MCAA
MARIE CURIE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

MCAA Gender, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy

Incorporating the MCAA Gender Equality Plan 2026 – 2029

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MCAA Gender, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy

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Acronyms and abbreviations

Full definitions are provided in Annex I. This document uses GDEI as the standard term for the combined Gender, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion framework, and reserves GEDI specifically for the name of the responsible Working Group.

GDEI	Gender, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (the strategy-level framework used throughout this document)
GEDI WG	MCAA Genders, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group
GEP	Gender Equality Plan (the Horizon Europe funding-eligibility instrument this document also serves as)
EDI	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
MCAA	Marie Curie Alumni Association
MSCA	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
ERA	European Research Area
REA	European Research Executive Agency
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
OWSD	Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World
SAGA	UNESCO STEM and Gender Advancement framework
GenSIS	UNESCO–OWSD Gender-Inclusive Science Institutions and Systems approach
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
CoARA	Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other sexual and gender minorities

Foreword from the GEDI Working Group

The name Marie Sklodowska-Curie is not merely a label; it is a commitment. She was a scientist who won two Nobel Prizes, who worked across the borders of nations and gender at a time when both were formidable barriers. She did not simply overcome those barriers through individual excellence; she revealed, by her example, how much the world loses when talent is excluded by identity. Her legacy demands that we ask, without complacency: in whose interests do our institutions and communities operate, and who is still being left out?

This plan is our answer to that question for the period 2026 to 2029. It is ambitious because the gaps are real. It is specific because vague commitments do not produce change. And it is honest about the constraints of a volunteer-led, member-driven organisation, because credibility depends on promising only what we genuinely intend to deliver.

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) is not a single institution but a global community of more than 24,000 researchers. Some of the evidence base in this plan is still incomplete: as several Board reviewers rightly noted during preparation, the MCAA does not yet hold comprehensive, disaggregated data on the gender, nationality, career stage, and disability profiles of its membership, governance, and award recipients. Building that evidence base is itself one of this plan's first commitments, and future revisions of this strategy will be stronger for it.

We invite every member, Chapter, Working Group, partner, and supporter of the MCAA to engage with, hold us to account on, and contribute to these commitments.

The Genders, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) Working Group, MCAA, August 2026

1 Part I: Motivation behind the MCAA GDEI Strategy

This Gender, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (GDEI) Strategy, which incorporates the MCAA's Gender Equality Plan (GEP), sets out why the MCAA is adopting this plan, what the MCAA is, and the concepts that underpin its approach to gender equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Part II situates the plan within the European and international policy frameworks that inform it. Part III sets out the concrete commitments, actions, and targets that constitute the plan itself.

1.1 Gender in the global research ecosystem

Despite gradual progress, women remain substantially underrepresented in research and scientific leadership worldwide. According to the latest United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics data, women represented approximately 31.4 per cent of researchers globally in 2023, up from 29.5 per cent in 2013. Regional differences remain considerable: women account for around 45 per cent of researchers in Central Asia, Northern Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, while participation remains much lower in Southern and Eastern Asia. UNESCO also reports that women represent only 35 per cent of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates, approximately 22 per cent of the STEM workforce in G20 countries, and only around one in ten STEM leaders.

These inequalities are not limited to participation rates. Women frequently experience greater barriers to accessing research funding, secure employment, international mobility, institutional leadership, professional networks, and decision-making positions. Such barriers are often more pronounced for women working in low- and middle-income countries, migrant and displaced researchers, women with disabilities, racialised and Indigenous women, and those based in institutions with limited scientific infrastructure. Consequently, global averages may conceal substantial disparities between countries, regions, disciplines, sectors, and career stages.

The unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work remains a major structural constraint on women's scientific careers. Globally, women perform more than three-quarters of unpaid care and domestic work and spend approximately 2.5 times as many hours on these responsibilities as men. This reduces the time available for research, mobility, networking, leadership, training, and other career-building activities. The effects are particularly significant in research systems where childcare, parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and social protection are limited or unavailable.

These challenges are reinforced by unequal access to research infrastructure and funding across regions. Researcher density remains particularly low in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of

Central and Southern Asia, limiting scientific career opportunities for both women and men, but often affecting women disproportionately. At the same time, the relatively high proportion of women researchers in some regions does not necessarily translate into equitable access to senior positions, institutional influence, research funding, or leadership.

Global frameworks promoted by UNESCO, United Nations (UN) Women, Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD), and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) therefore emphasise that improving women's representation alone is insufficient. Sustainable progress requires structural action addressing recruitment, retention, career progression, working conditions, care responsibilities, harassment and discrimination, access to resources, leadership opportunities, and participation in science-policy decision-making. For the MCAA, this global perspective is essential because its membership extends beyond Europe and includes researchers working across highly diverse institutional, socioeconomic, cultural, and geopolitical contexts.

1.2 Gender in the European research ecosystem

Despite decades of European Union (EU) policy attention, structural gender inequalities persist across the European research system. Women account for approximately 48 per cent of PhD graduates in the EU but represent progressively smaller proportions at successive career stages, a pattern documented extensively in the She Figures reports published by the European Commission. Women account for fewer than 30 per cent of full professors across most Member States and remain underrepresented in senior leadership, editorial boards, grant evaluation panels, and science policy bodies.

Specific barriers affecting women researchers include the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work; the intersection of academic precarity with family planning and parental leave; mobility requirements that disadvantage those with caring responsibilities or partnership constraints; and persistent biases in peer review and hiring. The European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions' (MSCA) own provisions directly address several of these barriers, but implementation varies widely across institutions and national contexts.

1.3 Who we are: A member-led global non-profit association

The MCAA is a non-profit association of researchers who benefit or have benefited from the MSCA of the European Commission. Founded on 7 February 2014, the MCAA is governed entirely by and for its members. It is not a research institution, a funding body, or a higher education establishment. It is, first and foremost, a community: a volunteer-powered, member-driven organisation in which the researchers themselves hold authority, set direction, and define values.

This membership-driven identity shapes every aspect of this plan. The MCAA's commitments must work for a community of over 24,000 researchers across more than 155 countries, spanning all career stages from doctoral candidates to senior research leaders, all disciplines from the humanities to engineering, and all institutional contexts from academia to industry to the public sector and civil society. Policies must be realistic and workable for a largely volunteer organisation with a lean professional Secretariat engaged on a freelance basis. The Association has no employees in the conventional sense, which shapes what employment-style Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) procedures can require of it. And they must be genuinely inclusive of a membership whose diversity of backgrounds, circumstances, and locations is one of the Association's greatest assets.

The MCAA is a civil society organisation (CSO). Under Horizon Europe, the GEP eligibility criterion is mandatory for public bodies, higher education institutions, and research organisations; it is recommended for CSOs such as NGOs. The MCAA voluntarily adopts a plan that fully meets the mandatory standard. This choice reflects the Association's role as a representative body for MSCA researchers, its aspiration to model best practice for member institutions, and its commitment to institutional accountability.

Table 1. Organisational features of the MCAA

Organisational feature	Detail	Reference
Legal status	International non-profit association, registered in Belgium	MCAA Statutes
Membership	>24,000 researchers from >155 countries	Page "The MCAA in numbers" on the MCAA website
Governance	Board (11 elected members); Executive Committee (5 elected members as part of the Board); General Assembly	MCAA Statutes
Operational structure	Professional Secretariat (17 staff, engaged as freelance contractors rather than employees) and volunteer Chapters and Working Groups	MCAA Statutes; page "MCAA Secretariat" on the MCAA website
Chapters	41 geographical Chapters	Page "Chapters" on the MCAA website
Working Groups	8 thematic Working Groups, including the GEDI WG	Page "Working Groups" on the MCAA website

Strategic pillars	1. Community engagement; 2. Career development; 3. Societal impact and science policy; 4. Governance improvement; 5. Long-term sustainability	MCAA Long-Term Strategy
Transversal approaches	Gender, Diversity and Equity; Data-driven management	MCAA Long-Term Strategy
Membership basis	Current and former MSCA fellows; all career stages; open to non-EU nationals	MCAA Statuses

1.4 The MCAA membership: Diversity by design

The MCAA's membership is defined by its diversity. The MSCA's global reach means that members come not only from EU Member States and associated countries but also from non-associated third countries, reflecting the programme's commitment to international scientific collaboration. This global membership profile is both a strength and a planning challenge: the barriers, legal protections, and institutional contexts that shape members' experiences vary profoundly across geographies.

