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LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN INNOVATION AND RESEARCH INITIATIVES

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List of acronyms

ANACEC	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
ANCD	National Agency for Research and Development
ASM	Academy of Sciences of Moldova
AGEPI	State Agency on Intellectual Property
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation.
IDIS	Institute for Development and Social Initiatives
HG	Government Decision
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PNCI	National Program for Research and Innovation for 2024-2027
R&D	Research and Development
RDI	Research, Development, and Innovation
SND	National Development Strategy
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Introduction

This analytical report examines the current state of gender equality in research and innovation in the Republic of Moldova. The aim of the research is to provide a coherent and comprehensive analysis of the obstacles and opportunities in ensuring gender equality in the research and innovation sector, as well as to draw conclusions and recommendations for strengthening gender equality. The recommendations will contribute to the development of a roadmap for improving gender equality in research and innovation in the Republic of Moldova.

The report presents the results of a quantitative and qualitative research on gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova. Qualitative research has aimed at exploring the perspectives and experiences of people involved in the research system, from researchers and academics to decision-makers, to find the challenges women face, existing opportunities, persistent barriers, examples of best practices and viable solutions to promote gender equality.

The report is based on the perspectives and experiences of sixteen interviewees: researchers, academics, project coordinators, institution directories and decision makers. The interviews were structured according to a guide that addressed key issues such as the representation of women in science, career challenges, existing policies and measures implemented, as well as future recommendations. Each section of the report thematically corresponds to a set of questions in the interview guide, integrating respondents' answers and highlighting the main ideas through quotes from their narratives.

The interview guide included questions structured on several key topics: motivation and career path, experiences on gender equality (barriers, inequalities, stereotypes encountered), gender-related institutional policies and practices, access to resources and leadership positions, gender discrimination and support mechanisms, the impact of family life and motherhood on careers, as well as solutions and recommendations to promote gender equality.

The qualitative approach allowed the participants to explore in depth their personal perceptions and experiences, highlighting not only facts (e.g. the weight of women in academic positions) but also subjective valences, as women feel in the scientific environment, what invisible obstacles they encounter and what solutions they consider necessary.

The assessment directly supports the measure's goals to:

- Map and understand the status and roles of women in Moldova's research and innovation sectors.
- Identify gaps and challenges in fostering gender equality and inclusiveness.
- Enhance the visibility of existing gender-responsive practices and policies.
- Offer recommendations for increasing women's participation and leadership in innovative ecosystems.
- Support the development of tailored capacity-building and policy-integration actions for local stakeholders.

By combining both statistical data and individual experiences, this report aims to offer evidence-based recommendations to inform national policy and institutional practice, and to inspire transformative change in Moldova's innovation and research landscape toward genuine gender equality.

Methodology of research

The method of this landscape assessment combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the status, barriers, and opportunities for women in the research and innovation sectors of the Republic of Moldova.

A perception research design was employed to explore in-depth the lived experiences, beliefs, and opinions of individuals engaged in Moldova's R&D and innovation ecosystem. Between March 14 – 26, 2025, a total of sixteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders, including: researchers and PhD students, university professors and faculty deans, directors of research institutions, representatives from national research agencies and ministries, coordinators of innovation and funding programs.

The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were conducted according to an interview guide structured around several thematic axes: career motivations, barriers to participation, gender stereotypes, leadership opportunities, institutional support, the impact of motherhood, and suggestions for policy improvements.

Participants were selected to ensure gender, institutional, and disciplinary diversity. 14 out of 16 interviewees were women, covering a wide age range (30–55+) and representing a balanced mix of public universities, research institutes, and national policy-making bodies. Thematic analysis was conducted using triangulation across interview transcripts to find patterns, recurring insights, and key divergences.

Quotes from the interviews were used throughout the report to highlight qualitative trends and reinforce the authenticity of the findings.

The limitations of the methodology lie in the subjective nature of individual perceptions and in the small number of participants, but the sample was diverse and thematic, which gives us confidence that the results obtained reflect the relevant problems and trends at the level of the national research system. In addition, the triangulation of the researchers' perspective with that of the decision-makers allowed a broader understanding of the institutional context.

Next, the report has a thematic structure, following the questions in the interview guide. Each section summarizes the responses of the interviewees and highlights the recurring themes, also quotes are represented (with the mention of the respondent's code, scientific title, and function, the date of the interview). The report concludes with the general conclusions drawn up and a set of recommendations based on the solutions proposed by the participants.

To complement the findings on perception, a review and synthesis of available statistical data was conducted, drawing from: national datasets provided by the Ministry of Education and Research, reports from ANACEC (National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research); statistical records from ASM (Academy of Sciences of Moldova), patent data from AGEPI (State Agency on Intellectual Property); Recent indicators from the PNCI (National Program for Research and Innovation 2024–2027); gender-disaggregated data available through ANCD funded R&D programs, National Bureau of Statistics data on doctoral and postdoctoral research; publicly available data on the leadership of faculties, departments and research institutes within tertiary education institutions; publicly available data on leadership and workforce of the national agencies tasked with organizing the organization of research programs and with quality assurance in education and research.

While statistical data is available in various formats, its fragmented and often non-gender-disaggregated nature is still a challenge. The study highlights this limitation and recommends systematic collection and publication of sex-disaggregated data across research funding and policy implementation structures.

The integration of qualitative insights with statistical analysis enables a triangulated understanding of both subjective and systemic barriers faced by women in Moldova's research ecosystem. Findings will be discussed and confirmed in an interim consultation session with the GIZ and will be further given and refined through a dedicated technical workshop with up to thirty stakeholders.

In addition to the interviews and statistical analysis, the study was supplemented by group discussions held on 15 May 2025 at IDIS „Viitorul", attended by a mixed group of – researchers, representatives of universities, national funding agencies and decision makers in the field of research and innovation. The session, facilitated by the project team, aimed to validate the main preliminary findings and outline operational recommendations for improving gender equality in the field of research and innovation. The discussions were structured on three central themes – the flexibility of the didactic norm in relation to didactic activity in universities, the increase of women's access to management positions and ensuring a fair access to research resources, the elaboration of institutional policies in ensuring gender equality in research and innovation institutions that were signed in the observation sheets. The participants proposed concrete measures, such as the reorganization of the scientific evaluation commissions, the launch of mentoring programs and the development of transparent tools for monitoring progress, the revision of the employment contract in the research and university teaching activity that were integrated in the final recommendations section of the report.

This mixed-method approach ensures that both structural factors (laws, funding patterns, institutional policies) and lived realities (beliefs, social roles, informal practices) are accounted for in formulating recommendations for policy and programmatic action under the feminist development cooperation framework.

Executive summary

This landscape assessment explores the status of gender equality in the research and innovation sector of the Republic of Moldova, with a particular focus on the barriers and opportunities experienced by women. Combining both quantitative data and qualitative insights, the study highlights systemic inequalities, institutional practices, and the lived experiences of women researchers across disciplines.

Women constitute a majority of the R&D workforce, maintaining consistent representation since 2017. While the total number of Researchers workforce shrank from 2017 to 2024 by 22% (from 3,180 to 2,478), women's share rose from 48.5% to 53%, indicating resilience in their representation despite systemic reductions. Their presence is particularly strong in medical sciences (65%), social sciences (69%), and humanities (57%).

With regard to recognition, leadership and advanced academic roles, women researchers represent hold 54.3% of PhDs titles across all fields, but their representation declines among habilitated doctors (35.2%). This trend varies by field – social sciences show a 71 % female share at PhD versus 59 % at habilitation, medicine moves from two-thirds to just over two-fifths, whereas engineering from 25 % at PhD to only 20 % at habilitation. Patent ownership shows a disparity, with men holding 69.4% of patents compared to women (30.6%), and only one woman appearing among Moldova's top twenty-five inventors.

State-funded R&D institutions dominate the sector (76.1% as of 2021), but the absence of gender-disaggregated funding data limits analysis of potential systemic barriers. While women have comparable access to institutional resources at faculty and research facility levels, anecdotal evidence suggests men are more often selected for project leadership roles, which may influence resource allocation. In 2023, 73.5% of doctoral students received state funding, down 7.6% from 2022; since women form many doctoral candidates, this reduction may disproportionately affect them.

R&D expenditures increased to 671.1 million lei (0.22% of GDP) in 2023, though public institutions' share slightly declined (82.2% from 84.1%). Most expenditures (96.5%) cover current costs, primarily salaries (77.4%). Low research salaries, below the national average, discourage career advancement, particularly for public employees restricted by rigid compensation structures. However, available data on research projects implemented by teams of researchers shows that women lead about half of those initiatives, thereby showing that, from this perspective, women are not discriminated against when it comes to access to resources. Access to financial resources is still a challenge for both female and male researchers, as the average salary of a researcher is significantly below the national average.

Women hold 31.25% of university rector positions (33.3% in public institutions, 25% in private) and 52% of dean roles, with higher representation in pedagogical (62.5%) and humanities faculties (67%). In research institutes, 39% of directors are women, with leadership distributed across disciplines – women direct institutions in life and social sciences, as well as in traditionally male-dominated fields like physics and chemistry. While women earn 51.7% of PhDs and 47.6% of habilitated doctorates, their representation drops at senior academic levels (45.5% of university professors, 31.4% of habilitated doctors). Disciplinary gaps persist, with women underrepresented in engineering (2.7% of PhD holders) and technology (5.9% of habilitated doctors).

Within the Academy of Sciences, women's membership has risen to 12.5%, yet they occupy only 5.3% of titular academician positions. Conversely, women dominate leadership in quality assurance bodies (ANACEC: 70% of directorates, 80% of specialist roles, 85% of council members) and the ANCD (80.8% of key positions).

Gender representation in Moldova's research sector runs independently of institutional performance, as Moldovan universities are still absent from major global rankings. While gender equity reforms could improve the professional conditions for women in research, there is no sign that such measures would directly impact the quality or global standing of Moldova's R&D output. The data underscores a need for targeted interventions in resource allocation, career progression, and field-specific participation, without assuming inherent linkages between gender balance and research outcomes.

Gender equality appears to be well in reach in terms of participation of women based on statistical data, and the perception of the respondents backs these findings, the majority of women stating in the interviews that they have not experienced or witnessed gender-based discrimination in their respective professional fields. However, beliefs disclosed in interviews reveal persistent structural and cultural barriers:

- Chronic underfunding, job insecurity (due to short-term project-based contracts), and low salaries in research disproportionately affect women, who often combine multiple academic, research, and caregiving roles.
- Motherhood and family responsibilities are cited as key challenges that delay or interrupt women's professional advancement. Long maternity leaves and limited institutional support infrastructure (e.g., flexible hours, childcare) contribute to slower career progression.
- Cultural and social norms reinforce traditional gender roles, which limit women's availability for leadership and research mobility. Many interviewees reported internalized pressure to "do more" to prove their competence in a male-dominated environment.
- Institutional support for gender equality remains weak. Most universities and research institutes lack formal gender policies, mentoring programs, or targeted support measures. Positive developments – such as the adoption of gender equality plans or inclusion of gender criteria in public funding programs – are recently and unevenly implemented.

The perception-based research, based on sixteen in-depth interviews, uncovered both shared and unique experiences among women researchers. Most described their career choices as intrinsically motivated but emphasized the structural constraints such as limited visibility, lack of mentoring, and exclusion from leadership that shape their trajectories.

Participants identified subtle forms of gender discrimination, including stereotypical assumptions (e.g., about women's leadership abilities or family responsibilities) and invisible barriers such as being overlooked for high-level positions or excluded from academic statistics and events.

Recommendations drawn from the findings emphasize the need for:

- Institutionalized support measures (e.g., mentoring, flexible work conditions).
- Systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data in all R&D metrics.
- Greater visibility of women researchers, especially in university settings.
- Encouraging and equipping women for leadership and innovation roles.
- Aligning national policies with feminist development cooperation frameworks.

At the end of this study, the following are outlined and detailed:

- solutions and recommendations arising from the analysis of statistical data;
- recommendations for promoting gender equality in research and innovation;
- recommendations from participants in the discussions on the study, aimed at ensuring gender equality in the field of research and innovation in the Republic of Moldova;
- conclusions and future directions.

This report provides an evidence-based foundation for policy reform and targeted programming to advance genuine gender equality in Moldova's research and innovation ecosystem.

Sumar executiv (în română)

Această evaluare explorează statutul egalității de gen în sectorul cercetării și inovării din Republica Moldova, cu un accent deosebit pe barierele și oportunitățile cu care se confruntă femeile. Combinând, atât datele cantitative, cât și perspectivele calitative, studiul evidențiază inegalitățile sistemice, practicile instituționale și experiențele trăite de către cercetătoarele femei din diferite discipline.

Femeile constituie majoritatea forței de muncă în domeniul cercetării și dezvoltării, menținând o reprezentare constantă și în creștere de mai mulți ani. În timp ce numărul total al cercetătorilor a scăzut din 2017 și până în 2024 cu 22% (de la 3.180 la 2.478), ponderea femeilor a crescut de la 48,5% la 53%, indicând reziliența reprezentării lor în ciuda reducerilor sistemice. Prezența lor este deosebit de puternică în științele medicale (65%), științele sociale (69%) și umaniste (57%).

În ceea ce privește recunoașterea, conducerea și rolurile academice avansate, cercetătoarele femei dețin 54,3% din titlurile de doctorat în toate domeniile, dar reprezentarea lor scade în rândul doctorilor habilitați (35,2%). Această tendință variază în funcție de domeniu – științele sociale arată o pondere de 71% a femeilor la doctorat față de 59% cu titlul de doctor habilitat, medicina variază – de la două treimi femei cu doctorat la puțin peste două cincimi – femei doctori habilitați, în timp ce în inginerie numărul femeilor scade de la 25% la doctorat la doar 20% la femei doctori habilitați.

Dreptul de proprietate asupra brevetelor arată o discrepanță, bărbații deținând 69,4% din brevete în comparație cu femeile (30,6%) și o singură femeie figurând printre primii douăzeci și cinci de inventatori ai Moldovei.

Cheltuielile de cercetare și dezvoltare au crescut la 671,1 milioane de lei (0,22% din PIB) în 2023, deși ponderea instituțiilor publice a scăzut ușor (82,2% de la 84,1%). Majoritatea cheltuielilor (96,5%) acoperă costurile curente, în principal salariile (77,4%). Salariile mici din cercetare, sub media națională, descurajează avansarea în carieră, în special pentru angajații publici restricționați de structuri de remunerare rigide. Cu toate acestea, datele disponibile privind proiectele de cercetare implementate de echipe de cercetători arată că femeile conduc aproximativ jumătate din aceste inițiative, demonstrând astfel că, din această perspectivă, femeile nu sunt discriminate în ceea ce privește accesul la resurse. Accesul la resurse financiare reprezintă încă o provocare atât pentru cercetătoare, cât și pentru cercetători, deoarece salariul mediu al unui cercetător este cu mult sub media națională.

