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REPORT: WEMov’s Gender Equality Strategy and the COST Gender Equality Plan (GEP)

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Introduction

Gender equality has become a critical focus in research and innovation, especially within European networks like COST. In 2024, the COST Gender Equality Plan (GEP) was released, aiming to foster an inclusive culture in COST Actions by ensuring equal opportunities across all genders in leadership, participation, and research content. The GEP highlights that diversity leads to more innovative research outcomes and stresses the need to address gender imbalances in fields traditionally dominated by one gender (COST Gender Equality Plan, 2024)¹.

COST Action CA19112 *Women on the Move (WEMov)* aligns with these gender equality goals. Focused on women’s migration, WEMov is committed to integrating gender equality into both its research processes and organizational structures. The project emphasizes that gender equality is not only an ethical necessity but also enhances the quality of research by incorporating diverse perspectives.

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted among WEMov members in September 2024, coinciding with the conclusion of the WEMov COST Action. The survey aimed to evaluate its gender equality strategy, with a particular focus on leadership roles, research participation, and the challenges of attracting male researchers.

Structure and Content of the Survey

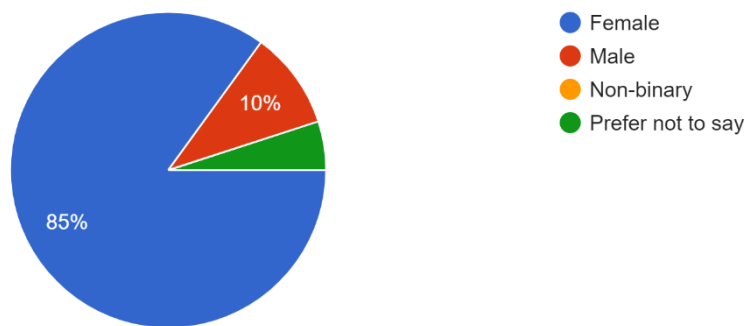
The survey used in this report aims to assess WEMov’s gender equality strategy by gathering feedback from participants holding various roles within the COST Action. It is structured as an online questionnaire that includes both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The multiple-choice section captures quantitative data on participants’ gender identities, their awareness of the COST Gender Equality Plan (GEP), and their perceptions of gender balance in leadership and decision-making processes. The open-ended section allows participants to share qualitative insights about their experiences and provide suggestions for improving gender equality within WEMov.

Survey participants include leaders, working group (WG) members, management committee (MC) members, and those holding multiple roles within the COST Action. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the current state of gender equality in the project, capturing both quantitative trends and personal experiences.

¹ The Gender Equality Plan is available here: <https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2024/07/COST-Gender-Equality-Plan-09072024.pdf>

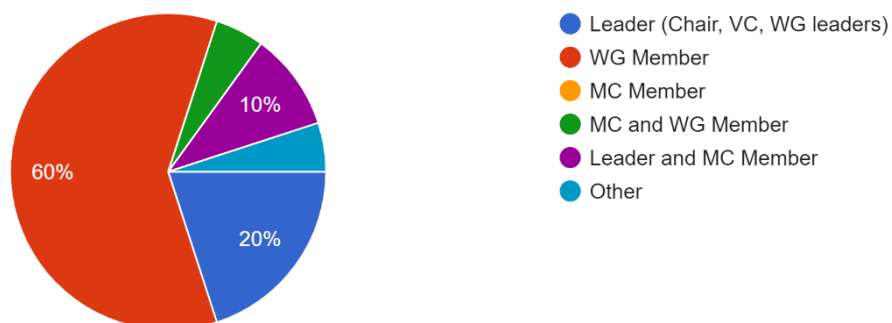
Survey Participant Overview

The survey gathers responses from various members of WEMov, including leaders, working group (WG) members, management committee (MC) members, and those who hold multiple roles within the COST Action. The participants are a mix of female (majority) and male researchers, reflecting the gender dynamics typically observed in gender-focused projects.