A comprehensive, disaggregated picture of MCAA membership diversity does not yet exist. The Board reviewers of this plan were explicit on this point: the Association cannot currently state with confidence its overall gender balance, the demographic profile of its Executive Committee compared with its Board, or the gender and geographic distribution of award recipients, although available indications suggest awards have skewed towards men. Establishing this evidence base, through the "The MCAA in numbers" data the Secretariat already holds and through new voluntary General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant self-identification surveys, is accordingly treated as an early and concrete priority of this plan rather than a background assumption. Pending that fuller baseline, the following observations from available evidence guide our initial priority-setting:

- Gender representation: Women appear to be well represented in the overall membership and, in recent Board terms, have in fact held a substantial majority of Board seats; representation in the Executive Committee and among elected office-holders more specifically has been less consistent, and award recipients have skewed towards men. Section 3.2 addresses this picture in more detail.
- Geographic distribution: Members from non-EU, non-associated-country backgrounds face specific barriers to MCAA governance participation, including visa requirements for in-person events and time-zone disadvantages for online activities.

- Career stage: The membership spans a wide range of career stages, with doctoral and early-career researchers facing particular precarity and researchers at other stages facing different but real barriers, including bias linked to being perceived as either too junior or too senior for a given role.
- Disability and chronic illness: These are likely significantly underrepresented in the MCAA participation data because self-identification rates for disability are low in professional contexts, and because barriers to participation may result in non-participation rather than visible complaint.

1.5 Why this plan matters for a membership organisation

Because the MCAA is a member-led body, its culture, norms, and values are not imposed from the top but are collectively shaped by tens of thousands of individual researchers. This makes the work of gender equality and inclusion both more challenging and more impactful than in a conventional employer-employee institution.

More challenging because the MCAA cannot mandate conduct in the way an employer can. It must lead through culture, policy, programming, and the persuasive authority of its elected leadership. Its members join voluntarily and remain for reasons of community and value alignment. If the MCAA's culture is exclusionary or unwelcoming in any dimension, the most marginalised members are likely to disengage silently, without the formal redress mechanisms that employment law provides.

More impactful because a membership organisation that genuinely embodies equity and inclusion sends a signal that shapes norms across an entire professional community. When 24,000 researchers from 150 countries experience an association that is gender-balanced, racially and culturally diverse, accessible to members with disabilities, and supportive of non-linear careers, they carry those norms into their own institutions, laboratories, and policy arenas. The MCAA has the potential to be a multiplier of good practice at a scale that most individual institutions cannot match.

1.6 What diversity means in the MCAA context

Diversity, in the context of the MCAA, refers to the presence within our membership and governance of people across the full spectrum of human difference. This includes, but is not limited to, gender, including gender identity and gender expression, nationality and geographic origin, ethnicity and racial or cultural background, disability and chronic health conditions, socioeconomic background and first-generation researcher status, sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTIQ+), religion and belief, age and career stage, and family and caring status.

Diversity in a membership organisation like the MCAA is not primarily a policy target to be engineered from above. It is an existing reality of the community. Over 24,000 researchers from more than 155 countries are already part of this Association. The question this strategy addresses is not how to bring diverse people in, but how to ensure that the full reality of that diversity can participate equitably, contribute authentically, and feel genuinely welcomed and respected.

1.7 What inclusion means

Inclusion is distinct from diversity. An organisation can be diverse without being inclusive: it can contain many different kinds of people while structuring its processes, culture, and norms in ways that systematically advantage some and disadvantage others. Inclusion means actively creating the conditions in which all members, regardless of background or identity, can:

- Access MCAA activities, benefits, and opportunities on equitable terms.
- Participate in decision-making and governance without facing disproportionate barriers.
- Contribute their full selves without pressure to conform to a dominant norm.
- Feel that they belong and that their presence is genuinely valued, not merely tolerated.
- Raise concerns, experience redress, and trust that the Association will act fairly.

Inclusion is an active, ongoing practice. It requires constant attention to who is not in the room, whose voice is not being heard, and which assumptions embedded in institutional processes are inadvertently excluding people. In a volunteer-led, global membership organisation, inclusion must be designed into every aspect of how the MCAA operates.

1.8 Equity: Going beyond equal treatment

Equity recognises that equal treatment is not always sufficient to produce equal outcomes. Researchers face structurally different starting points depending on their nationality, access to resources, institutional context, health status, and many other factors. A researcher completing an MSCA fellowship in a well-funded European institution has access to support networks, career advice, and professional visibility that a researcher from a non-associated third country, working in a lower-resourced context and navigating complex visa requirements, does not.

Equity asks the MCAA to identify these differences in starting position and to actively compensate for them through targeted support, preferential access to resources where appropriate, and the removal of structural barriers wherever possible. This is not a rejection of merit; it is a recognition that merit cannot be fairly assessed or developed when the conditions for participation are unequal.

1.9 Intersectionality: The complexity of identity

Definition

> *Intersectionality is the recognition that individuals hold multiple, overlapping social identities that interact to shape their experience of privilege and disadvantage, inclusion and exclusion. An intersectional approach to EDI ensures that policies and actions do not inadvertently address only the most visible or majority experience within any given category.*

People do not experience a single dimension of identity in isolation. A researcher who is a woman is also a national of a particular country, a speaker of particular languages, a person with or without a disability, a member of a particular socioeconomic class, and much more. These dimensions interact and compound: a woman with a disability from a non-EU, non-associated country faces barriers that multiply and interact in ways that cannot be understood by examining gender, disability, or nationality separately.

The concept of intersectionality, developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw and central to contemporary EU equality policy, including the ERA Policy Agenda, requires that we resist single-axis thinking and respond to the compound realities of discrimination and disadvantage. This strategy takes an intersectional approach throughout: every pillar, every action, and every target is designed with awareness of how different dimensions of identity combine to shape researchers' experiences.

1.10 Third-country members: A specific priority

The MSCA's global orientation means that a significant proportion of MCAA members are nationals of, or based in, countries that are not EU Member States or associated countries. These members, often referred to as third-country nationals or non-associated-country researchers, face a distinct and compounding set of challenges in relation to MCAA participation and the broader research landscape

1.10.1 Who are third-country members?

Third-country members of the MCAA include:

- Researchers from countries not associated with Horizon Europe (outside the EU and the list of associated countries) who participated in MSCA projects as outgoing fellows or as part of international partnerships.
- Researchers who completed an MSCA fellowship in Europe and have since returned to their home country in the Global South, Asia, Latin America, Africa, or the Middle East.
- Researchers currently based in third countries who maintain MCAA membership for community, career development, or advocacy purposes.

- Researchers who are nationals of third countries but based in EU Member States or associated countries who may face additional barriers related to immigration status, visa requirements, and institutional integration.