Femeile dețin 31,25% din posturile de rector universitar (33,3% în instituțiile publice, 25% în cele private) și 52% din posturile de decan, cu o reprezentare mai mare în facultățile pedagogice (62,5%) și umaniste (67%). În institutele de cercetare, 39% dintre directori sunt femei, conducerea fiind distribuită relativ uniform pe domenii și discipline – femeile conduc instituții în domeniul

vieții și științelor sociale, precum și în domenii dominate de bărbați, cum ar fi fizica și chimia. Conform celor mai recente date ale ANCEC pe ultimul an, tendința este aceea că în timp ce femeile obțin 51,7% din doctorate și 47,6% din doctorate abilitate, reprezentarea lor generală rămâne în urmă la nivelurile academice superioare (45,5% dintre profesorii universitari, 31,4% dintre doctorii abilitați). Diferențele disciplinare persistă, femeile fiind subreprezentate în inginerie (2,7% dintre doctori) și tehnologie (5,9% dintre doctorii habilitați).

În cadrul Academiei de Științe, numărul de femei care au devenit membre a crescut la 12,5%, dar ocupă doar 5,3% din pozițiile titulare de academician. Pe de altă parte, femeile domină conducerea în organismele de asigurare a calității (ANACEC: 70% din direcții, 80% din roluri de specialitate, 85% din membrii consiliului) și ANCD (80,8% din poziții cheie).

Problema reprezentării de gen în sectorul de cercetare din Moldova este una independentă de cea a performanței instituționalã, deoarece universitățile din Moldova sunt încă absente din clasamentele globale majore. În timp ce reformele egalității de gen ar putea îmbunătăți condițiile profesionale pentru femeile din cercetare, nu există niciun indiciu că astfel de măsuri ar avea un impact direct asupra calității sau poziției la nivel global a rezultatelor cercetării și dezvoltării din Moldova. Datele subliniază necesitatea unor intervenții specifice în alocarea resurselor, progresul carierei și participarea specifică domeniului, fără a indica legături inerente între echilibrul de gen și calitatea sau rezultatele cercetării.

Pe baza datelor statistice, egalitatea de gen pare să fie bine realizată în ceea ce privește participarea femeilor, iar percepția respondenților susține aceste constatări, majoritatea femeilor declarând în cadrul interviurilor că nu au experimentat sau nu au fost martore ale discriminării bazate pe gen în domeniile lor profesionale respective. Cu toate acestea, convingerile dezvăluite în cadrul interviurilor relevă bariere structurale și culturale persistente:

- Subfinanțarea cronică, lipsa de siguranță a locului de muncă (din cauza contractelor pe termen scurt bazate pe proiecte) și salariile scăzute în cercetare afectează în mod disproporționat femeile, care adesea combină roluri multiple: academice, de cercetare și de îngrijire a familiei.
- Responsabilitățile materne și familiale sunt citate ca provocări cheie, care întârzie sau întrerup avansarea profesională a femeilor. Concediile de maternitate lungi și infrastructura instituțională limitată de sprijin (de exemplu, orele flexibile, îngrijirea copiilor) contribuie la o evoluție mai lentă a carierei.
- Normele culturale și sociale consolidează rolurile tradiționale de gen, care limitează disponibilitatea femeilor pentru conducere și mobilitatea în cercetare. Multe dintre persoanele intervievate au raportat o presiune internalizată de a „face mai mult” pentru a-și dovedi competența într-un mediu dominat de bărbați.
- Sprijinul instituțional pentru egalitatea de gen rămâne slab. Majoritatea universităților și institutelor de cercetare nu dispun de politici formale în materie de gen, programe de mentorat sau măsuri de sprijin specifice. Evoluțiile pozitive – cum ar fi adoptarea de planuri privind egalitatea de gen sau includerea criteriilor de gen în programele de finanțare publică – sunt implementate recent și inegal.

Cercetarea percepției, bazată pe șaisprezece interviuri aprofundate, a descoperit atât experiențe comune, cât și unice în rândul cercetătoarelor. Cele mai multe și-au descris opțiunile de carieră ca fiind motivate intrinsec, dar au subliniat constrângerile structurale, cum ar fi vizibilitatea limitată, lipsa mentoratului și excluderea de la conducere, care le modelează traiectoriile.

Participanții/participantele au identificat forme subtile de discriminare de gen, inclusiv presupuneri stereotipe (de exemplu, despre abilitățile de conducere ale femeilor sau responsabilitățile familiale) și bariere invizibile, cum ar fi faptul că sunt trecute cu vederea pentru pozițiile de nivel înalt sau excluse din statisticile și evenimentele academice.

Recomandările formulate pe baza constatărilor evidențiază nevoia de:

- Măsuri de sprijin instituționalizate (de exemplu, mentorat, condiții de muncă flexibile).
- Colectarea sistematică de date defalcate pe sexe în toate măsurătorile de cercetare și dezvoltare.
- O mai mare vizibilitate a femeilor cercetătoare, în special în mediul universitar.
- Încurajarea și echiparea femeilor pentru roluri de conducere și inovare.
- Alinierea politicilor naționale la cadrele feministe de cooperare pentru dezvoltare

La finele acestui studiu sunt formulate, punctat și detaliat:

- soluții și recomandări care decurg din analiza datelor statistice
- recomandări pentru promovarea egalității de gen în cercetare și inovare.
- recomandările participanților/participantelor la discuțiile privind studiul în vederea asigurării egalității de gen în domeniul cercetării și inovării în Republica Moldova
- concluzii și direcții viitoare.

Acest raport oferă o bază bazată pe dovezi pentru reforma politicilor și programarea direcționată pentru a promova egalitatea reală de gen în ecosistemul de cercetare și inovare din Moldova.

THE PERCEPTION-BASED RESEARCH ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE FIELD OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

1. Career path and motivation

A Career path and motivation: *What made you choose a career in science and innovation?*

The participants' responses highlighted a variety of **motivational factors** that were the basis of the scientific career choice. Many participants invoked the *early passion for* their field and the desire to discover new things. For example, one researcher reported that even in school she dreamed "*that I would make great discoveries,* I would become a world-renowned researcher" (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025), which is why she continued her bachelor, master and doctoral studies, including abroad.

Other participants described having a **natural route to** research, believing that academic opportunities emerged successively and guided them naturally to science.

Quote

"I was fascinated by chemistry from school, and I had this dream that I will make great discoveries... that's why I chose to continue my studies... in the country and abroad"
(I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025)

„My career in science has come along the way. It was not originally chosen... Everything was very natural, step by step" (I_15, doctor, researcher, project member, 26.03.2025), who immediately followed the doctoral studies after the master's degree.

For some interviewees, *the academic environment* was perceived as a natural continuation of the teaching activity. There were also cases where **professional needs** influenced the choice of research: For example, a teacher mentioned that she started her PhD because it was an essential condition to remain a university professor, which became practically the start of her research journey (woman, 50+, Chisinau). In general, no one indicated major external constraints in career choice – motivation came from within or from the context of the educational path.

Quote

"The career in science came along somehow, step by step... in June I finished my master's degree and in November I was enrolled in a PhD. Everything was very natural"

(I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025)

It is worth noting that the male interviewee (decision-maker in the field of public policy) has accentuated the attraction to the strategic side of research. Although not directly asked about personal motivation, his involvement in a leadership role shows interest in policy making and funding the field, suggesting a different motivation – oriented toward system-level impact rather than research work.

Quote

"My choice was influenced by the need to be able to remain as a teacher at the university... the PhD was the beginning of my research path"

(I_05, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 18.03.2025)

B Academic and Professional course: *How has your academic and professional course been to date?*

The analysis of professional **routes shows different routes**, but also common elements. All respondents attended higher education (most hold the PhD title), some participants having significant international academic experience. For example, there were researchers who gained international research experience in France, Germany, Romania, and Ukraine before reintegrating into research in the Republic of Moldova.

Thus, studying abroad has enriched research and innovation skills, but also generated challenges when returned to the country (*as we will see in the section on obstacles).*

Many participants combine **multiple professional roles**. Positions of academics and research activity. This moment can be seen from their descriptions: For example, some university lecturers mentioned that they also work as a researcher in institutes, conduct scientific projects obtained through competition, and coordinate teaching activity at all levels

Quote

"I did my doctorate in France, in Bordeaux, and my post-doctoral degree in Germany. Later other activities followed..."

(I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025)

in higher education. Others hold administrative positions in research (heads of department, members of evaluation boards or commissions), which indicates an extensive involvement in the management of scientific work in addition to their own research work.

A common element is **academic continuity**. Many interviewees have gone directly from bachelor studies to master studies and then to doctoral studies, without breaks, thus strengthening their scientific career early on. *"Without a break... in June I graduated the master's degree and in October* I was already enrolled in the PhD" (I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025), it emphasizes the uninterrupted nature of its formation.

On the other hand, there were also paths with changes of direction or *professional reinventions*. Some participants started in other sectors (e.g. in the public sector or industry) and later returned to academia. One of the participants reported that he initially worked at the Ministry of Finance and continued his scientific activity to devote himself both to teaching and research, following his scientific vocation.

Overall, the professional profiles of the participants reflect a **high qualification** (all women interviewed hold scientific titles and important positions) and an intense involvement in the national research system, either through publications and projects or through coordination functions. Multiple involvement is a source of satisfaction, but as we will see it is also a source of overwork and specific obstacles for women.

Quote

"Since 5 I understood very well that I was going to follow the path in scientific activity... immediately after graduation I continued. Thus, in three years... I have defended my thesis as a doctor"

(I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025)

Quote

"I am employed as an engineer researcher at the Technical University, as a basic activity. And I also have teaching activity at the UTM College"

(I ten, PhD student, researcher, 24.03.2025)

C Career obstacles: *What do you think were the biggest obstacles you encountered in your career?*

The discussion of **obstacles** revealed several structural and personal problems that women in research have faced over the years. A *major and recurrent obstacle mentioned* by all participants is **chronic underfunding of research**. Many interviewees stressed that the lack of financial resources made it difficult to conduct relevant projects and put them in a position to work further. *"Lack of financial resources... studies in sociology are expensive. We cannot conduct a study with limited resources"* (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025), highlighting that without adequate funding, the quality of the research suffers. Under-funding from research forces many women to look for other projects in addition to their core activity or to focus on external grants, which involves additional effort.

Another major obstacle identified is the **instability of the research career**. Young female researchers have shown themselves vulnerable, as many research positions depend on temporary projects. *"Those who do research are more vulnerable. the job is for a fixed period. If you have the project, you have a job. if the project is over and you do not get another one, you need to look for work elsewhere. You do not have financial stability"* (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025) explained a research participant. That precariousness particularly affects women who often cannot accept the same mobility or availability as men (for example, for family reasons) and risk leaving the system unless they quickly find another project.

For the researchers who have been on traineeships abroad, **reintegration into the country has** been a significant obstacle. *"The biggest obstacles were the reintegration in the Republic of Moldova, after the studies and experience gained in the European space"* (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025) confessed one of them, suggesting that the local system does not have good enough mechanisms to capitalize and retain the returned specialists. The return to the national research system involved bureaucratic difficulties and the lack of jobs equivalent to the level of expertise acquired abroad.

Quote

"The lack of financial resources ... We cannot conduct a study with limited resources. If you follow the methodology, you cannot achieve a focus group without even a tea or a biscuit"

(I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025)

Quote

"Those who are basic in research are more financially vulnerable. You do not have stability... If the project is over and you do not get another one, you must look for a job elsewhere"

(I_14, researcher, project member, 26.03.2025)

A common obstacle mentioned by the participants is **the double work-family** (which we will also detail in the section on maternity). Many women have felt the extra effort to perform their professional duties in parallel with their family duties, in a context where institutional support (e.g. nurseries, flexible work programs) is lacking. Motherhood thus appears as a structural obstacle that slows career progression some participants used the phrase *"the cost a woman bears"* for career research.

From the perspective of **gender discrimination** (obstacles generated by sexist attitudes), most interviewees stated that they did not directly face explicit discrimination during their career, at least not of a serious nature. However, episodes of *bias* or prejudice have been reported. One teacher mentioned that at one point she was suggested that the topic she chose for research would be "*more suitable for a man to study*" (I_03, university professor, researcher, 17.03.2025) as a sign of a mentality that discourages women from approaching certain "too heavy" topics. Such attitudes can function as indirect obstacles, undermining trust or preventing them from accessing certain projects.

Quote

"Openly no one will say that [discrimination] is, but she feels it. Especially in the exact sciences, it is felt when a woman is in the given field and aspires to leadership"
(I_15, doctor, researcher, project member, 26.03.2025)

Therefore, the main obstacles identified were more **structural:**

- lack of funding.
- job insecurity, double burden.
- and to a lesser extent, gender bias.

Even though not all participants had the same difficulties, each could list one or more problems that made their career difficult. It is important to note that the interviewees emphasized that despite these obstacles, *perseverance and passion* helped them to move forward – an aspect that will also emerge from their final messages to the young researchers.

Quote

"When I returned [after my PhD abroad], I had to start over here again. We say that we want our international experience to come back home, but in fact we are closed off and we do not accept them, because they come with a much broader experience, we are accustomed to work as we once worked, closed, not to evolve, we arrange this for us, and then if someone comes stronger, more experienced, and we have to evolve, we have to put in extra effort into being on the level. And then it is easier not to accept them, to reject them, to stay and work as we have worked so far ..."
(I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025)

D Models and inspiration: *Did you have female mentors or models in science that inspired you?*

The question of **mentors and female models** received varied answers from the participants. Some of the participants were able to name concrete people – successful women in science – who guided and inspired them directly. For example, one researcher enthusiastically told of her PhD abroad leader, *"a lady with three young children who was able to do science and have a remarkable career"* (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025). Such moments were a source of inspiration for the participants, demonstrating that one can combine the family with a brilliant career in science. Another interviewee also mentioned **the informal mentorship received** from a more experienced colleague: *"I had [my colleague] at the chair, who helped me a lot ... as a model scientist"* (I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025). Mentoring in research helped them and explained things in the research were also models to follow, which later mattered in their training as a researcher.

On the other hand, a large part of the participants said **they did not necessarily have female mentors or** declared models. Some have pointed out that they were rather inspired by the general achievements of some scientists, without having a direct mentor: "*there are people who inspire me with their results, but* I can't say that they are a model of 'I want to be like her' because I have my own path" (I_04, PhD, 17.03.2025).

Other interviewees have admitted the absence of mentoring programs or an explicit *role-model culture in* their institutions, considering that this is even a gap that should be ensured in the future.

When there were **positive female models,** they had a beneficial impact because they provided confidence and practical advice. However, many successful women interviewed seem to have succeeded without a direct mentor, relying on their own perseverance. This suggests that there is an opportunity to formalize mentoring for young researchers, as they themselves felt the lack of structured support in their course.

