)
As a senior member representative of SGEIP?	30% (17)
In an SGEIP article?	52% (29)

In this question, respondents were also invited to provide their email addresses for potential future contact regarding SHiFT activities and follow-up initiatives. This

allowed the identification of individuals interested in maintaining engagement and contributing to forthcoming actions within the network.

Integration of Gender Perspectives in Professional Practice

The majority of respondents who answered the questions *"Have you taken gender considerations into account: in recruitment processes, job assignments, or career development opportunities; in the composition of the project coordination or conference team; or in the process of collecting a new sample for your research?"* reported that they were already engaged with gender-related issues or expressed a clear interest in this area. This indicates that many participants possess prior experience or a proactive attitude towards integrating gender considerations within their professional practice, highlighting both existing expertise and the potential for further involvement in gender-focused initiatives (Table 3, Fig. 9).

Table 3: Integration of Gender Perspectives in Professional Practice

Have you taken gender considerations into account?	No	Yes	Partially	Not applicable
In recruitment processes, job assignments, or career development opportunities?	13%	59%	13%	16%
In the composition of the project coordination team or the conference team?	16%	54%	18%	13%
In the process of collecting a new sample for your research?	9%	64%	11%	16%

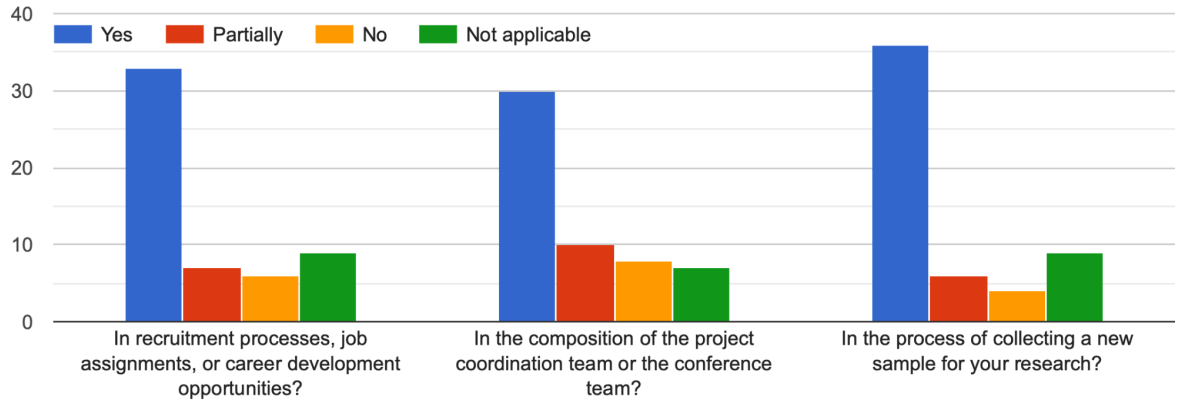


Figure 9: Gender Perspectives in Professional and Research Practice

5. Discussion

As part of the development of the SHiFT Gender Equality and Inclusion Plan, a survey was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives, experiences, and needs of the SHiFT community regarding gender balance, diversity, and inclusion.

The survey aimed to provide evidence-based insights to guide the identification of priorities and the formulation of targeted actions within the Plan. Drawing on established frameworks and references, including the International Science Council (2025), UNESCO (2019), the United Nations Population Fund (2022), as well as tools such as the GEAM survey (RESET, 2019) and the GESI Framework (2018), the survey was designed to capture both structural and cultural dimensions of gender and social inclusion within the network.

Although the findings are not fully representative, they offer an overview of current engagement, institutional support, and individual experiences related to gender equality within SHiFT members.

The overall results suggest that promoting gender equality within SHiFT requires a mix of structural measures, awareness-raising, and targeted support. Survey responses indicate a strong female presence, with women accounting for 77% of respondents (Fig. 2). Also, the leaders and action chairs are represented mainly by women. In this regard, SHiFT's COST Action differs from other COST actions. According to the COST Gender Equality Plan, 37% of Chairs and 49% of the Vice-chairs are women (COST Association.

(2024). *Gender Equality Plan for COST Activities*. https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2024/11/COST-Gender-Equality-Plan-07112024.pdf).