1.10.2 Barriers faced by third-country members

- Eligibility gaps: Under Horizon Europe, third-country nationals from non-associated countries are generally ineligible to apply as coordinators for MSCA grants, limiting their ongoing connection to the MSCA ecosystem.
- Visa and travel barriers: Attending in-person MCAA events requires obtaining Schengen visas, which are time-consuming, costly, and often denied to researchers from certain countries, creating a systemic inequality in participation.
- Time-zone exclusion: Live online MCAA events scheduled for European time zones systematically disadvantage members in Asia, the Pacific, the Americas, and sub-Saharan Africa. This is not solely a Europe-versus-the-rest-of-the-world issue, as Europe itself spans several time zones, from the Azores to the Eastern EU border, but the effect is most acute for members furthest from Central European Time.
- Language barriers: While the MCAA operates primarily in English, many members from non-EU countries, particularly in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, may find intensive English-language programming less accessible.
- Resource disparities: Researchers in lower-income countries often lack institutional support for professional development and may lack the financial resources to access training, conferences, or networking opportunities that European peers take for granted.
- Institutional isolation: After returning to their home countries following an MSCA fellowship, researchers may find themselves isolated from the networks and visibility that their European peers continue to enjoy through geographic proximity.
- Policy invisibility: EU research policy debates rarely adequately represent the perspectives of non-European researchers, even those who have benefited from and contributed to MSCA programmes.

1.11 MCAA commitments for third-country members

- Ensure that all major MCAA events are available in hybrid format, making in-person visa barriers irrelevant to core participation rights.
- Deliberately schedule at least a portion of recurring online MCAA activities to accommodate members in non-European time zones, and publish a rotation policy so members know in advance when their region will be prioritised.
- Allocate microgrants specifically for members from low- and middle-income countries and non-associated third countries, enabling participation in career development activities.

- Develop multilingual communication resources for key MCAA documents, with particular attention to Spanish, French, Arabic, and Portuguese, reflecting the geographic distribution of the membership.
- Engage geographical MCAA Chapters in non-European regions as active partners in plan implementation, with dedicated support and resources.
- Advocate to the European Commission and REA for the expansion of MSCA eligibility and participation opportunities for researchers from non-associated countries, including in the design of the 10th EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10).
- Collect and disaggregate data on third-country member participation in MCAA activities, governance, and career development support, and report on equity of access annually.

1.12 The GDEI plan in the context of the MCAA's long-term strategy

The MCAA's vision is to create an inclusive and sustainable research environment that enables knowledge to benefit society. That vision makes clear that equality, diversity and inclusion sit at the heart of the MCAA, which is why EDI was identified as one of the transversal enablers of the MCAA's Long-Term Strategy, alongside data-driven management.

The MCAA has adopted a long-term strategic framework aimed at strengthening its impact, improving the benefits and opportunities available to its members, enhancing its governance, and ensuring the Association's future sustainability.

The framework is organised around five strategic pillars: community engagement; career development; societal impact and science policy; governance improvement; and long-term sustainability. The implementation of these pillars is supported by two transversal approaches: gender, diversity and equity; and data-driven management.

This GDEI Strategy 2026–2029 constitutes the implementation framework for the first transversal approach. It is therefore not conceived as a stand-alone or parallel strategy. Its purpose is to ensure that gender equality, diversity, equity and inclusion are systematically incorporated into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of every area of the MCAA Long-Term Strategy.

The strategy combines two complementary functions: fulfilment of the institutional and process requirements of a GEP under Horizon Europe; and integration of broader diversity, equity and inclusion principles across MCAA governance, membership, activities, services, partnerships and policy work.

The second transversal approach, data-driven management, is embedded throughout this strategy. Reliable, voluntary and GDPR-compliant data will be used to identify inequalities, assess participation and access, establish baselines, monitor progress and support evidence-based decisions. Monitoring will therefore extend beyond activity counts to include participation, representation, accessibility, satisfaction, and outcomes for different groups of members.

As a global alumni association, the MCAA recognises that diversity includes not only gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic background, and career stage, but also geographic location, nationality, migration status, language, and access to institutional resources. Particular attention will be given to the participation of members based outside the EU and associated countries, who may experience visa, time-zone, language, financial and policy-related barriers.

Implementation is a shared responsibility, reflecting the transversal nature of this strategy across MCAA governance. The MCAA Board holds institutional oversight and ultimate accountability for the strategy, since its implementation spans every Chapter and WG and cannot rest with a single thematic body. The GEDI WG provides expertise, coordinates operational delivery, and articulates the direction set by the Board with Chapters and other WGs. The Secretariat supports coordination, data collection and reporting; and Chapters, WGs and members contribute to implementation within their respective activities and communities.

1.13 Priority gaps identified

1. No comprehensive, GDPR-compliant, disaggregated membership data exists as a systematic baseline.
2. No formal anti-harassment and safe reporting policy specific to MCAA activities exists.
3. Training on gender equality and unconscious bias is not yet systematised for volunteers in leadership roles.
4. Governance documents have not been reviewed for inclusive language and equitable provisions.
5. There is no structured accessibility checklist or inclusion-by-design requirement for MCAA events.
6. Career development support does not yet systematically target members from underrepresented groups or non-associated third countries.

2 Part II: Policy Framework

The MCAA GDEI Strategy is grounded in both international commitments and European policy and regulatory frameworks that recognise gender equality, inclusive scientific systems, and equitable access to scientific careers as global priorities.

As an international alumni association with members based across Europe and in many other regions of the world, the MCAA interprets gender equality and diversity through a global and intersectional perspective. This includes recognising differences in geographic location, nationality, migration status, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, language, career stage, and access to scientific resources.

2.1 International frameworks

2.1.1 United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The MCAA strategy is particularly aligned with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Together, these connect the MCAA's internal equality policies with its wider societal impact, science-policy engagement and international partnerships.

2.1.2 CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is a principal international legal framework for eliminating discrimination against women in education, employment, professional advancement, and decision-making. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) remains one of the most comprehensive international agendas for women's rights, addressing employment, decision-making, institutional mechanisms, violence against women, and access to science and technology. Both inform the removal of direct and indirect barriers to leadership, mobility, and participation that this plan addresses.

2.1.3 UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers (2017)

This recommendation calls for equal access to scientific education, employment, and career progression without discrimination, and encourages institutions to redress past inequalities affecting women and other underrepresented groups through equitable recruitment,

promotion, assessment, and recognition of career interruptions. It informs the MCAA's work in career development, mobility, governance, mentoring, and advocacy.

2.1.4 UNESCO Call to Action: Closing the Gender Gap in Science (2024)

This call to action urges governments, institutions, funders, and civil society to address the structural causes of gender inequality in science, including through greater visibility for women scientists, gender-responsive institutional policies, and safer, fairer working environments. The MCAA contributes through its mentoring, leadership, policy, and Chapter and WG activities.

2.1.5 UNESCO STEM and Gender Advancement (SAGA) and GenSIS

SAGA provides methodological tools for measuring gender equality in science through harmonised, sex-disaggregated indicators, directly relevant to the data-driven management approach of the MCAA Long-Term Strategy. The related UNESCO–OWSD Gender-Inclusive Science Institutions and Systems (GenSIS) approach reinforces that sustainable change requires institutional and policy reform, not only individual support, which is the same principle this plan applies throughout.

2.1.6 Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD)

OWSD strengthens the role, careers and leadership of women scientists from the Global South through training, networking, research support, and advocacy. Its focus on geographic and structural inequalities in access to science and its Chapter-based model of locally rooted networks is directly relevant to the MCAA's own third-country membership and Chapter structure.

2.2 European Union policy foundations

2.2.1 EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights

Equality is a constitutional obligation in EU law, not a policy preference. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union commits the Union to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women (Article 8), to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation (Article 10), and gives it competence to act on this (Article 19). The Charter of Fundamental Rights, which carries the same legal weight as the Treaties, affirms the prohibition of discrimination on any ground

(Article 21) and the right to equality between men and women (Article 23), and binds all EU institutions and Member States implementing EU law.

2.2.2 The European Research Area (ERA) and gender equality

Gender equality and inclusion have been explicit ERA priorities since 2012. The ERA Policy Agenda 2022–2024 reaffirmed these as core values, with Action 5 calling on Member States and stakeholders to promote gender equality and inclusiveness through institutional gender equality plans, intersectional approaches, inclusive governance, and data-based monitoring; the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 deepens this commitment. The MCAA is a stakeholder organisation within the ERA Forum and contributes to these goals through that engagement alongside its own membership networks, advocacy, and the present plan.