Quotes

"My thesis leader, a lady ... I was fascinated to see how with three young children you could manage, do science, and have a remarkable career"
(I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025)

"I had Muse V., my colleague, at the chair, who... explained a lot to me about how to do research – as a model scientist, so to speak, was really an example."
(I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025)

"I cannot say... I do not necessarily care about a particular model. I am trying to build my own."
(I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025).

2. Experiences on gender equality in science and innovation

A Women's representation: *Do you think there is a balanced representation of women in your field of activity?*

The participants' views on the **representation of women** in different scientific fields varied according to the profile of each respondent. Overall, most indicated that women are well represented (even majority) at research staff level in many sectors but are underrepresented in leadership positions or in terms of visibility and recognition in the research system.

Some participants in the socio-human fields considered that the situation is balanced. "*If we talk about political, legal, sociological sciences, I think so. I cannot give exact figures now, but there is still gender equality [between women and men]*" (I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025) said one participant, suggesting that women have a presence comparable to men in these areas. The perception given is also explained by the fact that in social sciences and education, traditionally, women are numerous.

On the other hand, in STEM and at the top positions, the responses showed imbalances. One researcher nuanced: *"The representation [of women] can and does exist, but the chances and opportunities are not the same. Even if we are numerically more, if we look at the number of coordinated projects or scientific titles, the ratio will decrease"* (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025). In other words, although many women work in research, they have fewer **leadership roles** (lab leaders, project leaders, full teachers, etc.) than male colleagues.

Some of the women interviewed also gave concrete examples: In their research teams there were often more women than men, but men were in the upper hierarchically positions. Others mentioned that in universities, at the level of doctoral students, women tend to be the majority – a phenomenon explained, in the opinion of some, by the fact that men prefer higher-paid careers outside academia and research. Thus, research becomes populated by women (who remain passionately, even if wages are low), which creates a paradoxical situation**:**

Quote

"It certainly does not exist, at least nationally. If I refer to the general field of science, but also to the field in which I do research in history, of course there is this discrepancy between women and men. "Women are in the minority, unfortunately."

(I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025)

Quote

"Representation can and does exist, but opportunities and opportunities are not the same. Quantitatively there are more women, but if we take by the number of projects or scientific titles, the ratio is already decreasing"

(I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025)

Women are most of the scientific workforce, but minority in decision-making positions.

An interesting aspect signalled by a participant was *the difference of visibility between* women researchers in institutes and those in universities. She noted that official statistics and academic events put emphasis on researchers in institutes, often ignoring those in the university environment, who also have teaching tasks: *"Women in higher education are more discriminated against than those in research, in that they are not visible. If you look at the statistics, we are practically lost... there [in statistics] appear only the women from the research institutes"* (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025).

Quote

"If we look at how many men and how many women are lab leaders or project leaders, we will see that men prevail"
(I_14, researcher, project member, 26.03.2025).

The moment highlights a subtle way in which women's representation becomes unfair – ignoring an entire category of research academics, mostly women in overall research assessments.

In short, **the numerical representation of** women in science is perceived as high or even predominant in many areas (especially in the least remunerated areas), but **the representation at management level** (high positions, public visibility) is still unbalanced in favour of men. Not all participants consider this to be deliberate discrimination but recognize it as a fact arising from historical and social conditions.

B Gender – obstacle or advantage: *Have you ever felt that gender was an obstacle or advantage in your professional career?*

When asked this personal question, most respondents answered that they did not perceive gender as a decisive factor in their career – neither as a major obstacle nor as a special advantage. They stressed that professional development depended on individual skills, work, and circumstances, and less (at least explicitly) on being women. *"No, it was neither an advantage nor an obstacle [being a woman]. It was more about the person and personality, not about gender"* (I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025) explained one researcher, considering that in her experience the promotion was based on merit. The opinion that *gender is neutral if* you perform has been shared by several participants, especially those who did not perceive open discrimination in their environment.

Quote

"No, it was neither an advantage nor an obstacle [being a woman]. It was more about which person you are... I cannot say that it is neither an advantage nor a gender obstacle"
(I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025)

However, several interviewees admitted that there were situations where being a woman put them at a disadvantage, albeit in an "invisible" manner. A prominent example is the one mentioned above: One researcher said she was accused (by a superior) of choosing a direction of research, saying that "*it would be welcome to be investigated by a man rather than a woman*." (I_03, university professor, researcher, 17.03.2025).

That statement is a stereotype-tinge, she told her that, in the eyes of some, her competence was questioned only because of gender, so gender functioned as an obstacle in the given context. Although the case is singular, it points to mentalities that can restrain women, for example, by discouraging them from addressing "ambitious" themes or by looking at them as inappropriate for certain topics.

Other participants noted that *the advantages or disadvantages are* more context-sensitive: for example, they said they did not feel that they were disadvantaged as a woman but not advantaged – except that sometimes women are perceived as more organized or conscientious, which is not necessarily a real "advantage", but also a stereotype.

One thing that several interviewees have pointed out is that, although they did not formally feel discriminated against, they made a greater effort to reach the same results, feeling the need to always prove that they can cope. *"Women ... create extra tasks themselves and somehow do more to prove they can. I have the impression that men are a little more relaxed"* saw one participant (I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025). Such a remark suggests that, in the absence of officially differentiated treatment, women may implicitly feel the need to work double to be taken seriously, it follows that gender acts as an *internalized obstacle*, not openly imposed by the system.

None of the participants showed any *special advantages* they would have benefited from just because they were a woman. Only the interviewee man mentioned that because there are so many women in the system, it is possible that men are sometimes promoted faster to balance the situation – but this was a hypothetical observation.

Quotes

"No, it was neither an advantage nor an obstacle [being a woman]. It was more about which person you are... I cannot say that it is neither an advantage nor a gender obstacle"
(I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025)

"I cannot consider it to be an advantage, but I said before, including for the choice of the second topic for research, I was also reproached for the subject, that is, it would be better to be investigated by a man than by a woman"
(I_03, university professor, researcher, 17.03.2025)

"Openly no one says [that gender is an obstacle], but it feels ... especially in the exact sciences, when a woman wants to take the lead. It is a kind of invisible treatment"
(I_10, PhD, researcher, 24.03.2025)

Women, on the contrary, have been cautious in asserting that there is any gender advantage in their favour; if they succeeded, they put it at the expense of their own merits and family support, not any facility provided by society.

Quote

"In different situations, there were different experiences. In general, if I think about the stages of completing the doctoral thesis, I will say that it was challenging, because the predominant environment in which I did my research was male. And then I had to prove that I am a few times better to be accepted as such"

(I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025)

C Differences in treatment: *Are there differences in treatment between men and women in access to finance, promotion, or leadership opportunities?*

Most participants admitted that **differences in treatment exist**, although not necessarily on an official or intentional level, but because of *cultural and structural factors*. Practically, the idea has emerged that, *on paper*, the rules are the same for all, but *in practice women* often face additional obstacles, which makes them less able to access certain opportunities.

A concrete example discussed was the to **management positions in projects and institutions**. Many interviewees have noticed that in informal selection for leadership positions (project, laboratory, etc.), men tend to be favoured. *"When it comes to career advancement and we have two candidates, a woman and a man, surely the man will be advantaged for certain reasons*," said one participant, reflecting a perception shared by others (I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025).

No one will say explicitly that they prefer a man, but pretexts (e.g., time availability, mobility) are invoked that tilt the balance in favour of men. One researcher called this phenomenon *an "invisible treatment"* that exists in the system.

A frequently cited reason women are sometimes shunned when promoting or coordinating projects is the assumption that family responsibilities will hinder them. Several participants confirmed this assumption: *"When I had a small child... it was this fear: If you could fit in with deadlines, if you could do everything on time, because you have other activities. Men's candidates were preferred. This is at the beginning of the path"* (I_05, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 18.03.2025).

Quote

"But in the second or invisible plane there is this perception that a man would still be more preferred in certain positions or as a project leader... No one will say openly, but it happens"

(I_05, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 18.03.2025).

"...when I was a young child... of course men's applications [for research positions] were preferred. This is at the beginning of the path"

(I_05, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 18.03.2025)

In other words, at the start of a major project, *she thinks "she has a small child, she might not be able to cope*," so a man is preferred. Such prejudice, even if it is sometimes *unostent constitutes* a clear difference in treatment, signalled by the participants.

In terms of **access to finance**, most respondents said that funding opportunities (grants, projects) are theoretically open equally. But they admitted that, since men are more often project coordinators, they attract more consistent funding. One participant clearly put the point on *the pay gap in a project: "If men have a leadership position in the project, then they automatically have a higher salary. And if... the lady has an execution function, the salary will be lower"* (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025). Therefore, even if the funding is equal in positions, the fact that women are less often in the role of project coordinator and more often in the role of *executants leads* to differences in income and professional prestige.

Regarding **academic career promotion** (titles, degrees), some researchers have stated that the regulations are the same and do not make gender differences, so there should be formal discrimination. However, given that women accumulate more difficult conditions for advancement (due to maternity leave or overloading with administrative burdens), they can later reach promotion. For example, some participants mentioned that many women postpone their doctoral thesis or obtaining the associate degree because of limited time, which is de facto a stagnation compared to male colleagues.

There are also opinions that efforts have been made to correct these differences in recent years. One example came from a participant who coordinates a research program: She said she took *"very well into account the share of women"* involved in the project and complied with the legal representation criteria, including an equal number of women in the research team. It suggests that where gender criteria are required (for example, in projects funded by ANCD since 2020, there are such requirements), the differences are diminishing.

However, the general impression from interviews is that women *do not benefit from the same facto in* career treatment. Not because there are different rules, but because *circumstances* (bias, expectations, social roles) create unequal ground.

Quotes

"Women have difficulty obtaining funding for research projects and are under-represented in leadership positions... out of 45 members of the Academy's science sections, only 14 are women"
(I_016, doctor, researcher, scientific secretary, 26.03.2025)

"If men have a leading position in the project, then they automatically have a higher salary... and if the lady has an execution function, the salary will be lower"
(I_10 PhD, researcher, 24.03.2025)

We did not have a culture of leadership among women.
(I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025)

D Institutional support policies: *What institutional policies (in universities, research institutes) exist to support women in science?*

When asked about the existence of **policies or institutional measures dedicated to** supporting women in science, most respondents indicated that *they are either non-existent or very few*. In other words, there are formally no well-defined programs or practices at the level of universities or institutes that specifically favour female researchers.

The most common reaction was "*there are no such policies. And not only are they not, but given the situation we have, I do not even see certain actions... Nor is there any apparent willingness among those in charge of the institutions to think a certain plan or to take certain actions that would support women in the research activity"* (I_05, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 18.03.2025) said one participant, referring to the lack of institutional initiatives.

This reflects the reality of many academic organizations in the country: They do not have *gender equity policies* implemented internally, such as formal mentoring, internal grants for young researchers, or initiative-taking recruitment procedures.

The only aspects that have been mentioned as existing are those of *symbolic or* general level. For example, several interviewees mentioned the celebration of **the International Day of Women and Girls in Science** (February 11) – an event marked annually by some institutions. However, this initiative is perceived as insufficient. *"It seems to me that only one event a year, when we have Women in Science Day*, is little" (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the committee, 18.03.2025) commented one researcher, pointing out that there are no support programs for the rest of the year.

Moreover, it has been criticized the way in which even at that event university women are not visible (the focus is more on the researchers inthe institutes) respectively and a potential good practice is imperfectly implemented.

As a *positive practices very* few examples have been mentioned. A notable example mentioned by a respondent refers to the Academy of Economic Studies (ASEM) where a compulsory *budgetary course sensitive to* the gender-sensitive master program was introduced, which shows the integration

Quote

"I do not know, at some point, any specific campaign that would encourage [women in science]. Rather, the actions come from women in the field, less officially made by ANACEC"
(I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025)

Quote

"Only one event a year, when we have Women's Day in Science – it is a little bit... I have not seen women in higher education are invisible in the research sector... It is a discriminatory element"
(I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025)

of gender perspective in the university curriculum. While it is not a direct policy of support for women's careers, it is an example when academic institutions can address the topic of gender equality as part of education, which overall can change behaviours, attitudes, and mentalities.

Some participants recalled that in recent years, under the influence of European requirements (e.g. Horizon Europe program), research institutions have started to adopt gender equality plans or at least include gender criteria in projects. A researcher confirmed that the research program she coordinated considered the participation of women and young people according to the legal provisions, which shows a step forward. At the same time, at national level, the Academy of Sciences of Moldova adopted a plan for gender equality 2022–2025 (aligned with the European Research Area) – information mentioned by an interviewee. However, these efforts are very recent and were not known in detail by the university respondents.

In this order, the idea has emerged that so far institutional support has been absent. Women have supported each other or themselves, and **gender equality has not been a priority in the internal policies of scientific organizations**. There are *positive early trends* – imposed especially by external financiers (e.g. EU) or recent national strategies but cannot yet be quoted as well-established practices. This finding led directly to discussions about the need to implement stronger measures, reflected in the solutions and recommendations sections of the interviews.

Quote

"To be a specially drafted and approved document is not. Obviously, as a continuation, as a conclusion, it is worth it. Although usually when we talk about developing and promoting a policy, it is based on certain analyses that give us results that it is a problem."

(I_01, Project Coordinator, 14.03.2025)

3. Challenges and impact of gender equality policies

Regarding the evolution of gender equality in research and science, respondents offered mixed but moderately optimistic perspectives. Many interviewees have noted that in recent years there have been *noticeable improvements*. *"We have seen lately that the situation has improved. This is obvious"* (I_03, university professor, researcher, 17.03.2025) said an experienced participant, comparing the present with the past.

Specifically, it was mentioned that today the topic of gender equality is much more present in public discussions and on the agenda of the institutions, which was not discussed a decade ago.

Also, in some areas (especially socio-human ones) women have strengthened their position, having the same opportunities as men. This points to a *positive trend*, explained to the interviewees in relation to the evolution of alignment with international standards and recently adopted government policies. For example, adopting gender plans, imposing representation criteria in projects and increasing awareness can explain the perception of progress. One researcher noted that *"some improvement actions were proposed"* (I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025), a sign that decision-makers had begun to act. The finding is correlated with the fact that women make up the majority in the research system (at least numerically), which allows them to support each other more than in the past.

On the other hand, some respondents were more reserved. Some participants confessed that they do not have enough data to assess progress, but looking at other sectors in society (where gender equality has made progress), they believe that in research too things *have "developed positively in this respect", although "there is room for improvement"* (I_04, PhD, 17.03.2025). This opinion reflects a moderate optimism: The perception that the direction is right but cannot be fully satisfied.

Some more experienced participants also offered a different shade: They noted that the general interest in research careers is decreasing among young people, regardless of gender, due to low wages and the declining prestige of the field.