Demographic

Respondents were mostly senior researchers (42%), while only 5% were younger members (see Table 1, Figures 3 and 4). This suggests that SHiFT benefits from the involvement of experienced professionals while still including early-career members.

Institution, Research and Activities & SHiFT

Approximately half of the respondents (52%) reported that their home institutions have a Gender Equality Plan or an equivalent framework (Fig. 5), indicating a positive baseline of institutional support. However, 18% of participants indicated that they were unsure or did not know whether such a framework exists. Further discussion of the topic among COST members is imperative.

An important fact, 59% had witnessed or were aware of gender-based discrimination within their own institutions. This highlights some persistent structural and cultural barriers. Women's rights and gender equality still face challenges in various societies.

In contrast, only 12% reported similar experiences within the SHiFT network (Fig. 6), suggesting that SHiFT has been relatively successful in fostering an equitable and safe environment.

Measures & Strategies

Respondents indicate several strategies to advance gender equality within SHiFT. Such as, regular monitoring of gender parity was the most frequently cited action (61%), alongside gender-sensitive communication and event planning (50%), awareness training (48%), and mentorship programmes (39%) (Fig. 8). Collectively, these measures indicate that SHiFT members recognise the importance of both structural and cultural approaches in promoting inclusion.

Is SHiFT's gender balance typical? According to the literature, for social science/ or climate change projects to be female-led or to have strong parity in leadership. Many

projects are still male-dominated, especially in leadership roles, high-profile policymaking, or where technical/scientific authority is involved.

Projects that *do* achieve gender balance are often explicitly designed to do so (gender justice framing, feminist theory, inclusive design) and often operate in contexts or with funders that require or strongly encourage that.

What evidence says about gender/leaders in social science & climate change?

There is a growing recognition in climate-social science research and climate action more broadly that women are underrepresented in leadership, and that gender, social inclusion, and power dynamics are often not sufficiently addressed.

The OECD has published working papers showing that women's participation in environmental decision-making is linked to more ambitious climate goals and policies. Also, many climate justice and gender justice projects in places like Africa are led by or involve women significantly — for example, Promoting Climate Action for Gender Justice in Nigeria, which places women and gender inclusion at its centre.

But at the same time, many systemic barriers persist: gender norms, lack of visibility, funding disparities, lack of support (childcare, flexible working, etc.), and cultural resistance. These limit women's ability to lead, especially in certain contexts.

So the trend is that gender-inclusive leadership is increasingly emphasised, but it is still unusual for gender balance (especially female leadership) to be the norm in many climate/social science spaces — particularly at higher leadership levels, in many countries, or in highly technical/scientific domains.

All these findings together suggest that to make gender equality in SHiFT better, we need to make sure there is oversight of the structure, awareness of the culture, and support for specific projects. By combining these methods, the network can encourage everyone to feel included, make sure that everyone has the chance to get involved, and create a professional environment where all members can make a full contribution.

In summary:

Main barriers: Structural/institutional obstacles (61%), implicit biases (57%), family/work balance (54%), and lack of awareness (45%) were identified as the key challenges to achieving gender equality within SHiFT.

Supportive actions: Regular gender equality monitoring (61%), gender-sensitive communication and event planning (50%), awareness training on gender bias (48%), and mentorship programmes for underrepresented genders (39%) were highlighted as effective measures to improve inclusion.

Key insight: The participants consider that the barriers to equality and inclusion, in general, are both systemic and cultural, requiring a combination of monitoring, awareness-raising, and targeted support initiatives.

Implication: Implementing these actions will foster a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive environment, enabling all members to participate and contribute fully.

The survey findings therefore provide not only a snapshot of the current situation but also a valuable evidence base to guide future actions and policies under the Gender Equality and Inclusion Plan.

6. Conclusions & Limitations

The SHiFT Gender Equality and Inclusion survey provides some valuable insights into the perspectives, experiences, and engagement of members regarding gender balance, diversity, and inclusion. However, most participants in the survey were already connected with these issues. It is essential to publicise the upcoming survey and encourage new participants to join the COST action SHIFT.

The primary limitation of this initial survey was the limited time available for disseminating and collecting information. This survey was the subject of intense discussion not only in the working group but also in the webinar, which formed the basis for the new questionnaire.

7. References

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