2.2.3 Horizon Europe Regulation (EU) 2021/695

Horizon Europe (2021–2027, EUR 95.5 billion) designates gender equality as a cross-cutting priority through three provisions that directly inform this plan:

- Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) as an eligibility criterion for public bodies, research organisations, and higher education institutions from EU Member States and associated countries, the primary regulatory instrument to which this plan responds.
- Integration of the gender dimension into research content, evaluated under the excellence criterion when relevant to the topic.
- A 50 per cent target for women on evaluation committees, expert groups, and programme-related boards. As of 2025, the tie-break ranking criterion for proposals with equal scores was updated so that gender balance is assessed among researchers named in leading roles in the proposal's research team, rather than across the team as a whole which is a change long called for given the persistence of the glass ceiling in research, though it does not by itself resolve the risk of proposals being structured to meet the target on paper.

2.2.4 MSCA EDI commitments

The MSCA (2021–2027, EUR 6.6 billion) embed EDI across all instruments through concrete, enforceable provisions: family allowances and long-term leave allowances (maternity, paternity, parental, sick, and special leave) for fellows with family responsibilities; a special needs allowance for researchers or staff with disabilities; part-time working arrangements; equal pay regardless of gender; and an expectation that MSCA-funded projects embrace diversity, counter gender- and disability-related mobility barriers, and apply the European Charter for Researchers (see Section 2.2.7 below).

2.2.5 European Commission gender equality strategies and directives

The Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 combined gender mainstreaming with targeted action and intersectionality as a horizontal principle; the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030, launched in March 2026, renews this focus on gender-based cyberviolence, political and economic leadership, work-life balance, and research and innovation, alongside the Roadmap for Women's Rights from March 2025. These sit alongside the EU's binding non-discrimination directives: the Gender Equality Directive (recast) 2006/54/EC, the Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC, and the Employment Equality Directive 2000/78/EC, which set enforceable minimum equality standards across the labour market, including the research sector, in every EU Member State where MCAA members work.

2.2.6 Broader EU EDI equality strategies

This plan is additionally informed by the EU LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and its 2026–2030 successor; the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030; the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025 and successor Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030; and the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020–2030.

2.2.7 European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct

First adopted in 2005 and revised in 2023, with a further, more accessible 2025 edition, the Charter and Code establish researchers' rights, responsibilities, and obligations, and require transparent, merit-based recruitment and equal working conditions regardless of gender, nationality, disability, or other characteristics. The HR Excellence in Research label recognises institutions that implement it, and the MCAA encourages its institutional members to pursue this recognition.

2.2.8 United Nations frameworks referenced in EU policy

EU equality policy, in turn, draws on the UN SDGs, CEDAW, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women, to which the EU is a party.

2.3 How these frameworks come together

The international and European policy architecture described in this part establishes gender equality, non-discrimination, and diversity as legal obligations, programmatic requirements, and institutional responsibilities. This plan translates that architecture into commitments

appropriate to the MCAA's identity as a global, non-profit, membership-driven alumni association for MSCA researchers.

Taken together, these frameworks support a multidimensional approach to gender equality, diversity, equity and inclusion within the MCAA. They indicate that the Association should act simultaneously at four levels:

- Individual level: Career support, mentoring, training, recognition, and leadership development.
- Community level: Inclusive participation, networking, representation, and support through Chapters and Working Groups,
- Institutional level: Fair procedures, inclusive governance, data-based monitoring, and accountability.
- Policy level: Advocacy for equitable, safe, and inclusive research systems at European and global levels.

Accordingly, the MCAA GDEI Strategy is not limited to achieving gender balance in participation. It seeks to identify and remove structural barriers, improve equitable access to opportunities, strengthen the participation of underrepresented groups, and ensure that diversity contributes meaningfully to the Association's governance, scientific-policy work and societal impact.

2.4 Mandatory GEP requirements: MCAA compliance

In accordance with the Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans (European Commission, 2021) and the four mandatory process-related building blocks, the MCAA declares compliance as follows:

Table 2. The MCAA's compliance with GEP requirements

Requirement	MCAA compliance measure	Status
1. Public document endorsed by senior management	This plan is adopted by the MCAA Board, published on the MCAA website, and actively communicated to all members and stakeholders.	Complied
2. Dedicated resources and gender expertise	The GEDI WG serves as the primary implementation body. A Board liaison for EDI is appointed. Secretariat staff time is allocated to coordination and monitoring. External expertise is engaged as required.	Complied

Requirement	MCAA compliance measure	Status
3. Data collection, monitoring, and annual reporting	Voluntary, GDPR-compliant disaggregated membership data collection is established as a year 1 priority. Annual GEP Progress Reports are submitted to the Board and presented at the General Assembly.	In progress (Year 1)
4. Training and awareness-raising	Structured EDI onboarding and unconscious-bias training is mandatory for all Board members, WG coordinators, and Chapter leads, delivered within their first term and refreshed every two years.	Complied

3 Part III: Gender, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan

This part sets out the concrete commitments, actions, and targets through which the MCAA will deliver on the motivation set out in Part I and the policy foundations set out in Part II. It begins with the five Horizon Europe thematic areas that constitute the mandatory core of a GEP (Section 3), before turning to monitoring and governance (Sections 4–5) and the MCAA's broader Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (Sections 6–10).

3.1 Thematic areas, commitments, and targets

The five thematic areas recommended in the Horizon Europe GEP Guidance are addressed below. For each area, objectives, specific commitments, concrete actions, and measurable targets are set out. All targets are framed to be realistic within the MCAA's non-profit, membership-driven operational model, and reflect the Board's preference for the earliest achievable timelines rather than default multi-year horizons.

3.1.1 Work-life balance and organisational culture

Objective

To cultivate an inclusive, flexible, and supportive MCAA culture that acknowledges and accommodates the diverse personal circumstances of researchers across all life stages.

Context

Research careers impose particular demands on work-life balance. International mobility, which is central to the MSCA experience, creates added complexity for researchers with caring responsibilities, dual-career partnerships, or health needs. An alumni association that operates primarily through volunteer engagement must acknowledge that its members are giving their time within already demanding professional and personal lives. Flexibility is not a concession; it is the condition for broad and equitable participation.

Commitments and actions

- Adopt a flexible participation policy recognising that parental leave, illness, caring responsibilities, or other life events may temporarily reduce a volunteer's capacity to contribute, without prejudice to their standing in the Association.
- Schedule all major MCAA activities at times that maximise accessibility across time zones and publish a time-zone equity statement for recurring events, including principles for rotating scheduling to enable fair participation across different geographical regions.

- Ensure hybrid participation is available for all major MCAA events, including the Annual Conference and General Assembly, so that members who cannot travel due to financial, visa, health, or caring constraints can participate fully.
- Adopt and publish a code of conduct for MCAA events and digital spaces, outlining expected professional behaviour, anti-harassment provisions, and reporting mechanisms for participants and contributors. This complements the broader MCAA Code of Conduct, which already establishes the organisation's overarching principles, values, and standards of professional and ethical behaviour.
- Assess the feasibility of providing childcare support or subsidies for in-person MCAA events, and implement where resources permit.
- Include accessibility and inclusion-satisfaction items in annual member surveys, and report results to the Board.

Targets

- MCAA Code of Conduct: Existing framework, already adopted and published; any event- or digital-space-specific supplementary guidance to be referenced separately as it is developed.
- Flexible participation policy adopted: Q3 2026.
- Hybrid participation at all major events: From 2026 onwards.
- Time-zone equity statement published for all recurring MCAA events: Q4 2026.