Quotes

"I think [the situation] has evolved positively."
(I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025)

"Lately, things have improved. This is obvious, unlike the exact sciences. In socio-human, ladies have the same rights as men"
(I_03, university professor, researcher, 17.03.2025)

"I do not have a benchmark to say that it has improved or remained the same. But in parallel with the other sectors... I think research has also developed positively in this regard. Like the other sectors – there is room for improvement"
(I_04, PhD, 17.03.2025)

"*There has been a decrease in the number of women who come to research. The priorities have changed, the priorities have changed. Now, among the youth, we see a practical reluctance to the field of research"* I_03, university professor, researcher, 17.03.2025) observed an interviewee.

This state implies that, as fewer young people and young people enter the research, the issue of gender equality overlaps with a broader problem – *the attractiveness of the profession*. It was also added that it is not a priority for girls to go into research, especially if they get married, because of financial conditions and family responsibilities.

> **Quote**
>
> **"Overall, at national level, the situation varies from one area to another. I do not think it is a priority for girls to go into research, because... if they get married, it will certainly be more complicated to pursue a career"**
>
> (I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025)

In summary, it can be said that the situation of gender equality in research **has improved gradually compared to** previous years – there is more awareness and measures, and in some research sectors (social, humanities) it has reached parity at the basic level. However, progress is fragile and uneven between fields, because in the exact sciences and at the top positions, gaps persist, and factors such as insufficient funding and cultural norms still delay the full achievement of gender equality. Participants stressed the need to continue this path of improvement, stepping up efforts where problems remain acute.

A Barriers and practices in public policies: *To what extent are the principles and standards of gender equality respected in public research and science policies? Are there any good practices, positive trends? Negative?*

The question asked participants to reflect at the macro level – on national policies and how they support gender equality or not. The majority considered that *although the legal framework and strategies mention gender equality*, concrete implementation leaves desirable. In other words, the principles exist on paper, but their actual observance is partial.

> **Quote**
>
> **"I think there are improvements, but probably until a good success we still have [work]."**
>
> (I_11, doctor, researcher, project member, 24.03.2025)

Many interviewees were either uninformed or sceptical about existing gender-sensitive public policies. Some admitted that they do not know in detail national strategies such as the Gender Equality Strategy, Action plans, which suggests a **communication gap** – women in research are not sufficiently involved or consulted in the development of these policies. One of them said directly: *"National – I do not know [to be political]. It would be good, for example, for European projects to provide for the percentage of women and men* ... I do not know if it is introduced in our country" (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025).

In terms of **good practices**, few could be listed. A positive example mentioned was precisely the new requirement that publicly funded research teams include women is considered a step forward if it continues to be applied. Also, the adoption of institutional gender equality plans (by some universities or research institutions) is seen as a potential positive trend, even though at the time of the interviews they are not yet actually implemented.

Some participants noted that *"improvements are,"* therefore positive trends exist, but *"until a beautiful success we have"*(I eleven, doctor, researcher, project member, 24.03.2025). The messages in the narratives acknowledged the efforts of the Government and ANCD toward gender equality but stressed that the results are not yet substantially visible.

However, as regards persistent negative practices, some issues have been reiterated, such as *gender stereotypes and sexism still* exist (even if more veiled), *wage and promotion inequalities and lack of recognition of* certain categories of women (e.g. university researchers, as being officially invisible).

One of the most important systemic problems identified was that although the legislation provides for equal opportunities, **implementation is not actively monitored.** *"There are discrepancies in the implementation of the regulatory framework. Of course, [ANACEC] can formulate improvements ... including improvements at the level of Government, Ministry, and institutions – recommendations for sure. So, it has an especially key role to ensure that plays an especially key role"* (I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the committee, 19.03.2025), suggesting that research agencies should supervise the application of gender standards.

There is therefore a **declaratory commitment to gender equality in current public policies**, but compliance with these standards is partial. There are some emerging best practices, such as project representation requirements, action plans, awareness initiatives – but they have not yet fully produced their effects. Meanwhile, old negative trends (stereotypes, power differences) can still be observed. All of this points to the need for more rigorous implementation and the transformation of document policies into obvious reality for women in science.

Quotes

"At the national level ... in theory, it must respect the UN principles of sustainable development (including gender equality), and we rally to them. But in practice, our researchers... we must take these aspects into account so that we can have them at European level, not just declaratively" (I_13, governmental official, 25.03.2025)

"The effort of women in science is double, their cost of making a career is much higher... I find it discriminatory that women in research universities are not visible in the system" (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025)

"The principles of gender equality? They are planned, but their implementation... there are some incompatibilities or differences. Proposals for improvement must be formulated at the level of the Government and institutions" (I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025)

B Effects of institutional optimizations: *To what extent do adapted policies ensure gender equality following research and science optimizations?*

The question of recent **reforms and reorganizations (optimizations)** of the research system has generated vague answers. Many participants were not sure what "optimizations" meant (for example, the merging of research institutes with universities in previous years) or could not assess *their impact on gender equality.*

From the answers obtained, it can be inferred that policies resulting from reforms have not visibly integrated the gender perspective. No participant indicated that the institutional reorganization would have introduced specific measures for women or that they would have been consulted in a distinct way. In other words, **the optimizations were structural and financial** in nature, without an explicit focus on gender equality.

Some interviewed women said that after the reform, conditions remained the same for women and men – meaning neither new barriers nor new facilities were created for women. For example, one interviewee noted that she had not noticed any noticeable change in gender equality since 2018 (when reorganizations took place), all of which still depended on skills and funding.

However, two aspects can be inferred: On the one hand, *the general decrease in* the number of postures and the departure of many researchers (following the optimizations) affected both men and women proportionately. On the other hand, the fact that some women have switched from institutes to universities may have temporarily disrupted their careers, but none have directly complained about it.

One of the few statements on the subject was that *"improvements are [after reforms]*, but there is still a long way to the desired success", suggesting that optimizations have not solved existing inequality problems – though perhaps they have brought them to public attention.

Overall, the idea that **institutional optimizations have not had a clear impact on gender equality can be drawn up**. This can be interpreted as a *missed opportunity* because the reforms could be an opportunity to introduce pro-equality measures (e.g. gender criteria in reorganization, professional retraining programs for affected researchers, etc), but this topic seems to have not been in the foreground. Therefore, women researchers felt optimizations just like male colleagues – as difficult administrative changes, but without a notable gender part.

C Experienced gender discrimination: *Have you experienced or seen cases of gender discrimination in academia or research?*

The question of actual experiences of **gender discrimination** brought up some specific examples, although most of the participants highlighted the absence of serious or flagrant situations in their careers. Many have said *they have not seen direct discrimination* in the sense of seeing women officially excluded from research for any gender-related reason. This fact is encouraging, suggests that the Moldovan academic environment does not tolerate directly explicit discriminatory behaviours.

However, cases of **subtle discrimination or sexist attitudes have been reported.** The above-mentioned incident in which a female researcher was told that her topic would be more appropriate for a man is a clear example of gender discrimination, even if it did not materialize in a formal action (the woman was not prevented from continuing her theme, but she was not allowed to continue her work). he was sent a disheartening message. That is, it was rightly perceived as a form of *gender marginalization*, against which he had to fight twice to assert his right to investigate what he wanted.

Another form of discrimination mentioned was *ignoring the contribution of women*. An example: Researchers from research universities are omitted from statistics and visibility events, which constitutes institutional discrimination, as one interviewee stated, *"it seems to me that [this] is a discriminatory element in relation to women in higher education who conduct research"* (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the commission, 18.03.2025). Their work is considered less valuable just because they do not have *full-time researcher status in* an institute, which mostly affects women in research, given that many academics are women.

Several participants pointed out that *discrimination, if any, is rarely overt,* and manifests itself through missed opportunities or *micro-inequities*. For example, one of the participants said, "*Yes, it is. If I look directly at my activity, what surrounds me, I think yes, it is a little more difficult for a woman to assert herself. In all my practice, in all my work experience, only two male bosses have changed.* (I_11, doctor, researcher, project member, 24.03.2025).

Such an opinion minimizes the existence of discrimination, attributing failures to personal choices. The given moments may reflect the experiences of the participants, even if they do not feel discriminated against, but they risk ignoring *the external factors that make some women choose family* or other field (choice that is not free from social constraints).

Quotes

"I was reproached that [my theme] would be more welcome to be investigated by a man than by a woman" (I_03, university professor, researcher, 17.03.2025) – an example of direct discrimination

"Women in higher education ... are not visible ... it seems discriminatory [that] they do not appear when reporting scientific performance" (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025)

About the discrimination, several interviewees admitted to noticing situations in which female colleagues were treated incorrectly. One example mentioned by one researcher refers to how at an international conference, tough questions were asked only to herself (the only woman on the panel), while male colleagues were spared a subtle form of academic harassment based on the prejudice that the woman should be evaluated more harshly. While not a formal example, it shows how gender feelings can influence professional interactions.

Overall, we can find that **cases of direct discrimination were few in** the reported experiences, but **indirect discrimination** – through stereotypes, attitudes, or approaches – was observed. It is also worth noting the attitude of many participants to avoid victimization: They tend to emphasize their resilience and minimize discriminatory incidents. This moment is commendable from the perspective of self-confidence, but it can also make subtle phenomena of discrimination unaddressed, because they are not brought to light.

Quote

"Yes, I saw, I was not directly involved, but I have seen different situations where women are seen, stereotyped, inferior, unable to do research, not having enough logic to do critical analysis and studies... Yes, they are. I know cases, but I will not give names. And even ladies who have suffered themselves with scientific career, on a scientific basis, namely because they refused certain favours from the leaders or members of the commission"

(I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025).

D Cultural norms and access to leadership: *How do cultural and social norms affect women's access to leadership positions in science?*

All participants recognized that **cultural norms and traditional social expectations play** key roles in shaping the professional path of women, especially when it comes to accessing leadership positions. In the Moldovan society, gender roles are still quite traditional, attributing women the main responsibility for the care of children and the household. The given reality is reflected in the careers of women scientists, who must *constantly reconcile the demands of the family with those of research*.

Many interviewees highlighted the "double burden" of women between work and domestic work – and its impact on the possibility of taking on leadership roles. *"Work-family balance is a problem. It depends on whether the husband takes on some household responsibilities... If the husband takes on some business, you manage to focus on research"* (I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025).

Quote

"Work-family balance is a problem. It depends on whether the husband is preparing lunch or dinner. If your husband takes up business, you manage to focus on research"

(I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025)

This highlighted an essential aspect, such as **the support of the family,** which can partially compensate for social norms otherwise would burden the woman. The influence of the norms was illustrated in the speeches of the participants, if family affairs are exclusively for the woman, then she must either give up her career or make enormous personal sacrifices.

Several participants confirmed the idea that in our culture, women are expected to prioritize the family. *"If a woman marries, it will certainly be more complicated to pursue a career"* (I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025) said one of the participants. This is not because someone would ban her, but because the rules require her to take care of the children, the house, follow the husband if he moves in with the job. Thus, many women, although enthusiastic about research, eventually end up making a *"social and cultural compromise"* by choosing a more flexible job or giving up leadership positions to take care of the family.

Another cultural aspect mentioned was *the feeling of women leaders*. There is still the stereotype that men are better leaders or that women are "too emotional" to lead scientific teams. Even though the participants subtly expressed such ideas, they form a *mental background in* public research organizations. Although more women have shown the opposite, such prejudices continue to discourage women from running for leadership positions ("will they take me seriously?"). or they can influence decision-makers (who choose a man who thinks, unconsciously, that he is "better off" as a boss).

The participants also stressed that **the rules are changing hard**, being deeply rooted in society. One noted that at the level of collective mentality, women are still seen as the main caretakers: *"in our society, the role of women in the family is seen as a primary one... Science does not wait until you raise the child, but society expects you to raise the child"* (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025). The conflict between "what science requires" (continuity, total dedication) and "what the family requires" (breaks, time) causes few women to get up – not because of lack of talent, but because they are unable to be in two places at once.

Quotes

"I believe that the factor of the traditionalist attitude toward the role of women in society is making its mark, sometimes overt, sometimes subtle, because traditionally the woman has several obligations, to fulfil them in the context of the family, in the context of the responsibilities she assumes. And I believe that things will take a long time, if there is no effective and persevering create a culture of gender equality in society"

(I_12, doctor, government official, 25.03.2025)

"The woman – if she gives birth to a child, obviously – she must take care. Until three years of age it is impossible to fit the child to kindergarten, and then the time for research is much less"

(I_11, doctor, researcher, project member, 24.03.2025)

However, some encouraging signs appear: Younger participants noted that new generations of fathers are more involved, and the existence of public discussions about gender equality helps to raise awareness. One of the researchers said that husbands take over from housework, which allows women to be more active professionally. Such examples show that when traditional norms are overcome in the family by sharing responsibilities, women can excel and take the lead without feeling guilt or extreme exhaustion.

Quote

"Simply put, in the daily work of women they share a lot of responsibilities and functions, and they have to share their research activity, their domestic activity, and then it is very difficult to focus on a certain field, to increase quality in that field, because, in fact, they have to work in the same field. there are several responsibilities shared..."

(I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025).

E **Pay gap: *Do you think there are differences in pay between men and women in science and innovation?***

Opinions on the **pay gap** were nuanced. In the public research and education system, wages are set by salary categories and functions, which means that *there are no direct wage differences for the same position* depending on gender. Many participants emphasized this aspect: Legally, a female associate professor/doctor has the same salary as a male doctor, a female scientific researcher earns as much as a male colleague. Thus, as a formal principle, there should be no **pay gap in** the public research sector. Some respondents even said they did not know of any difference and that, on the contrary, *"the conditions are equal for both men and women"* (I_09, doctor, researcher, 20.03.2025).

Quote

"If men have a leading position in the project, they automatically have a higher salary... and if the lady has an execution function, the salary will be lower"

(I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025).

However, differences arise *indirectly*, due to unequal distribution in positions and from different professional paths. In practice, **men often earn more** because they occupy more often better paid management positions or hold multiple more positions. One participant explained the phenomenon very clearly in the context of research projects: *"If men have a leading position in the project, then they automatically have a higher salary... If the lady has an execution function, the salary will be lower"* (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025). In many research projects, the man is the director/coordinator, the woman is a researcher or nurse – thus, the difference in role becomes the difference in income.

Also, *career outages related to* maternity affect the total long-term incomes of women. Two interviewees pointed out that women, having these breaks (maternity leave of 2-3 years), lose in terms of seniority and salary promotions, and when they reach retirement, their pension will be lower than those of men of the same age and qualification. Data were mentioned in this regard: *Women earn on average ~14% less than men*, and in retirement the difference in accumulated income leads to pensions ~37% lower.

These figures were not necessarily known to all the participants, but one of them mentioned them, showing the severity of the problem overall. Interestingly, some researchers believe that *wage differences in research are part of a general problem*—all researchers are paid modestly. One bitterly joked: *"Research being low paid, men choose other fields, and women remain in research... so men don't come here, not because they earn more, but because there is little [to gain]"* (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025).