The participants' roles are distributed as follows:

- Leaders: 10%
- WG Members: 20%
- MC Members: 15%
- MC and WG Members: 25%
- Other roles: 5%

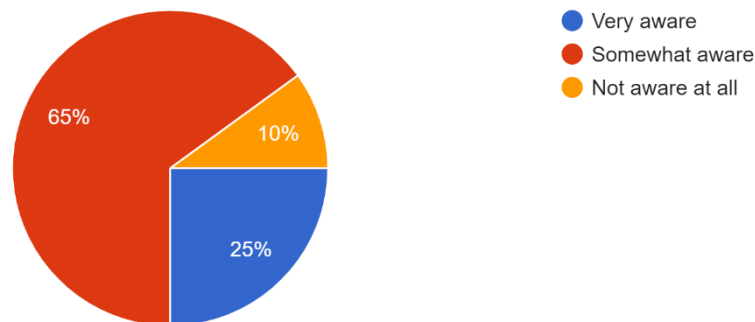


The participants also vary in their levels of awareness of the COST Gender Equality Plan (GEP), with most expressing a high level of awareness but some needing more information on the guidelines and how they apply to their work.

Key Findings from the Survey

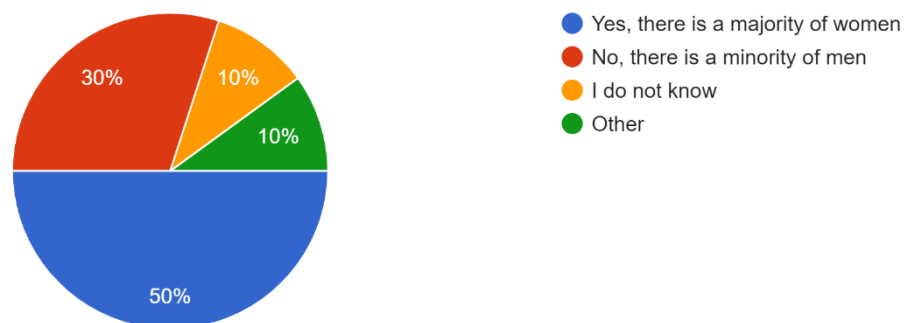
1. Gender Equality Awareness

Participants demonstrated varying levels of awareness of the GEP within COST Actions. While many respondents reported being “very aware” of the GEP, a smaller group indicated only “moderate” or “low” awareness. This suggests the need for further dissemination and clarification of new gender policies recently approved by COST within WEMov to ensure all participants are fully informed.

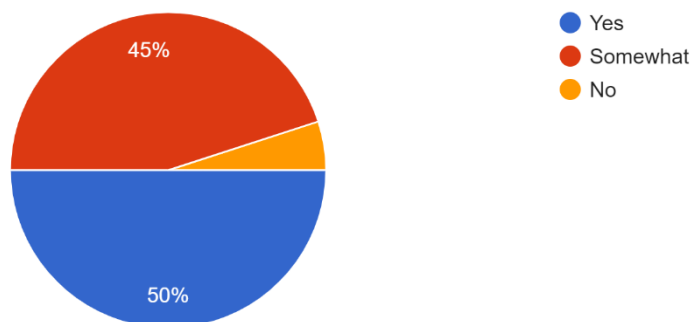


2. Gender Balance and Gender Equality in Leadership

Many respondents acknowledge that WEMov has achieved a good balance between female and male participants.



However, there is a consensus that the leadership and research teams are predominantly female, which some view as a reflection of the topic's focus on women's migration, traditionally attracting more female researchers. While women hold a majority of leadership roles, many participants emphasize the need for more balanced male and female leadership to ensure diverse viewpoints, particularly when dealing with gender-sensitive research topics. This imbalance is reflective of the broader trend in gender studies, where women are often the dominant researchers.



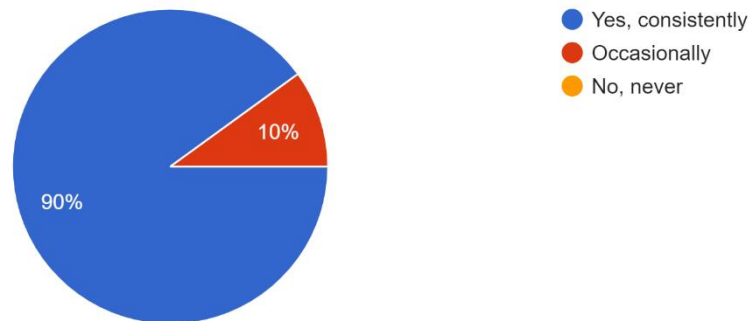
3. Barriers to Male Participation

A recurring concern is the limited involvement of male researchers in fields related to women's issues and gender studies, often perceived as female-dominated areas, particularly in topics like women's migration. Respondents suggest addressing this by implementing initiatives such as targeted invitations and emphasizing the value of male perspectives in these fields, in order to foster greater male participation. For instance, one suggestion was: *“to invite more male researchers to co-publish”* or *“Maybe helping them in facilitating and seeing what in their very own expertise would be fruitful contribution to the network. There is no research subject where gender wouldn't matter!”*.