3.1.2 Balanced representation of all genders in leadership and decision-making

Objective

To ensure that no gender is systematically underrepresented in any MCAA elected or appointed leadership position, not only the Board, but also the Executive Committee, WG, and Chapter leadership, and to advocate for balanced representation of all genders in MSCA-related governance structures. This section deliberately avoids framing the objective as a single gender-balance figure for the MCAA as a whole, since, as the context below sets out, the imbalance runs in different directions across different parts of MCAA life.

Context

The EU's Horizon Europe programme sets a target of 50 per cent women in programme-related boards, expert groups, and evaluation committees, and the ERA Policy Agenda likewise prioritises balanced gender representation in research governance. As a membership organisation that elects its own leadership, the MCAA cannot simply appoint balanced slates; it can encourage balanced candidatures and ensure that governance processes do not structurally disadvantage any group.

The MCAA's own recent history complicates a simple numeric-target approach here, and this plan is deliberately cautious as a result. Women have, in fact, held a clear majority of MCAA

Board seats in each of the last three Board terms—73 per cent in the 2022–2024 Board and 64 per cent in both the 2024–2026 and 2026–2028 Boards—while representation has been less consistent in the Executive Committee specifically, and the Association has had only two women Board Chairs to date. A generic target of a minimum percentage for each gender, of the kind common in GEPs written for institutions where men are overrepresented, would, in the MCAA's case, function as a ceiling on women's participation rather than a floor for an underrepresented group. Board reviewers were clear that adopting one without qualification could be read as working against the very researchers this plan is meant to support. At the same time, award recipients have skewed towards men, suggesting the imbalance runs in different directions in different parts of MCAA life.

Rather than set a numeric Board gender-balance target now, on the basis of an incomplete picture, this plan commits the MCAA to building the evidence needed to set one meaningfully, and to acting immediately on dimensions where the direction of the problem is already clear, including the gender balance of awards and microgrants, and the balance of the Executive Committee specifically. A numeric target for Board and Executive Committee composition, appropriately framed in light of the fuller picture, is identified as a task for the mid-term review of this plan rather than being deferred indefinitely.

Commitments and actions

- Monitor gender balance across the full MCAA leadership pipeline from membership to candidates and elected representatives, including application rates and election outcomes by gender, disaggregated by Board, Executive Committee, WG, and Chapter roles. The 2026 Chapter and WG elections will serve as a baseline for this monitoring.
- Ensure equity regarding gender and geographical representation in the MCAA Awards, honorary membership, and microgrants, and publish the demographic profile of recipients annually from the point at which this data is available.
- Implement active outreach to encourage gender-balanced candidacies for Board, Executive Committee, WG leadership, and Chapter Chair roles, including mentoring of potential candidates by incumbent leaders, with particular attention to roles and pathways where men are currently underrepresented among candidates.
- Require all MCAA-organised panels and conference sessions to strive for gender balance; require WGs and Chapters to report annually on speaker gender balance.
- Continue publishing annual data on gender composition of the Board, Executive Committee, Working Group coordination committees, and Chapter leadership on the MCAA website, disaggregated at the level of each body rather than only in aggregate.
- Engage with the Research Executive Agency (REA), the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), and the European Commission to advocate for gender-balanced composition of MSCA evaluation panels, advisory groups, and policy bodies, including in the design of FP10.

Targets

- Disaggregated annual gender-composition data (Board, Executive Committee, WGs, Chapters, awards and microgrants) published on the MCAA website: From 2027.
- At least 80 per cent of MCAA-organised panels to achieve gender balance (no gender exceeding 70 per cent of speakers): From 2027.
- Evidence-based numeric target(s) for Board and Executive Committee gender composition, informed by the data collected above, to be proposed at the 2028 mid-term review of this plan.

3.1.3 Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

Objective

To ensure that MCAA staff recruitment and its career support offer to members actively promote equal opportunity and address structural barriers, and to recognise explicitly that excellent research careers can follow diverse and non-linear pathways—not only career breaks and restarts, but also moves between sectors, geographies, and disciplines—consistent with current European discussions on research careers.

Context

As a non-profit organisation, the MCAA operates through a relatively small professional Secretariat compared with larger institutional employers, with a team of 17 people supporting the organisation's activities on a freelance basis rather than as employees—a structure that shapes what recruitment and employment-style EDI procedures can require. The Secretariat nonetheless provides an important opportunity to embed gender equality and diversity considerations in recruitment, career progression, and organisational practices, and the principles it applies to its own engagement of staff matter symbolically and practically, as an expression of the values it asks others to adopt. More substantially, the MCAA's career development activities, including the MCAA Academy, mentoring programmes, microgrants, and Coursera learning licences, reach thousands of researchers. How equitably those resources are distributed is a meaningful question of equity.

Commitments and actions

- Adopt a gender-sensitive recruitment policy for all Secretariat engagements, requiring gender-balanced shortlists, structured and criteria-based interviews, and a review mechanism for identifying and mitigating bias.
- Continue to ensure equitable access to MCAA opportunities, including microgrants, Coursera licences, and the MCAA Academy, through transparent eligibility criteria and monitoring of participation patterns. Existing allocation processes already give some attention to diversity and inclusion, including for the Coursera programme, where all licence categories, except one aimed at women, already consider under-represented

groups. This plan formalises and extends that attention with active outreach to women, researchers from non-associated third countries, researchers with disabilities, and early-career and career-restart researchers, and monitoring of whether additional targeted outreach is needed.

- Report annually on the demographic profile of beneficiaries of career development support.
- Develop specific resources for researchers navigating non-linear careers: career restart guides, return-to-research support, and connections to the MSCA's career restart provisions, where these remain available.
- Collaborate with EURAXESS and partner organisations to provide career information relevant to members located in non-EU, non-associated-country contexts.

Targets

- Gender-sensitive recruitment policy adopted: Q3 2026.
- Annual beneficiary demographics report for career development programmes, including microgrants: From 2027.
- At least one dedicated career restart activity per year: From 2027.

3.1.4 Integration of the gender dimension into research and advocacy content

Objective

To ensure that the MCAA's policy advocacy, publications, and capacity-building activities reflect and promote the integration of sex and gender analysis into research and innovation, where relevant to the topic at hand.

Context

Horizon Europe requires that the gender dimension be integrated into R&I content as a matter of scientific quality, where relevant to the topic, not as a universal formality applied irrespective of subject matter. The ERA Policy Agenda similarly emphasises the need for gender-sensitive research methodologies. The MCAA, as an advocacy organisation representing MSCA researchers, has a responsibility to help its members understand and apply this requirement, and to ensure that its own policy work models good practice, while recognising that not every policy topic has a meaningful gender dimension to integrate.

This connects directly to the MCAA's existing engagement with responsible research assessment through the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and the MCAA's own Towards an Inclusive Evaluation of Research (TIER) WG. Fair and inclusive research assessment is increasingly recognised as an enabler of gender equality, inclusion, and equitable research careers. This plan treats that connection as a matter of coherence with the Association's existing policy work rather than a separate strand.

Commitments and actions

- Where relevant, integrate gender, diversity, inclusion, and responsible research assessment considerations into MCAA policy papers, public consultations, and submissions to EU institutions, as appropriate to the topic, including those related to FP10 design, rather than treating this as a mandatory section in every document regardless of subject.
- Develop and disseminate guidance for MCAA members on how to integrate the gender dimension into their research design, methodology, and outputs, consistent with Horizon Europe requirements.
- Ensure that the MCAA's IRRADIUM magazine and other communication materials actively feature researchers from diverse genders, backgrounds, career stages, and geographic origins.
- Host at least two activities per year on the gender, diversity, or inclusion dimensions in research, targeting current MSCA fellows and MCAA members.

Contribute to or commission at least one publication per year on a topic related to gender equality, diversity, or inclusion in research.

Targets

- Gender or diversity dimension considered, where topic-relevant, in MCAA policy papers: From Q3 2026.
- At least two webinars or workshops per year on gender, diversity, or inclusion in research: From 2027.
- Annual IRRADIUM magazine EDI feature: From 2027.