Her idea is that the gender gap in research is smaller than the difference between researchers (women/men) and other professionals. However, even if all are underpaid, women are more willing to accept this fact, leading to research becoming a "feminized" low-wage field – a vicious circle of devaluation of work.

Thus, **officially there are no gender-based pay** *differences, but the differences arise for structural reasons*: Men occupy more senior positions and accumulate more uninterrupted seniority, while women have careers fragmented by the maternal role. As a result, the average earnings of female researchers are lower and their prospects for life earnings are reduced, even though the pay for the same job is the same. The participants suggested that the solution is to ensure that women can get into leadership positions (i.e. higher salaries) to the same extent as men and that maternity breaks are somehow compensated.

Quotes

"Yes, it is not an express difference to the law, but in the institutional activity of everyday life it is felt, because as long as the salary depends on the position I am occupying, it is clear that men occupy the leading positions and then calculating at the end the salary of women and the salary of men between institutions, these differences certainly arise."
(I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025)

"Women earn an average of 14% less than men, and this difference widens at retirement age, reaching 37%"
(I_016, doctor, researcher, scientific secretary, 26.03.2025).

"Science, being underpaid, men choose to pursue careers in other fields... and then women remain the ones who embark on research"
(I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the ANACEC, 18.03.2025).

F Impact of maternity and family life: *How does motherhood and family life influence women's professional progress in this area?*

All participants agreed – often from their own experience – that **motherhood and family responsibilities significantly influence a scientist's career.** Such influence is negative in the sense of slowing professional progress, although many women find ways to continue making personal sacrifices.

Motherhood usually brings a break in research work. In Moldova, childcare leave can last up to 3 years, and many researchers choose or are forced to take a large part of this leave. The interviewees described in emotional terms how the given period is. *"The role of a mother until the age of 2-3 at home: 2 years you lose out on qualifications, skills. When you return to work after 2 years, you fall behind your colleagues, your progress,"* said a researcher who went through this (I_04, PhD, 17.03.2025). This quote perfectly captures the reality, while the researcher woman is at home with the child, the field evolves, colleagues have published, innovative technologies have appeared, and the woman must recover quickly. The loss of pace can also mean missing opportunities (grants, conferences) during that interval, therefore a gap difficult to offset.

In addition, even during *childcare*, many researchers have tried to keep a minimum of scientific activity – usually with extraordinary effort. One participant said: *"Being with the young child, I could not afford to go to the library to research. I had to merge: The child was sleeping; I was working on the computer. At night, when I was asleep, I was working again. It was the most difficult period"* (I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025). The testimony given illustrates the price paid by many women – late working hours, minimal rest, all so as not to abandon the academic dream. Obviously, not everyone can sustain this rhythm, and some women give in, choosing families at the expense of their careers, which is reflected in the lower percentage of women in advanced positions.

The family life of motherhood continues to influence the availability of research for women. Children often stay in the mother's primary care even after they grow up, and

Quotes

"Yes, that is an obstacle. Perhaps, to do research, scientific elaboration, qualitative, you must probably dedicate yourself to the subject you are researching, but often the problems that exist in the family, the relationships you have with your husband, in some cases are families, the family, the family, the family, the family, the family, the family, the relationships you have with your husband. especially those women who participate in research, face a multitude of problems"
(I_03, university professor, researcher, 17.03.2025).

"I did the master's work being pregnant and with a small child in care... I felt challenges: Access to institutions, to publications – with the child I cannot afford to go to the library. There is no place to leave the child"
(I_04, PhD, 17.03.2025).

daily household chores consume time and energy. Many interviewees admitted that, having a family, they could not stay overtime in the laboratory or travel as much to national and foreign scientific events. One researcher said, *"Science does not wait until you care for someone... for example, a lab, if you want results, you must be there daily. But if you take care of a family member, you cannot"* (I_06, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 18.03.2025). In this context, personal life sets practical limits – not necessarily through formal coercion, but through *moral and emotional imperatives*. Scientists feel the pressure to "do it all," but the day has only 24 hours.

Many participants stressed the need for *support to* mitigate these effects. Some received family support (parents, husband), which allowed them to continue. Others, however, did not have such a network and had to limit their ambitions. One explicitly proposed that support infrastructures (crèches, long kindergartens) should be created for young researchers, otherwise they "lose the train" (I_02, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025)

Therefore, *motherhood and family life significantly delay the professional rise of women*, explaining why we see fewer and fewer women as we ascend to the top of the academic hierarchy. Women compensate as they can – work at night, postpone motherhood or have fewer children, accept smaller roles – but these compromises also have their own costs. All interviewees agreed that women should not be asked to choose between career and family. On the contrary, the system should *support them to* be able to achieve both, as is the case with men (who, with the support of wives, usually manage to have both career and family).

Quotes

"The time I worked on my PhD thesis was the most difficult, for a simple reason: I didn't have anyone to help me [with the child] ... at night he was asleep, I was working on the computer and so on"
(I_02, PhD, researcher, project coordinator, 14.03.2025).

"I think women could do and do a lot. But the fact that they succeed both with motherhood and on the academic side, I would say it is something extra, more than a man does."
(I_10, PhD, researcher, 24.03.2025).

4. Implemented measures and the impact of current policies

A *How do you assess the impact of current policies and initiatives on gender equality in research and innovation?*

On the one hand, women are present in many fields and have notable achievements, proving that *they "have the same possibilities... I see no impediment"* to succeeding, according to one of the researchers. On the other hand, there are several **structural and cultural problems that** make their career path significantly difficult and limit their access to top positions. Below we summarize the main findings on the impact of current policies and initiatives:

- **A "glass ceiling" persists in women's research careers.** Women make up about half or even most research staff in many institutions, but they occupy far fewer management positions (project heads, institute directors, members in academic forums). For example, only *5 in 24 rectories* of higher education institutions are women. This disparity shows a *"glass ceiling"* – not formal, but a result of socio-cultural and institutional factors.
- **Key barriers to women's careers.** The chronic lack of research funding affects all researchers, but it strikes women more strongly, who often remain in lower positions and thus more vulnerable to the income side over the course of their lives. Job instability (contracts per project) creates professional insecurity. The situation of *dual family-career burden* especially weighs on women, leading to interruptions in activity, slower pace of advancement and prejudices about their willingness to advance into hierarchical positions. Motherhood is associated with qualifying "lost years"and considerable personal sacrifice.
- **Gender discrimination in subtle form.** Although no cases of direct institutionalized discrimination have been reported, there are many subtle manifestations: Stereotypes (e.g. the idea that certain subjects "are not for women"), tacit preferences for promotion (choosing a supposedly "freer" man), low visibility of women's contributions (ignoring university researchers in statistics). These accumulated "micro-inequalities" have a significant impact on women's confidence and opportunities.
- **Lack of support measures and assessment of women's needs in research.** Until recently, academic and research institutions *had no internal policies focused on* promoting women. Women have succeeded through their own perseverance and informal help. Only in recent years have initiatives such as gender equality plans, gender criteria appeared in projects and awareness events, but they are at the beginning and have not yet changed the existing situation significantly.
- **Emerging positive trends.** With all the problems, the situation is slowly improving. There is now more awareness and public discourse on gender equality, some young researchers receive help from compensatory measures, and the national legal framework begins to align requirements (e.g. the presence of women in project teams) with European standards. The surveyed perceive that *"things are improving"* and that the new generation is more open, but stress that *"we still have until a beautiful success"*.

Recommendations proposed by the participants for the roadmap. During the interviews, respondents formulated numerous solutions and recommendations to overcome identified barriers and accelerate gender equality in research. These proposals can be grouped into several strategic directions:

- **Dedicated funding and gender criteria in projects:** One of the most common recommendations is the implementation of *pro-active measures in* the allocation of resources, the application of the gender-sensitive budgetary mechanism in the field of research. The participants suggest developing research funding programs – grants and scholarships reserved for women, to support them in starting their own research projects. It is also proposed to introduce (or apply more strictly) **gender quotas in** the composition of research teams and decision-making structures. *"As with European projects, there should be a percentage of women who need to be in projects"* recommended a researcher, highlighting the importance of minimum guaranteed representation (I_08, doctor, researcher, project member, 20.03.2025). Such measures would ensure the presence of women where otherwise they could be omitted.
- **Mentoring and support networks.** Many interviewees stressed the need **for mentors and models for** young researchers. It is recommended to set up *formal mentoring programs* – experienced researchers to guide young women at the beginning of their professional journey. The creation of **female professional networks** (groups, associations) would also provide a space for exchange of experience, solidarity, and collaboration. "*You should have these mentorship sessions... why not? I have not seen such a thing in research,"* (I_10, PhD, researcher, 24.03.2025) was noted, thus advocating for the periodic organization of sessions and workshops for women in science. Such networks would help women develop leadership skills and overcome feelings of isolation.
- **Measures for work-life balance – personal life.** All participants emphasized the need for **family policy in** research institutions. Among the concrete recommendations such as: Setting up **nurseries and proximity kindergartens** (or partnerships with such services) for the children of employees, flexible work programs (possibility of partial teleworking, adapted hours), as well as *"a little longer term"* (I_11, doctor, researcher, project member, 24.03.2025) to meet academic requirements for young researchers. One of the researchers explicitly suggested that the universities and ANCD should offer *the extensions of deadlines for* the completion of theses or projects by mothers on leave. It is also recommended to encourage fathers to take parental leave – for example, through provisions that encourage such practice, thus reducing the exclusive burden on women.
- **Reform of evaluation and promotion criteria.** Many participants proposed adapting **academic evaluation systems to** consider the context of the needs of women in different research areas. At the same time, promotion processes should be made more transparent and, where a gender imbalance is found, corrective measures should be taken (e.g. if in a department/institute all teachers holding are men, why analysis should be made and the qualification of women for certain positions supported). Participants suggested that institutions should have **clear, non-discriminatory criteria** and provide *"very well-specified tools"* (I eleven, doctor, researcher, project member, 24.03.2025) for support – such as training opportunities and support for women.

- **Changing organizational culture and fighting stereotypes.** The substantive recommendation is to continue and intensify efforts to **raise awareness** of the importance of gender equality at all levels. This includes training sessions to raise awareness and raise awareness of gender equality for committees and managers, adopting **codes of conduct against** harassment and discrimination (and their strict application) and actively promoting women's achievements in science (increased visibility in media, conferences, various awards). As one participant pointed out, *"the work of women in science must be promoted twice, because their effort is double"* (I_05, doctor, researcher, project coordinator, 18.03.2025). Official policy developers should consider the signals such as the exodus/migration of men from research, the feminization ofthe field as a "question mark" that requires policy revision toward the research system, including from the gender perspective.

In the context of the above, a set of priority actions can be outlined. Government institutions (ministries, funding agencies) should start pilot funding programs for women and impose gender equality policies/plans on all research organizations (with results monitoring). Academic institutions should implement family support measures (flexibility, care infrastructure) and create internal mentoring and networking mechanisms for researchers.

At the same time, the scientific community must continue to discuss stereotypes and *promote successful female models* to inspire young generations of researchers.

Finally, the message to decision-makers is nuanced by the idea that **female talent in science exists and has been fully proved**, but to make the most of it, the system must end unnecessary impediments, provide opportunities, and fair conditions. As one of the interviewees urged, addressing the young researchers: *"To be confident, sure of what they are doing... they have the same possibilities... they just stay confident... I see no impediments that might come their way. If they have chosen this path, they must be sure that they will succeed*." It is the commitment of the institutions to ensure that words expressed become a reality, indeed no obstacle should be in the career of a woman who wants to contribute to the advancement of national science.

Messages of encouragement:

- *"The role of institutions is to establish clear criteria and support tools – for example, to give more time when needed – because women's skills are the same,* I see no difficulty" (I twelve, doctor, government official, 25.03.2025).
- *"Being confident about what I am doing... at first it seems difficult, but it is an interesting activity. They are no different in intelligence from men, they have the same possibilities... there are no impediments, they just must believe they will succeed"* (I eleven, doctor, researcher, project member, 24.03.2025).
- *"Indeed, young mothers face several obstacles... the governors should review their policies toward the system, create conditions to merge their lives. Because otherwise the youth choose better paid domains"* (I_07, doctor, researcher, member of the profile committee, 19.03.2025).

- *“I would say to young girls who want a career in science: Do not be discouraged. Yes, it is not easy – it takes a lot of effort, sometimes there are no weekends – but if that is what they really want, go ahead. If they have a desire, they can reach their goal.”* (I eleven, doctor, researcher, project member, 24.03.2025).

Therefore, the voice of these women in science sends a strong message **gender equality in research is not only a matter of social justice, but also a condition for scientific excellence**. By harnessing the full human potential – regardless of gender – the scientific community in the Republic of Moldova can become more competitive, innovative, and inclusive. The implementation of the above recommendations will require political will, resources, and time, but the long-term benefits (supporting talent in the country, increasing research productivity, improving international image) will be appropriate. It is time for policies and practices to catch up with aspirations, so that every young woman passionate about science can say, in turn, years later: *“I had equal opportunities, and I fulfilled my professional dream in Moldova”* (I_04, PhD, 17.03.2025).

II THE SYNTHESIS OF AVAILABLE STATISTICAL DATA OF THE WOMEN FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN INNOVATION AND RESEARCH

1. Legal framework

Although the Moldovan legal framework does not specifically address the issue of securing women's chances ensuring their success in the field of R&D, some conclusions in this regard can be inferred from existing legislation aimed at codifying the equality of chances and gender equity.

Thus, The National Program for Research and Innovation for 2024-2027 (PNCI) in the Republic of Moldova offers significant opportunities to ensure equality of chances for women in the fields of research, development, and innovation (RDI). By prioritizing the consolidation of human capital in RDI, as outlined in Objective Specific 1.2, the program aims to increase the total number of researchers from 2,809 in 2022 to 3,500 by 2027, with a focus on attracting and retaining young researchers, including women, through targeted funding and support mechanisms. The program also emphasizes the importance of improving access to quality research infrastructure (Objective Specific 1.3), which is crucial for creating an inclusive environment where women can thrive in scientific careers. Furthermore, the PNCI promotes internationalization and integration into the European Research Area (Objective General III), offering women researchers opportunities to take part in European projects such as Horizon Europe, thereby enhancing their visibility and career prospects. The program's commitment to fostering collaboration between research institutions and the private sector (Objective Specific 2.1) also opens avenues for women to engage in innovation and technology transfer, addressing gender disparities in STEM fields. By addressing systemic challenges such as low salaries, outdated infrastructure, and limited funding, the PNCI lays the groundwork for a fairer research ecosystem, ensuring that women have equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from Moldova's scientific and innovative advancements.