One very interesting proposition was:

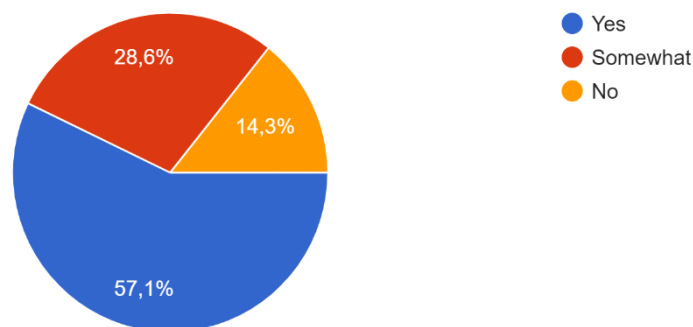
“When a research project is focused on women (women migrants, women authors, women in cinema...) the majority of scholars tend to be women, which says a lot. Maybe there should be a working group that directly involves, addresses, or would be pertinent to men somehow. For instance, Sons' Stories of Migrant Mothers, Men on Women's Migration, Charting Male Decisionmakers in Women's Migration... It is sad that men are not interested in participating in women-related projects the same way women would be willing to take part in projects that deal with men or gender in general.”

9. Do you think men and women have been given equal opportunities at WEMov?



Role of Gender-equality Advisors

The survey results regarding gender equality advisors in WEMov highlight their important role in fostering inclusivity and promoting gender-balanced decision-making. Most respondents expressed appreciation for the presence of gender equality advisors and recognized their contributions to ensuring equitable participation in activities. Those who attended the webinars on gender equality found them generally useful in raising awareness and enhancing understanding of gender dynamics within the COST Action. However, one participant noted that more systematic engagement with gender equality advisors and continuous training could further strengthen commitment to gender balance in both research and leadership.



Positive Experiences and Suggestions for Improvement



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Many respondents shared positive experiences with gender equality in WEMov, praising the inclusive and collaborative environment. They also recommend continuing mentorship programs, promoting gender balance in leadership, and incorporating other dimensions of diversity, such as ethnicity and age, into the equality framework.

These are some examples:

“The film includes men’s testimonies on women’s migration”²

“I find that people have been given the same opportunities no matter of the gender”

“Co-leadership was among the Actions’s best principles”

“The approach at the beginning team building phase focused on not only gender equity but equity in experience and age. I really appreciated how this was encouraged and in the manner which was positive firm encouragement and with justifiable reasoning. I take this away from the project as an example of best-practice in this area and a good example of measures taken to ensure equity across the board.”

“The integration of young researchers at the start of their careers, supporting women researchers in their career development.”

Final Remarks and Future Perspectives

In conclusion, the feedback provided by respondents of this survey highlights several key areas for improvement, which can be categorized thematically as follows:

- a) Targeted recruitment of male researchers in women’s and gender-specific research streams: A recurring suggestion is to design initiatives that actively encourage male participation. This approach not only recognizes the valuable contributions men can make to projects that specifically concern women’s and gender issues but also helps to foster a more balanced and inclusive environment, ensuring that gender diversity is truly reflected across all levels.
- b) Enhancing gender awareness: Another important recommendation is the implementation of regular activities aimed at maintaining a high level of gender consciousness among team members. These could include webinars, mentorship opportunities, and tailored training programs that continuously emphasize the objectives of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) and enable its quick diffusion across COST Actions. Such initiatives are essential to embed gender sensitivity as a long-term commitment, rather than a one-off endeavor.
- c) Broadening the focus on diversity: While gender remains a central concern, there is a growing call to expand the project’s diversity agenda to encompass other dimensions such as ethnicity, race, and age, using a more intersectional approach. This approach to inclusion would reflect the complex and interconnected nature of diversity and help create an environment where individuals of all backgrounds feel represented and valued in research and innovation activities, specifically among COST Actions.

² The film “In the Shadow: Women on the Move” is a key outcome of the WEMov project, co-authored by AC Marie Ruiz and VC Stellamarina Donato.



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Acknowledgment

We would like to extend my sincere thanks to all WEMov members for their participation in the survey and for providing us with valuable insights. We also want to express our gratitude to the Core Group for their invaluable support, with special appreciation to Action Chair Marie Ruiz.

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