3.1.5 Measures against gender-based violence and sexual harassment

Objective

To establish and maintain a zero-tolerance environment with respect to gender-based violence and sexual harassment across all MCAA activities, platforms, and communities.

Context

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment in academic and research settings are documented and serious problems. Studies consistently show high rates of harassment experienced by women and LGBTIQ+ researchers, with particular vulnerability for early-career and internationally mobile researchers who may lack institutional support networks or fear professional repercussions from reporting. The ERA Policy Agenda explicitly identifies addressing gender-based violence in academic settings as a priority. For a global membership organisation, establishing clear norms, safe reporting channels, and credible accountability is

essential, and, given the gap this plan identifies, doing so quickly is itself part of the commitment.

Commitments and actions

- Adopt and publish a formal anti-harassment and safe reporting policy covering all MCAA events, both in-person and online, digital platforms, and official communications. The policy defines prohibited conduct, reporting procedures, investigation processes, protections for reporters, and a range of appropriate sanctions.
- Maintain and actively promote the MCAA Whistleblowing Channel, ensuring it is widely known, genuinely anonymous, and operationally reliable, and involve the MCAA Ethics Committee, which already receives complaints through this channel and produces annual reports, as a partner in oversight of this policy area. The Ethics Committee's own regulation is not competent to determine sanctions against individuals, so the anti-harassment policy will define where the sanctioning authority sits. This division of roles will be reviewed alongside the Ethics Committee Regulation, which is due to be revised.
- Designate a contact person for harassment-related concerns at every major in-person MCAA event from 2026, and publicise this information prominently.
- Require all Board members, WG coordinators, and Chapter Chairs to complete training on recognising and responding to harassment as part of their onboarding.
- Conduct a biennial review of the anti-harassment policy, incorporating member feedback and updated good-practice guidance.

Targets

- Anti-harassment and safe reporting policy adopted and published: Q2 2026.
- Contact person designated at all major in-person events: From 2026, formalised in policy by 2027.
- Training completed by all elected Board members and WG/Chapter leads: Q4 2026; refreshed every two years.
- Biennial policy review report submitted to the Board: From 2027.

3.2 Monitoring, evaluation, and accountability

Accountability is the test of any equality plan. The following monitoring framework ensures that commitments are measurable, progress is publicly reported, and course corrections are possible.

Monitoring will be supported by collaboration between the GEDI Working Group, Board, and Secretariat. The Secretariat will support the integration, validation, and presentation of available institutional data, ensuring consistency of reporting, appropriate use of GDPR-compliant information, and alignment with MCAA governance processes.

Table 3 below distinguishes implementation indicators, which track whether a planned action or policy has actually been delivered, or impact indicators, which track participation, representation, accessibility, or satisfaction outcomes over time. Both are necessary: delivering a policy is not the same as changing outcomes, and this distinction is intended to keep the evidence-based approach honest about which of the two is actually being measured.

Table 3. The implementation and impact indicators of the plan

Indicator	Type	Frequency	Lead
Gender composition of MCAA Board and Executive Committee	Impact	Biannual (post-election)	Board / Secretariat
Gender composition of Working Group and Chapter coordination committees	Impact	Annual	GEDI WG
Gender and geographic balance of MCAA Award and microgrant recipients	Impact	Annual	Secretariat / GEDI WG
Gender balance of MCAA panel speakers	Impact	Per event; annual summary	GEDI WG / Event leads
Demographic membership data (self-reported, GDPR-compliant)	Impact	Annual	Secretariat
Beneficiary demographics for career development programmes	Impact	Annual	Secretariat / GEDI WG
Policies and actions delivered against the Implementation Plan (Section 8)	Implementation	Annual	GEDI WG
Training completion rates (EDI onboarding, anti-harassment)	Implementation	Annual	GEDI WG
Event accessibility satisfaction score	Impact	Annual member survey	Secretariat

Indicator	Type	Frequency	Lead
Anti-harassment policy review and anonymised incident summary	Implementation	Biennial	Ethics Committee / Board / Secretariat
Diversity and inclusion survey findings	Impact	Biennial	GEDI WG + Secretariat

An Annual GEP Progress Report will be prepared by the GEDI Working Group with Secretariat support, approved by the Board, and published on the MCAA website. A summary is presented at each annual General Assembly. A mid-term review in 2028 will inform a revised plan for 2029–2032, and will be the point at which the evidence-based Board and Executive Committee gender-composition target described in Section 3.2 is proposed.

3.3 Resources and governance of the plan

Because this strategy is a transversal approach spanning the entire MCAA Long-Term Strategy, its implementation is a shared responsibility rather than the task of a single WG. The GEDI WG provides expertise and coordinates day-to-day delivery, articulating the direction set by the Board for other Chapters and WGs; ultimate accountability sits with the Board, which supervises implementation across the Association.

- The GEDI WG coordinates plan implementation and reports on progress; its coordinator reports to the MCAA Board.
- A Board Liaison for EDI is designated to ensure GEP commitments are reflected in Board decisions and institutional strategy.
- Secretariat staff time is allocated to EDI monitoring, communications, and event coordination related to this plan.
- Where specific activities require external expertise or additional resourcing, the MCAA will seek to fund these through its operational budget, EU grant funding, or partner contributions.

The MCAA will proactively explore EU and national funding streams supporting EDI initiatives in civil society and research organisations.

Transparency commitment

> *The MCAA is a non-profit, volunteer-led organisation. This plan sets targets that are ambitious yet grounded in the realities of the Association's operational model. All targets are subject to annual review against available resources. Where capacity constraints delay implementation, this will be transparently reported and the timeline adjusted without abandoning the commitment. The strategy will be reviewed periodically to reflect emerging evidence, member needs, and organisational priorities. Future Boards and GEDI WG compositions will build upon this foundation,*

ensuring that the MCAA's approach to gender equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion continues to evolve.

3.4 Strategic pillars of diversity and inclusion

The MCAA's GDEI Strategy is structured around five strategic pillars, each with specific actions and targets. These pillars are designed to be mutually reinforcing and collectively comprehensive, and give practical effect to the concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, and intersectionality introduced in Part I.

3.4.1 Pillar 1: Inclusive membership and community

Every member of the MCAA should be able to access the Association's benefits and participate in its community on equitable terms, regardless of where they are, who they are, or what constraints they face.

Key actions

- Develop and publish a membership accessibility framework identifying and systematically addressing barriers to participation, including language, cost, technology access, visa requirements, and time zones.
- Offer targeted microgrants and participation subsidies for members from low- and middle-income countries, non-associated third countries, and members facing financial hardship.
- Develop multilingual communication resources for key MCAA materials and events.
- Ensure the MCAA website and digital platforms comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 at Conformance Level AA (WCAG 2.1 AA), considering users with visual, auditory, cognitive, or motor impairments.
- Conduct a biennial inclusion survey to gather structured member feedback on their experience of belonging, access, and equity within the MCAA.
- Establish a member-facing EDI resource hub on the MCAA website, providing access to relevant EU and international policy documents, research, practical guides, and freely available training resources on topics including gender equality, hidden/unconscious bias, disability inclusion, LGBTIQ+ rights, and anti-racism.

3.4.2 Pillar 2: Inclusive governance and leadership

The MCAA's governance must actively reflect and enable the diversity of its membership. Elected and appointed leadership should represent the geographic, gender, career-stage, and disciplinary breadth of the Association.

Key actions

- Adopt an inclusive governance policy addressing barriers to standing for election, including geographic, financial, and accessibility-related barriers.
- Review the MCAA Statutes, bylaws, and internal policies for inclusive language, equitable provisions, and potential structural barriers to diverse participation.
- Implement structured EDI onboarding for all newly elected Board members and WG and Chapter leads, and explore introducing recommended or mandatory unconscious-bias training more broadly across leadership roles, drawing on freely available external training resources.
- Establish direct reporting by the GEDI WG to the Board, with a standing agenda item at each Board meeting.
- Set targets for geographic diversity in elected leadership alongside the gender-composition monitoring and evidence-based targets described in Section 3.2.
- Publish annual data on Board, Executive Committee, and WG and Chapter leadership composition covering gender, geographic region, and career stage.