The Law 5/2006 on ensuring equality equal opportunities for women and men provides a solid legal framework for ensuring equal opportunities between women and men in the field of research, development and innovation (R&D&I), through provisions that promote equal access

to education, employment and participation in scientific activities. According to Art. 13 para. (1) lit. c), educational and educational institutions must ensure equality between women and men in teaching and scientific and educational activity, including through the development of teaching materials and curricula that respect the principle of equality. This article gives equal opportunities for women to take part in research, teaching, and scientific and scholarly positions, removing barriers of gender discrimination. In addition, Art. 13 para. (3) provides for positive measures to promote the balanced participation of women and men in specific professions where there is over-representation of one sex, which can stimulate women's involvement in scientific and technical fields. Also Art. 10 para. (3) lit. a) obliges employers to ensure equal opportunities for employment, further training, and promotion, without discrimination, giving women equal opportunities to develop their research careers. Through these provisions, the law creates a favourable environment for women in R&D&I, ensuring that structural and cultural barriers are removed and that women have equal opportunities for professional development and participation in innovation.

The Law No. 121 of 25 May 2012 in the Republic of Moldova, aimed at ensuring equality, provides a robust legal framework to promote equal opportunities for women in research, development, and innovation (RDI). By explicitly prohibiting discrimination based on sex and other protected criteria (Article 1), the law creates a foundation for addressing systemic barriers that women face in these fields. Article 7, which prohibits discrimination in employment and professional activities, is particularly relevant, as it ensures that women cannot be excluded, restricted, or disadvantaged in hiring, promotion, or access to professional training, including in RDI sectors. This provision is critical for fostering gender equality in scientific and innovation careers, where women are often underrepresented. Additionally, Article 5 highlights the use of positive measures to address disadvantages faced by specific groups, including women, which can be used to implement targeted policies such as gender quotas, mentorship programs, or funding initiatives to support women researchers and innovators. The establishment of the Council for Equality (Article 11) further strengthens the enforcement of these provisions by monitoring compliance, investigating complaints, and promoting awareness of gender equality. By addressing both direct and indirect discrimination (Article 2), the law ensures that neutral practices, such as biased hiring criteria or unequal access to resources, are scrutinized and rectified. Overall, this law offers a comprehensive mechanism to dismantle gender-based barriers, enabling women to fully take part and thrive in RDI, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and fair scientific community.

Regarding the legal and regulatory framework ensuring, directly or indirectly, the gender equality in the Republic of Moldova, the majority of the participants in the in-depth interviews conducted by IDIS to assess the dynamics of gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova, felt that although the legal framework and strategies mention gender equality, concrete implementation leaves much to be desired. In other words, the principles exist on paper, but actual compliance is partial. Similarly, it can be inferred from the responses of those interviewed that the policies adopted because of the recently conducted institutional optimization reforms in the sphere of research and education have not visibly mainstreamed gender.

2. Women's participation in research and innovation in Moldova

Studies covering the period up to 2021 reveal that women have played a substantial role in Moldova's research and development (R&D) sector. In 2021, women accounted for 51.7% of the total R&D workforce, marking a slight rise of 0.8 percentage points compared to 2020. This upward trend was seen as a step toward greater gender parity, underscoring the active participation of women in research and innovation. The data also illustrated the gender distribution of researchers across various fields between 2018 and 2021. In 2021, out of a total of 2,920 researchers, 1,459 were women, supporting a steady majority. Women were especially prominent in fields such as medical sciences, where they stood for 60.6% of researchers (240 out of 396), and social sciences, where they made up 60.4% (323 out of 535). In agricultural sciences, women included 48.7% of researchers (226 out of 464). However, their presence was notably lower in engineering and technological sciences, where only 20.5% of researchers were women (69 out of 336). This imbalance suggested that while women were well-represented in certain areas, they remained underrepresented in others, possibly due to societal norms, structural barriers, or biological considerations with researcher women interviewed by IDIS mentioning the maternity leave as a very difficult period in their careers and one in which they risk falling behind from an academic perspective due to considerations related to care that needs to be provided to newborns and very young children.

Overall, on the evolution over time of gender equality in research and science from a gender equality perspective, participants in the in-depth interviews conducted by IDIS on the dynamics of gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova gave mixed perspectives, but with a moderate optimistic overall tone. In general, no one showed any major external constraints in their career choice – motivation came from within or from the context of their educational path. From the perspective of gender discrimination (obstacles generated by sexist attitudes), most interviewees said that they had not directly experienced explicit discrimination during their career.

Among the obstacles to career advancement mentioned by interviewed women are first of all the chronic shortage of research funding, then career instability due to the fact that many research positions depend on temporary projects and affect especially young female researchers, reintegration in the country (for female researchers who have completed research stays abroad), the double work-family burden.

Doctoral research

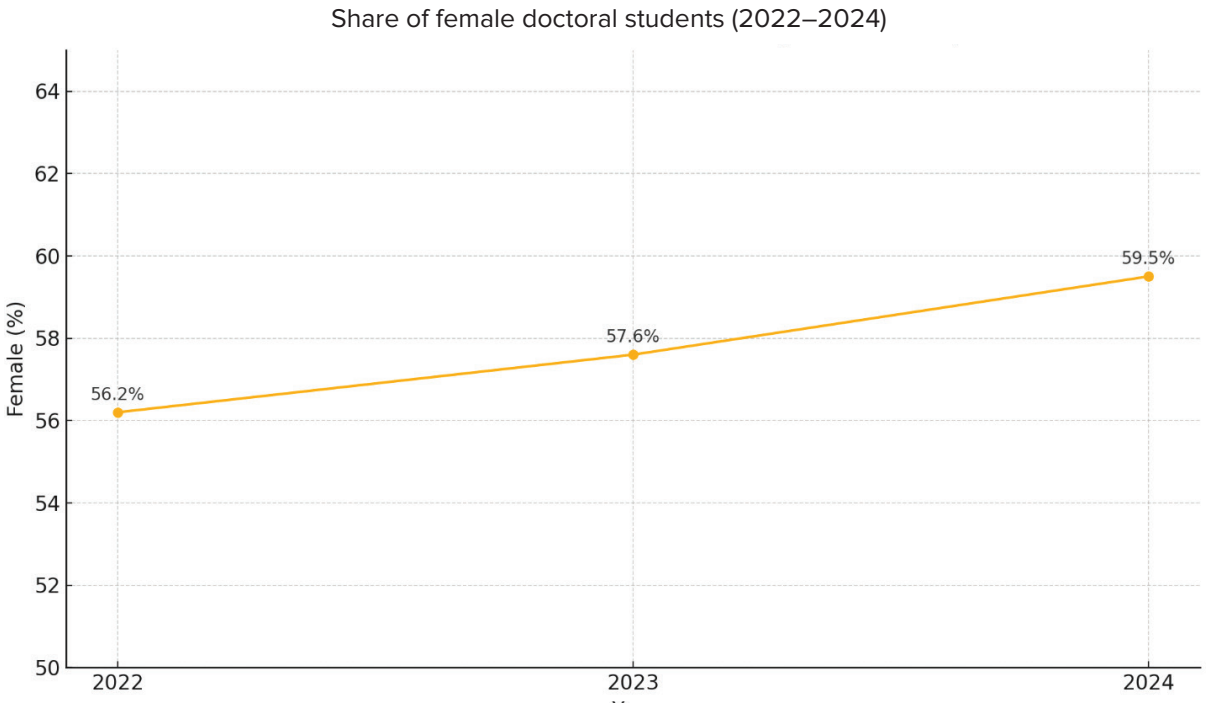
The 2022-2023 data on doctoral and postdoctoral research shows that women continue to play a significant role in Moldova's higher education and research sector, particularly in doctoral studies. Women accounted for 57.6% of the total number of doctoral students, compared to 42.4% for men, keeping a consistent trend of higher female participation in advanced academic studies.

Table 1. Students undertaking doctoral studies, by type of education, in 2022 and 2023

	2022			2023			2024		
	Total	including studies		Total	including studies		Total	including studies	
		daily attendance	reduced attendance		daily attendance	reduced attendance		daily attendance	reduced attendance
Total, including:	**1,601**	**372**	**1,229**	**1,504**	**359**	**1,145**	**1,384**	**318**	**1,066**
a) by gender:									
male	702	144	558	637	150	487	560	115	445
female	**899**	**228**	**671**	**867**	**209**	**658**	**824**	**203**	**621**

Source: *National Statistics Bureau Data*

Figure 1. Linear representation of evolution of female representation among doctoral students in Moldova



Between 2022 and 2024, the share of women among PhD students gradually increased from 56.1% to 59.5%, while the total number of students decreased. This reflects a strong presence of women in research and innovation activities. By gender, the breakdown of the number of students by scientific fields reveals that in three fields, women remain predominant, such as humanities (65.3%), medical sciences (64.8%) and social and economic sciences (60.4%), while in three others – engineering sciences and technologies (65.0%), agricultural sciences (56.7%) and natural sciences (53.7%) – men predominate. This disparity highlights the gendered distribution of women across scientific disciplines, with women excelling in some areas while staying underrepresented in others.

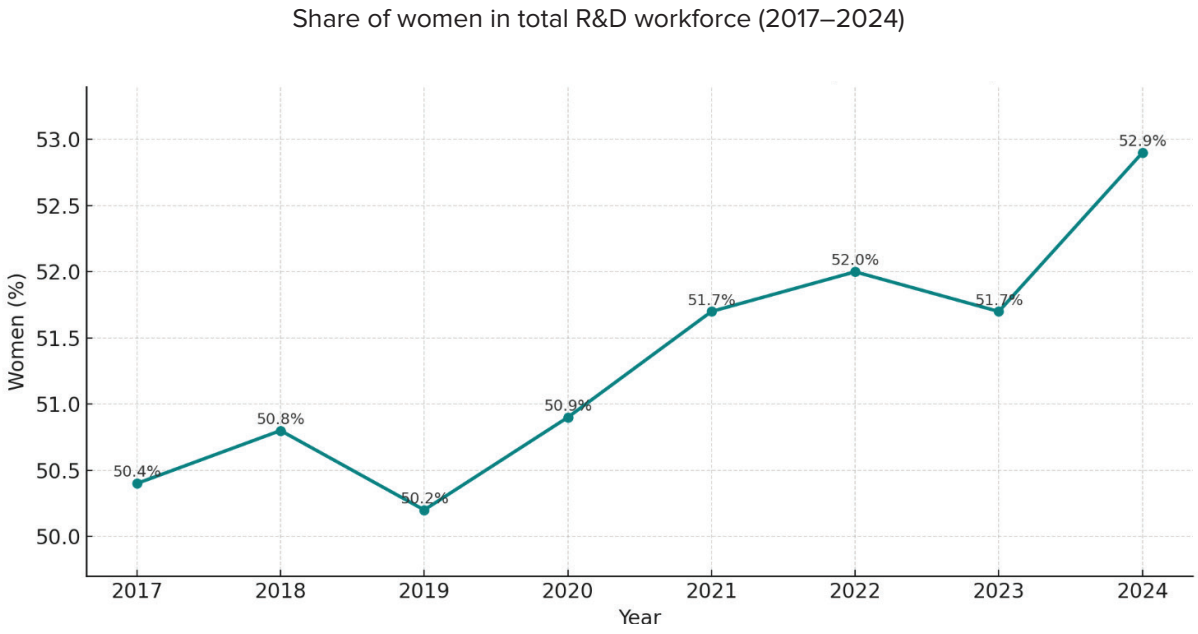
Women in R&D workforce

Over the past seven years, Moldova's Research and Development (R&D) sector has undergone significant changes, both in overall workforce size and in the representation of women. While the total number of employees in R&D has steadily declined, the proportion of women has remained remarkably stable – and in some areas, even increased – suggesting a complex interplay of gender dynamics, economic pressures, and policy influences.

Table 2. Women in R&D workforce

	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
Total employees	**4697**	**2366**	**4451**	**2263**	**4058**	**2037**	**4052**	**2062**	**4157**	**2150**	**3889**	**2023**	**3526**	**1823**	**3.323**	**1.758**
Researchers	3180	1542	3054	1483	2767	1315	2907	1430	2920	1459	2809	1429	2584	1309	2.478	1.312
Technicians	311	201	257	167	275	187	316	212	245	172	173	125	122	83	43	20
Auxiliary staff	582	296	576	319	510	292	460	240	561	291	430	248	450	264	446	272
Other staff categories	624	327	564	294	506	243	369	180	431	228	477	221	370	167	356	154

Figure 2. Linear representation of evolution of female representation in total R&D workforce (2017-2024)



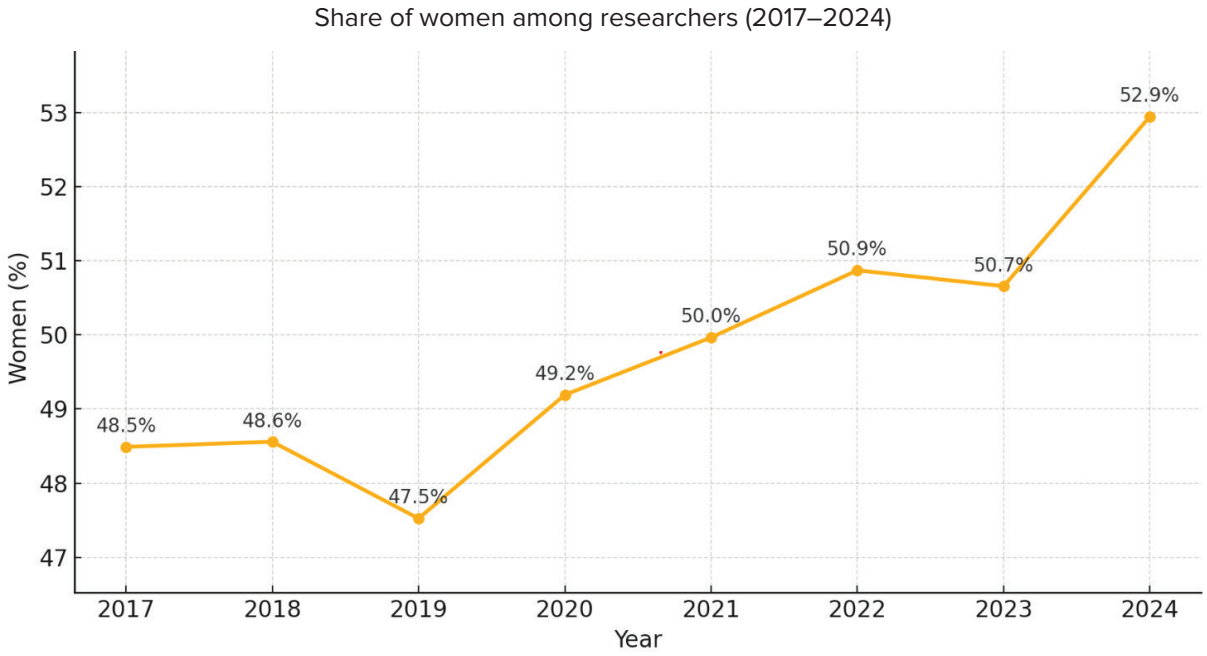
Source: *National Statistics Bureau Data*

The total R&D workforce in Moldova declined from 4,697 employees in 2017 to 3,323 by 2024, with women consistently representing 48–53% of employees (peaking at 1,758 women in 2024). Researchers decreased from 3,180 to 2,478, with women maintaining a stable share (~48–53%). Technicians saw the sharpest drop (311 to 43 total, women falling from 201 to 20). Auxiliary staff shrank (582 to 446 total), but women's share rose from 51% to 61%. Other staff declined (624 to 356 total), with women's representation dropping from 52% to 43%. Overall, workforce cuts disproportionately impacted technicians and "other staff" roles.

Table 3. Women in particular research fields

Fields/ Researchers	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
Researchers – total	**3180**	**1542**	**3054**	**1483**	**2767**	**1315**	**2907**	**1430**	**2920**	**1459**	**2809**	**1429**	**2584**	**1309**	**2478**	**1312**
natural sciences	1117	554	1083	542	1018	516	985	487	941	469	867	447	788	407	740	383
engineering and technological sciences	466	106	445	103	403	83	351	71	336	69	365	89	374	90	351	83
medical sciences	428	240	369	205	339	192	402	251	396	240	402	247	382	229	364	235
agricultural sciences	392	199	392	195	352	169	453	217	464	226	375	189	337	166	343	167
social sciences	459	280	464	285	393	230	477	278	535	323	559	335	504	320	462	319
Humanities	318	163	301	153	262	125	239	126	248	132	241	122	199	97	218	125

Figure 3. Linear representation of evolution of female representation among researchers (2017–2024)



Source: *National Statistical Bureau data*

While to total number of Researchers workforce shrank from 2017 to 2024 by 22% (from 3,180 to 2,478), women's share rose from 48.5% to 53%, indicating resilience in their representation despite systemic reductions. Fields such as Natural Sciences saw a sharp decline in total researchers (1,117 to 740), yet women maintained near-parity (49–52%) throughout the period, suggesting stable participation even as the field contracted. Engineering and Technology revealed persistent challenges, with women's representation stagnating at 22–24% across all years. Though total researchers declined (466 to 351), the lack of progress in female participation underscores systemic barriers that may require targeted interventions. In contrast, Medical Sciences demonstrated significant gains: women's share surged from 56% (240 of 428) in 2017 to 65% (235 of 364) by 2024, despite a shrinking total workforce. This sharp rise, while notable, warrants scrutiny to confirm methodological consistency or rule out external factors. Agricultural Sciences displayed erratic trends, with total researchers spiking to 454 in 2020 before plummeting to 343 by 2024. Social Sciences stood out as a bright spot: women's participation grew steadily from 61% to 69%, alongside a rise in total researchers (459 to 462), signalling both workforce expansion and improved gender equity. Humanities saw total researchers decline (318 to 218), yet women's share increased slightly (51% to 57%), reflecting stable representation amid contraction.

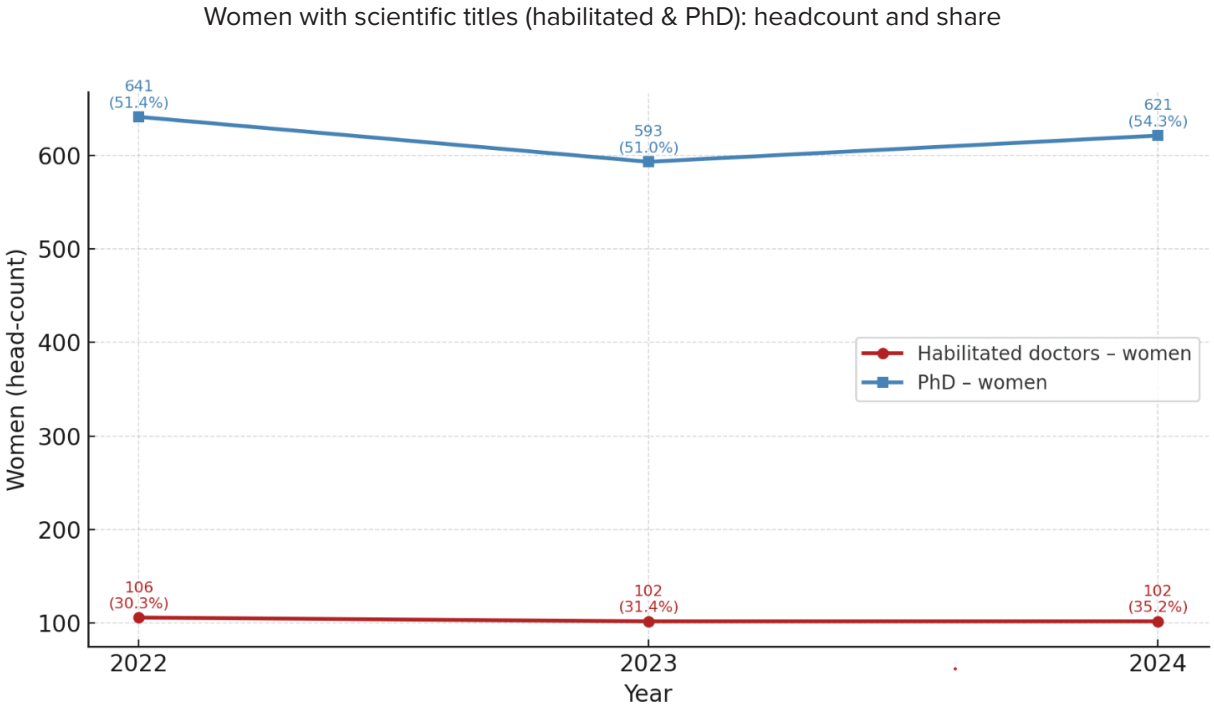
Distribution of scientific titles across research fields

The 2023 data on research and development emphasizes that women's representation in leadership roles within the R&D sector remains strong. In 2023, 50.7% of researchers were women, a slight decrease of 0.2 percentage points from 2022. Among researchers with scientific titles, women accounted for 51.0% of PhD holders but only 31.4% of habilitated doctors, showing a significant drop in representation at higher academic levels.

Table 4. Researchers with scientific titles by scientific fields in 2022–2023

	2022				2023				2024			
	habilitated doctor		PhD		habilitated doctor		PhD		habilitated doctor		PhD	
	Total	including women	Total	including women	Total	including women	Total	including women	Total	including women	Total	including women
Researchers with scientific titles	**350**	**106**	**1246**	**641**	**325**	**102**	**1162**	**593**	**290**	**102**	**1144**	**621**
natural sciences	101	17	420	217	80	13	406	206	78	15	355	188
engineering and technological sciences	28	6	100	13	29	6	104	16	25	5	126	31
medical sciences	67	24	143	90	70	25	136	82	62	26	134	90
agricultural sciences	30	3	136	66	29	5	139	68	26	6	165	70
social sciences	77	39	310	183	75	37	265	164	61	36	264	187
humanities	47	17	137	72	42	16	112	57	38	14	100	55

Figure 4. Linear evolution of share of women researchers with PhD and habilitated titles



Source: *National Statistical Bureau data*

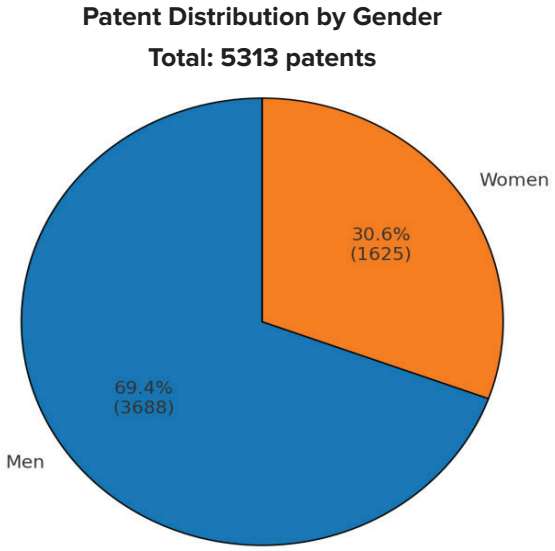
Between 2022 and 2024 the pool of women with scientific titles shrank in absolute terms, yet their weight inside the title-holding community edged upward and the contrasts between disciplines remained pronounced. Among habilitated doctors the female headcount slid from 106 to 102, but because the total cohort contracted even faster, women's share climbed from 30 % to a shade over 35 %.

Engineering and technology continue to be the most male-dominated fields, with only one woman in five having a habilitated level despite a slight numerical gain. The social sciences led the way, with nearly three out of five with a habilitated level now held by women, followed somewhat by the medical sciences and the humanities.

At the PhD level the trend is more favourable: women already form a slim majority in 2022 and, after a brief dip in 2023, reach 54 % in 2024 on the back of a rebound in social, medical and humanities doctorates. Discipline by discipline, the gap between senior and junior title ranks is striking social sciences show a 71 % female share at PhD versus 59 % at habilitated level, medicine moves from two-thirds to just over two-fifths, whereas engineering goes from 25 % at PhD to only 20 % at habilitated level.

Inventions and patents

In Moldova, men dominate the field of invention patents, holding 69.4% of the total, accounting for 3,688 patents. Women, on the other hand, account for 30.6%, with 1,625 patents. This significant disparity highlights the gender gap in innovation, where men have more than twice the number of patents compared to women. However, the considerable number of patents registered by women shows that they play an essential role in the creative and technological process. As opportunities and recognition for women in innovation continue to grow, this balance may shift toward a more equal distribution in the future.



It should also be mentioned that in the top 25 Moldovan inventors by the number of patents granted there is only one woman (second place).

3. Women's access to resources and opportunities in research and innovation in Moldova

Research up to 2021 highlighted that 76.1% of R&D units in Moldova were state-owned and publicly funded, showing strong government support for the sector. Assuming equitable distribution of these resources, women had access to similar opportunities as men. However, the lack of gender-disaggregated data on resource allocation made it challenging to determine whether women faced systemic obstacles in accessing funding, training, or other opportunities.

The 2023 data on doctoral and postdoctoral research shows that access to resources and opportunities for women in doctoral studies is closely tied to funding mechanisms. In 2023, 73.5% of doctoral students were funded by the state budget, a decrease of 7.6% compared to 2022. Women, who constituted most doctoral students, benefited from this public funding, as it provides essential support for research activities, training, and career development. However,

the data does not provide a gender-disaggregated breakdown of funding allocation, making it difficult to assess whether women face systemic barriers in accessing resources. Additionally, the proportion of women enrolled in part-time doctoral studies (76.1% of all students) suggests that many women may balance academic pursuits with other responsibilities, potentially limiting their access to full-time research opportunities.

The 2023 data on research and development shows that R&D expenditures increased by 6.5% (40.9 million lei) compared to 2022, reaching 671.1 million lei, or 0.22% of GDP**.** However, this was a slight decrease from 0.23% of GDP in 2022. Public institutions accounted for 82.2% of total R&D expenditures, down from 84.1% in 2022. While this shows strong government support for R&D, the lack of gender-disaggregated data on funding allocation makes it difficult to assess whether women have equitable access to resources. Most R&D expenditures **(**96.5%**)** were allocated to current expenses, with 77.4% dedicated to personnel costs. Women, who make up a massive portion of the R&D workforce, benefited from these expenditures.

4. Representation of women in leadership positions in research and innovation in Moldova

Overall, the majority indicated that women are numerically well represented (even in the majority) at the research staff level in many sectors but are under-represented in leadership positions or in terms of visibility and recognition in the research system. The actual data shows that, broadly speaking women are, as of today, well represented even in the leadership role in research institutions, with significant variations from overrepresentation to underrepresentation – depending on fields and institutions. As regards the visibility and recognition aspect, the available statistical data makes it impossible to assess the merits of the perception, although the indicator related to the membership in the Moldovan Academy of Sciences – an honorary one, seems to justify the expressed view.

Studies up to 2021 provided insights into leadership roles within higher education institutions, which are linked to research and innovation. In these institutions, 4,000 individuals were employed as core staff, with 2,400 holding scientific titles, representing 60% of the workforce. Among these, 87.5% were PhD holders, and 2.5% were habilitated doctors. Further analysis from 2021 showed that out of 346 habilitated doctors and 1,239 PhD holders, women constituted 105 (30.3%) and 630 (50.8%), respectively. Women were well-represented in fields such as medical and social sciences but less so in engineering and technological sciences. For instance, among PhD holders, women accounted for 56.8% in social sciences (163 out of 287) and 60.6% in medical sciences (240 out of 396). In contrast, their representation in engineering and technological sciences was significantly lower, with only twelve women out of 94 PhD holders (12.8%). Additionally, the research highlighted women's representation in prominent leadership roles: 31.1% of scientific researchers elected as members of the Science Sections of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova (14 out of 45 members); 31.4% of Research Institutes' directors (11 out of 35 directors); 20.8% of university rectors (5 out of 24 rectors).

The lowest representation of women was observed in the Academy of Sciences of Moldova (ASM), a prestigious national institution recognizing outstanding achievements in research and innovation. Women made up only 8.6% of ASM members (5 out of 58) and 5.3% of titular members (academicians) (2 out of 38).

Confirmed scientific titles

The 2024 data show that women are doing well in doctoral research. According to National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (ANACEC) data, out of the 143 individuals listed in the "Register of Scientific Doctorates Confirmed in 2024," 74 were women, representing 51.7% of the total. This shows a strong presence of women in advanced academic and research activities. Women were particularly prominent in fields such as medical sciences, biological sciences, and social sciences. For example, in medical sciences, women accounted for a massive portion of doctoral graduates, reflecting their active involvement in healthcare-related research.

The 2024 ANACEC data depicts a similar picture of women continuing to play a significant role in Moldova's research and innovation sector, particularly in doctoral studies. Out of the twenty-one individuals listed in the "Register of Scientific Degrees of Habilitated Doctors Conferred in 2024," 10 were women, standing for 47.6% of the total.

Table 5. Research and development titles conferred in 2024

	Habilitated degrees conferred in 2024			PhD degrees conferred in 2024		
Scientific Field	**Total Researchers**	**Women**	**% Women**	**Total Researchers**	**Women**	**% Women**
Medical Sciences	5	3	60%	30	18	60%
Biological Sciences	4	2	50%	20	12	60%
Social Sciences	2	1	50%	15	9	60%
Engineering and Technological Sciences	2	1	50%	25	10	40%
Chemical Sciences	1	0	0%	18	9	50%
Physical Sciences	1	0	0%	12	6	50%
Agricultural Sciences	1	0	0%	10	5	50%
Humanities	1	1	100%	8	4	50%
Economic Sciences	1	0	0%	7	3	43%
Legal Sciences	3	2	66.70%	5	2	40%

Source: *ANACEC data*

The 2023 data shows that women are well-represented as doctoral students. In 2023, 61.9% of newly enrolled doctoral students were women, showing a strong pipeline of female researchers. The number of postdoctoral researchers in 2023 was thirty-five, a decline of 16.7% from the

previous year. Of these, 45.7% were aged 40-49, but the data does not specify the gender distribution among postdoctoral researchers. Women are less represented in certain scientific fields, such as engineering and technology, which may limit their opportunities to ascend to leadership positions in these areas. For example, only 37.3% of doctoral students in engineering and technology were women, which could translate to fewer women in leadership roles within these disciplines.