3.4.3 Pillar 3: Inclusive events and programming

Inclusion must be designed into MCAA events and programming from the outset, not retrofitted as an afterthought. Every MCAA activity should be planned with the full diversity of the membership in mind.

Key actions

- Develop and require the use of an inclusion checklist for all MCAA events, covering physical and digital accessibility, captioning and interpretation, dietary needs, prayer and quiet space provisions, time-zone equity, code of conduct, and safe-space provisions.
- Ensure hybrid participation at all major events from 2026.
- Adopt a speaker diversity policy requiring event organisers to report on the diversity of invited speakers across gender, geographic origin, career stage, and institutional sector.
- Designate EDI as a standing programming item at the Annual Conference, including through the GEDI WG's Gender Equity and Research Symposium (GEaRS).
- Actively programme events that address the specific interests and needs of third-country members, including sessions on global research careers, international mobility barriers, and the MSCA's international dimension.

3.4.4 Pillar 4: Inclusive career development

The MCAA's career development activities should actively reach and benefit all members, with particular attention to those who face structural disadvantages in the research career landscape.

Key actions

- Review the MCAA Academy mentoring programme to ensure active recruitment of mentors and mentees from underrepresented groups, including women, researchers from non-associated countries, researchers with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ researchers, and provide mentors and programme coordinators with training on inclusive mentoring practices, including awareness of hidden or unconscious bias.
- Develop targeted career pathway resources for researchers navigating non-linear careers, researchers in the career restart phase, researchers transitioning between sectors, and researchers based in non-EU, non-associated-country contexts.
- Distribute Coursera licences and other learning resources with explicit attention to equity, prioritising members who lack access to comparable resources through their home institutions.
- Collaborate with EURAXESS, the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc), the Young Academy of Europe (YAE), and other stakeholders to provide region-specific career information and support for members globally.
- Develop guidance for members on managing disability-related needs in research environments, negotiating flexible work arrangements, and accessing legal protections, adapted to multiple national contexts.

3.4.5 Pillar 5: Advocacy for systemic change

As a representative body for over 24,000 MSCA researchers globally, the MCAA has both the opportunity and the responsibility to advocate for systemic change in research and innovation policy, funding, and culture.

Key actions

- Use the MCAA Policy Forum, direct engagement with the European Commission, REA, and Members of the European Parliament, and formal consultation responses to advocate for the retention and strengthening of MSCA EDI provisions in FP10.
- Develop and publish MCAA position papers on key EDI issues, including the needs of researchers from non-associated third countries, the gendered dimensions of international mobility, researcher mental health and wellbeing, disability inclusion in research careers, and LGBTIQ+ researcher safety in international mobility contexts.
- Engage with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030, the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027, and relevant UN and UNESCO frameworks in the MCAA advocacy and policy positioning.
- Collaborate with allied organisations, including Eurodoc, YAE, COST, Science Europe, OWSD, and BPW International, to amplify EDI advocacy messages and coordinate positions.
- Represent the interests of third-country MSCA researchers in EU policy discussions, explicitly including their perspectives in MCAA submissions and statements.

3.5 Priority groups and intersectional considerations

The following matrix sets out the primary dimensions of diversity that the MCAA commits to addressing, the specific barriers associated with each, and the key intersectional considerations that shape lived experience.

Table 4. Priority groups and intersectional dimensions considered by the MCAA

Dimension	Primary barriers	Key intersectional considerations
Gender (incl. gender identity & expression)	Underrepresentation in senior roles and leadership; bias in peer review and hiring; disproportionate care burden; gender-based violence and harassment.	Gender bias compounds with geographic origin, disability, and career stage. Non-binary and transgender researchers face institutional non-recognition that intersects with all other dimensions.
Geographic origin / nationality	Visa barriers; time-zone exclusion; resource disparities; policy invisibility; restricted Horizon Europe eligibility for non-associated-country nationals.	Researchers from the Global South who are also women, disabled, or LGBTIQ+ face compounding exclusions. Geographic origin intersects with race and ethnicity in ways that shape institutional reception.
Ethnicity and race	Systemic racism and racial inequalities within institutions, research environments, and wider society; underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making roles; biased evaluation and peer-review processes; and hostile or unwelcoming environments.	Race and ethnicity intersect strongly with geographic origin, nationality, migration background, and gender. Women of colour and other racialised researchers may experience compounded forms of discrimination and barriers that are not captured through single-axis analysis.
Disability and chronic illness	Physical inaccessibility; attitudinal barriers; career precarity associated with health fluctuation; lack of reasonable adjustments in research environments.	Disability intersects with gender (women with disabilities face higher rates of violence and poverty); career stage (early-career researchers with disabilities face greater precarity); and geographic

Dimension	Primary barriers	Key intersectional considerations
		origin (legal protections and support vary widely).
Career stage and age	Precarity and power imbalances affecting early-career researchers; age-related bias affecting researchers perceived as either too young or too old for particular roles, responsibilities, or career progression; barriers to career re-entry for career-restart researchers; and reduced access to leadership and development opportunities across different career stages.	Career stage and age intersect strongly with gender (e.g. caring-related career interruptions), disability, geographic origin, and other protected characteristics. An intersectional approach is needed to address barriers affecting researchers throughout the entire career lifecycle — in both directions of age bias.
Socioeconomic background	Financial barriers to conference participation, professional development, and networking; cultural capital gaps for first-generation researchers.	Socioeconomic disadvantage intersects with geographic origin, ethnicity, and disability to compound exclusion from research career advancement.
Sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTIQ+)	Legal risks associated with international mobility to countries that criminalise same-sex relationships or gender non-conformity; hostile or unwelcoming institutional environments.	LGBTIQ+ researchers who are also from the Global South or from certain religious backgrounds may face compounding legal and cultural risks in mobility contexts.
Religion and belief	Scheduling conflicts with religious observances; dietary exclusions at events; cultural misunderstandings.	Religious identity intersects with ethnicity, geographic origin, and gender in ways that shape professional experience across different institutional contexts.

3.6 Implementation plan

The following priority action timeline guides implementation for the first phase of this plan (2026–2027), with medium-term actions for 2028–2029. Timelines have been pulled forward wherever the underlying action does not depend on new resourcing, consistent with the Board's preference for the earliest achievable dates.

Table 5. The implementation plan of the MCAA GDEI Strategy

Action	Lead	Timeline
Adopt anti-harassment and safe reporting policy	GEDI WG + Board	Q2 2026
Adopt event code of conduct	GEDI WG + Secretariat	Q3 2026
Appoint Board liaison for EDI	Board	Q3 2026
Adopt flexible participation policy for volunteers	Board	Q3 2026
Adopt gender-sensitive recruitment policy	Board + Secretariat	Q3 2026
Publish time-zone equity statement for recurring events	GEDI WG + Secretariat	Q4 2026
Designate contact person at all major in-person events	Secretariat	From 2026; formalised Q1 2027
Launch GDPR-compliant baseline membership data collection	Secretariat + GEDI WG	Q1 2027
Develop event inclusion checklist	GEDI WG	Q1 2027
Publish first Annual GEP Progress Report	GEDI WG + Secretariat	Q1 2027
Complete EDI onboarding for Board, and WG and Chapter leads	GEDI WG	Q4 2026
Review the MCAA website for WCAG 2.1 AA compliance	Secretariat	Q3 2027
Publish first MCAA EDI position paper	GEDI WG + Policy WG	Q3 2027
Develop multilingual key communications resources	Secretariat + GEDI WG	Q4 2027
Launch membership accessibility framework	GEDI WG + Secretariat	Q1 2028
Conduct first biennial inclusion survey	GEDI WG + Secretariat	Q1 2028

Action	Lead	Timeline
Mid-term GDEI Strategy review, including evidence-based Board/Executive Committee gender target	GEDI WG + Board	Q2 2028
Launch revised plan for 2029–2032 cycle	GEDI WG + Board	Q1 2029

3.7 Reporting concerns and grievances

The MCAA provides safe, accessible channels for members, volunteers, and partners to raise concerns:

- The MCAA Whistleblowing Channel enables anonymous reporting of discrimination, harassment, or unethical conduct, and is overseen in part by the Ethics Committee, which already receives complaints through this channel and produces annual reports. Details are published on the MCAA website and communicated at all major events.
- The anti-harassment and safe reporting policy (Section 3.1.5) will set out formal grievance procedures, investigation timelines, protections for reporters, and a range of sanctions. Because the Ethics Committee's own regulation does not give it competence to determine sanctions against individuals, this policy—rather than the Ethics Committee alone—is the instrument that defines sanctioning authority; the two will be aligned as the Ethics Committee Regulation undergoes its planned revision.
- A designated contact person is present and publicised at all major in-person events.
- The GEDI WG and the Board EDI liaison serve as informal first points of contact for members seeking guidance.
- All formal processes comply with GDPR and applicable law. Retaliation against reporters is explicitly prohibited and treated as a disciplinary matter.
- Anonymised aggregate data on concerns raised and actions taken is included in the biennial anti-harassment policy review and the Ethics Committee's annual report.

3.8 Review, revision, and accountability

This plan is a commitment, not a declaration. The MCAA holds itself publicly accountable through:

- Annual GEP Progress Reports, approved by the Board and published on the MCAA website.
- Annual General Assembly presentation of progress, with a structured opportunity for member input and scrutiny.
- Biennial inclusion survey, the results of which directly inform the review of this strategy.

- Mid-term comprehensive review in 2028, incorporating all monitoring data, survey findings, updated EU and international policy context, and the evidence-based Board and Executive Committee gender-composition target described in Section 3.2.
- A revised plan for 2029–2032, adopted by the Board and ratified by the General Assembly.

Accountability statement

> *The MCAA GEDI WG has prepared this plan and is operationally accountable for its implementation. The MCAA Board holds ultimate institutional responsibility for its formal adoption and ongoing oversight, reflecting the transversal nature of this strategy throughout the MCAA governance. Every elected leader, WG coordinator, Chapter lead, and active member of the MCAA shares responsibility for the culture this plan commits us to building. The researchers who bear the name of Marie Skłodowska-Curie deserve nothing less.*

Annexes

Annex I: Key definitions

Term	Definition
Gender Equality Plan (GEP)	A formal, publicly available set of commitments and actions aimed at promoting gender equality through institutional and cultural change, meeting the four mandatory process requirements of Horizon Europe.
Gender, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (GDEI)	The umbrella term used consistently throughout this plan for the combined framework of principles and practices that promote equitable participation across all dimensions of human difference. Earlier drafts of this plan used several overlapping acronyms (GEP, D&I, EDI, GEDI); this document standardises on GDEI, while retaining GEDI as the name of the responsible Working Group (see below).
MCAA Genders, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (GEDI WG)	The MCAA GEDI WG is responsible for coordinating and monitoring implementation of this plan on behalf of the Board.
Intersectionality	The recognition that individuals hold multiple, overlapping social identities that interact to shape their experience of privilege and disadvantage. Developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw; central to the EU ERA Policy Agenda and Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030.
Gender dimension in research	The integration of sex and gender analysis into research design, methodology, and outputs, required by Horizon Europe as a matter of scientific quality where relevant to the topic of the research.
Third-country national / non-associated-country researcher	A researcher who is a national of, or based in, a country that is not an EU Member State or a country associated to Horizon Europe.
Career restart	The current MSCA Work Programme continues to state that Postdoctoral Fellowships are open to researchers with high potential aiming for a career restart, alongside those wishing to reintegrate in Europe or displaced by conflict. The dedicated evaluation panel that formerly gave this differentiated

Term	Definition
	consideration has, however, been discontinued, and it is not clear how the underlying commitment is now applied in practice at MSCA level. This plan uses the term to refer to that underlying need, which the MCAA addresses directly through its own career-restart resources rather than relying on an MSCA-level mechanism.
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)	The EU's reference programme for researcher mobility, training, and career development, operating under Horizon Europe 2021–2027.
Web Content Accessibility Guidelines v2.1, conformance level AA (WCAG 2.1 AA)	The international standard for digital accessibility.
European Research Area (ERA)	The unified research space of the EU within which researchers, knowledge, and technology circulate freely.
Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)	The 17 goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD)	A UNESCO-affiliated body supporting women scientists from the Global South.

Annex II: Policy reference list

International and United Nations instruments

- United Nations. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015).
- United Nations. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- United Nations. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995).
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
- UNESCO. Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers (2017).
- UNESCO. Call to Action: Closing the Gender Gap in Science (2024).
- UNESCO. STEM and Gender Advancement — SAGA Toolkit.
- Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World. Mission and Objectives.
- UNESCO and OWSD. Gender-Inclusive Science Institutions and Systems — GenSIS.

European Union instruments

- Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Articles 8, 10, and 19.
- Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Articles 21 and 23.
- Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Horizon Europe, 28 April 2021.
- European Commission (2021). Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans. Publications Office of the EU. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/876509
- European Commission (2021). Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022, General Annexes: GEP eligibility criterion.
- ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024, Action 5: Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness. Adopted at Competitiveness Council, November 2021.
- ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027, with continued priority on structural integration of gender equality and intersectional approach to inclusiveness.
- European Commission (2020). Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.
- European Commission (2026). Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030.
- European Commission (2025). Roadmap for Women's Rights, adopted 7 March 2025.
- European Commission (2020). LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2020-2025.
- European Commission (2026). LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030.

- European Commission (2021). Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.
- European Commission (2020). Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025.
- European Commission (2026). Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030.
- Council Directive 2006/54/EC on equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment (Gender Equality Directive, recast).
- Council Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.
- Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.
- European Commission (2005, updated). European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.
- Ljubljana Declaration on the European Research Area (2021).
- European Research Executive Agency (2026). Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. REA: Brussels.
- UN Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 16, and 17 (2015).

Internal MCAA instruments

- MCAA Code of Conduct, approved version v1.0 (2023). https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/system/files/2023-06/MCAA-Code-of-conduct-approved-version-v1.0.pdf
- MCAA Ethics Committee Regulation, approved version v1.0 (2023; scheduled for revision). https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/system/files/2023-06/MCAA-Ethics-Committee-Regulation-approved-version-v1.0.pdf
- MCAA Ethics Committee — remit and membership. https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/about-us/mcaa-ethics
- MCAA Statutes. https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/about-us/statutes
- MCAA "MCAA in Numbers". https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/mcaa-numbers

Annex III: GEP self-declaration checklist

Requirement	Met?	Evidence/reference
GEP is a public document endorsed by senior management	Yes	Prepared by the MCAA GEDI WG. Submitted to the MCAA Board for review and formal adoption. To be published on the MCAA website upon Board adoption.
Dedicated resources and gender expertise committed	Yes	GEDI WG; Board EDI liaison; Secretariat.
Disaggregated data collection and annual monitoring in place	In progress (year 1)	GDPR-compliant voluntary membership data collection launching Q1 2027; Annual GEP Progress Report from Q1 2027.
Training on gender equality and unconscious bias for leadership	Yes	Mandatory EDI onboarding for Board, WG and Chapter leads; biennial refresh.

Five recommended thematic areas addressed:

Thematic area	Addressed in
Work-life balance and organisational culture	Section 3.1.1
Balanced representation of all genders in leadership and decision-making	Section 3.1.2
Gender equality in recruitment and career progression	Section 3.1.3
Integration of the gender dimension into research and advocacy content	Section 3.1.4
Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment	Section 3.1.5

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