Distribution of academic and professorial titles

At the same time, while a few years ago the share of women among members of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences was below 9%, as of 2024, the percentage of women members of the academy has increased to 9 out of 72, i.e. 12.5%.

According to National Bureau of Statistics, female staff are 57.4% of all staff providing management, scientific and teaching activities in higher education in 2024. The same situation was in 2023.

The analysis of 2024 ANACEC data on titles of university lecturers and university professors confirmed that year depicts clear trend appears, showing that while women are well-represented among lecturers, their presence significantly decreases at the professor level, showing potential barriers to career advancement in academia. At the level of university lecturers, women make up 69.62% of the total, proving a strong presence in higher education teaching roles. However, among university professors, the percentage of women drops to 45.45%, showing that men are more likely to reach the highest academic ranks.

When examining specific educational spheres, notable patterns appear. In the field of education, women hold a significant majority at both levels, being 77.78% of lecturers and 66.67% of professors. This reflects broader global trends, where women are often predominant in educational sciences. Similar trends can be seen in the social sciences, journalism, and public relations domains, where women continue to hold significant representation at both levels, accounting for 71.43% of lecturers and 66.67% of professors.

In contrast, other fields show a more pronounced gender disparity. In business, administration, and law, women are 66.67% of lecturers, yet they are entirely absent from the professor category, suggesting that career progression in these disciplines may be more challenging for women. Engineering, processing technologies, architecture, and construction show an even starker contrast: while women account for 38.46% of lecturers, they are completely absent at the professor level.

Health sciences, however, present an interesting case. Women completely dominate the lecturer category, accounting for 100% of those confirmed in 2024. However, their representation drops to 50% at the professor level. While this is still a balanced distribution compared to other fields, it suggests that even in a sector where women are traditionally well-represented, reaching the highest academic rank may still pose challenges. Other fields, such as natural sciences,

mathematics, and statistics, as well as information and communication technologies, show small sample sizes, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions. Nevertheless, the absence of women among professors in these areas suggests a potential continuation of gender imbalances seen in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines worldwide.

	Register of scientific and teaching titles of university lecturer confirmed in 2024 in Moldova			Register of scientific and teaching titles of university professor confirmed in 2024 in Moldova		
Educational Sphere	**Women**	**Total**	**Percentage (%)**	**Women**	**Total**	**Percentage (%)**
Education	7	9	77.78%	2	3	66.67%
Arts and Humanities	1	4	25.00%	1	1	100.00%
Social Sciences, Journalism, and Public Relations	10	14	71.43%	2	3	66.67%
Business, Administration, and Law	8	12	66.67%	0	1	0.00%
Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Statistics	3	6	50.00%	0	0	N/A
Information and Communication Technologies	1	2	50.00%	0	0	N/A
Engineering, Processing Technologies, Architecture, and Construction	5	13	38.46%	0	1	0.00%
Health	19	19	100.00%	1	2	50.00%
Total	**55**	**79**	**69.62%**	**5**	**11**	**45.45%**

Source: *ANACEC data*

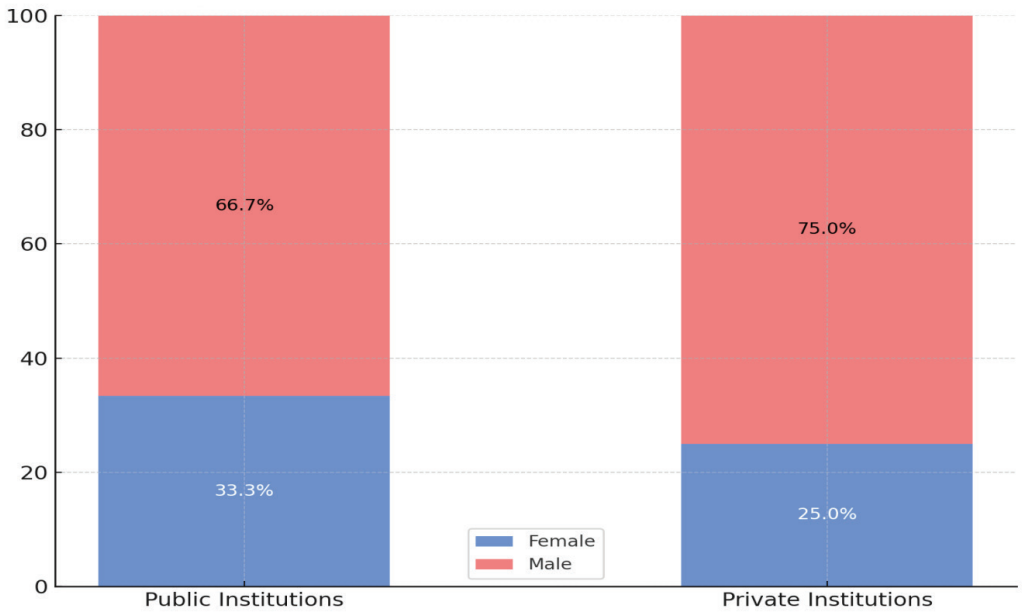
Overall, the data for 2024 seems to refute the feeling of the respondents in the in-depth interview that that the tendency is towards conferring professor titles to men, then to women.

5. Representation of women in leadership positions in universities and faculties

The analysis of the 16 higher education institutions in Moldova (12 public and 4 private) listed as accredited on the website of the Ministry of Education and Research, reveals notable trends in gender representation among rectors. Currently, women lead five of these institutions, constituting 31.25% of all rectors, while men occupy the remaining eleven positions, accounting for 68.75%. Among the twelve public universities, women hold four rector positions, representing 33.3% of leadership roles in this sector. These include the “Ion Creangă” Pedagogical State University, the “Alecu Russo” State University of Balti, Taraclia State University, and the Academy of Music, Theatre, and Fine Arts. The remaining eight public institutions, or 66.7%, are led by male rectors, spanning fields such as medicine, economics, engineering, and military studies. The private sector shows slightly lower female representation, with only one woman serving as rector out of four institutions, equating to 25%.

No.	Institution Name	Rector Gender
Public Institutions		
1	Moldova State University	Male
2	State Pedagogical University «I. Creangă»	Female
3	Technical University of Moldova	Male
4	Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova	Male
5	«Alecu Russo» State University of Balti	Female
6	Comrat State University	Male
7	«Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu» State University of Cahul	Male
8	Taraclia State University	Female
9	State University of Medicine and Pharmacy «N. Testemițanu»	Male
10	Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts	Female
11	Stefan cel Mare Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs	Male
12	Military Academy of the Armed Forces «Alexander the Good»	Male
Private Institutions		
1	Free International University of Moldova	Male
2	Cooperative-Commercial University of Moldova	Female
3	University of European Political and Economic Studies	Male
4	University of European Studies of Moldova	Male

Gender of Rectors in Tertiary Education Institutions (Moldova)



Overall, the statistical data, both current and historical, regarding the leadership of the tertiary education institutions backs the perception of the participants in the interviews that the women in leadership roles are underrepresented, and this hods true especially regarding the technical field.

Table 6. Historical Share of Women Rectors in Tertiary Education Institutions in Moldova

	Number of rectors		Share, %	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
2012	8	24	25.0	75.0
2013	7	23	23.3	76.7
2014	7	21	25.0	75.0
2015	10	19	34.5	65.5
2016	7	22	24.1	75.9
2017	8	22	21.4	78.6
2018	7	20	25.9	74.1
2019	6	21	22.2	77.8
2020	5	18	21.7	78.3
2021	5	19	20.8	79.2
2023	5	11	31.3	68.8

Source: M. Iatco, *Femeile în domeniul stinted și cercetării: analiza provocărilor în calea asigurării egalității de gen și politici recomandate,* Chișinău, 2022; Tertiary education institutions website.

Deans

Moldova's higher education system shows noteworthy progress toward gender equality in academic leadership, though with distinct variations across institution types and disciplines. The comprehensive data reveals a slight majority of female deans, with women occupying 52% of positions compared to men's 46.7% (39 female vs. thirty-five male deans, with one unknown case). This near-parity suggests significant strides in gender-balanced leadership, while still revealing areas for improvement.

Public universities show remarkable gender balance in leadership appointments. Among state-funded institutions, women hold 50.8% of dean positions compared to 49.2% held by men (30 female vs. twenty-nine male deans). The Moldova State University exemplifies this equilibrium, where women are 58.3% of deans (7 out of 12). Similarly, the Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University shows stronger female representation at 62.5% (5 female deans out of 8). However, technical institutions diverge sharply from this pattern – the Technical University of Moldova keeps 80% male leadership (8 out of ten deans), highlighting persistent gender disparities in STEM fields.

Private institutions present a more pronounced trend toward female leadership. Women account for 60% of dean positions in this sector (9 out of fifteen where gender is known), compared to 40% for men. The Cooperative Trade University shows complete female dominance with 100% women deans (2 out of 2), while the European University of Moldova keeps perfect gender balance among identified leaders (50-50 split between its two male and two female deans). This 20-percentage-point difference between private and public institutions in female representation suggests potentially different hiring practices or organizational cultures.

Disciplinary differences reveal entrenched gender patterns. In technical and scientific fields, male leadership predominates, particularly in engineering (80% at Technical University), military sciences (100% male at security academies), and medicine (80% male at the medical university). Conversely, education and humanities show reversed trends: pedagogical universities average 63% female deans, while humanities faculties reach 67% female representation. These patterns mirror global trends where STEM fields keep 25-30% gender gaps favouring men, while education and social sciences show 15-20% gaps favouring women.

The findings suggest Moldova has achieved relative gender balance in academic leadership overall (52.7% female), outperforming many European counterparts where women typically hold 35-45% of such positions. However, the disparity between most female-dominated (pedagogical universities at 63%) and male-dominated (technical universities at 80%) institutions shows persistent disciplinary segregation.

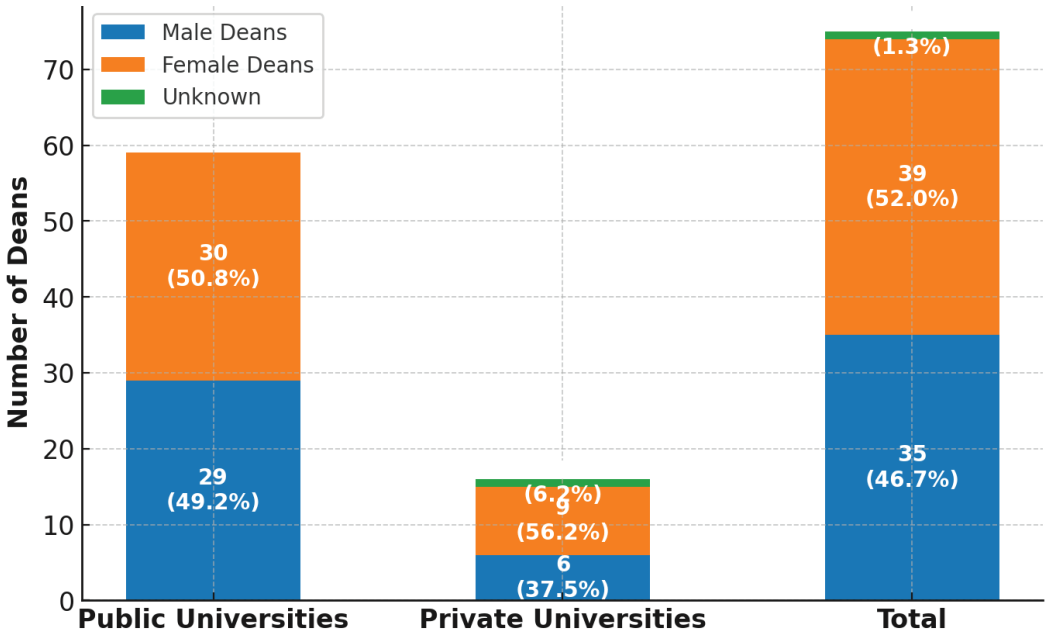
Table 7. Public tertiary education institutions

University Name	Male Deans	Female Deans
Moldova State University	5	7
Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University	3	5
Technical University of Moldova	8	2
Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova	2	4
Alecu Russo State University of Balti	1	3
Comrat State University	2	2
Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu State University of Cahul	1	3
Nicolae Testemițanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy	4	1
Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts	1	3
Ștefan cel Mare Academy (Ministry of Internal Affairs)	1	0
Alexandru cel Bun Military Academy	1	0
Public Sector Totals	**29**	**30**

Table 8. Private tertiary education institutions

University Name	Male Deans	Female Deans	Unknown
Free International University of Moldova (ULIM)	3	4	-
Cooperative Trade University	0	2	-
European Political and Economic Studies University	1	1	-
European University of Moldova	2	2	1
Private Sector Totals	**6**	**9**	**1**

Figure 5. Distribution of Male, Female and Unknown Deans in Universities



Overall, the statistical data about departmental and faculty leadership disproves (at this level) the opinions of few interviewees who felt that there were not enough women in leadership positions.

6. Representation of women in leadership positions in research-focused institutions

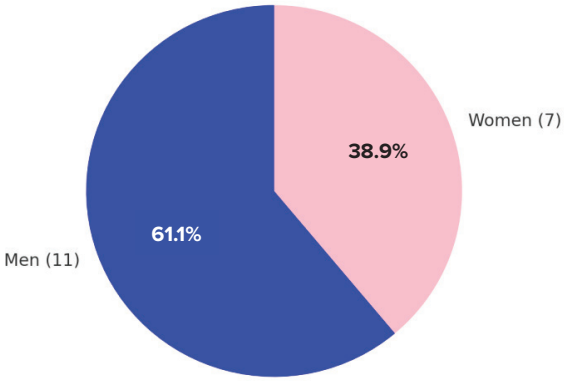
An analysis of research institutes listed by Moldova's Ministry of Education reveals that while men hold more leadership positions overall (11 out of 18 directors, or 61%), women lead a significant portion (7 institutions, or 39%). Notably, no field is exclusively led by one gender, showing some balance across disciplines, and even STEM.

Men dominate in technical and legal fields, such as energy, geology, and political research, while women lead in life sciences, economics, and linguistics, including microbiology, philology, and mathematics. Even in traditionally male-dominated areas like physics and chemistry, women hold directorships, just as men lead in some biological and ecological institutes. This distribution suggests that while gender disparities persist, particularly in engineering and hard sciences, both men and women contribute to leadership across all research fields in Moldova.

In natural sciences, a woman leads the Institute of Chemistry, while the Institute of Ecology and Geography has a male director. In physics and engineering, a woman heads the Institute of Applied Physics, while a man leads the Institute of Electronic Engineering and Nanotechnologies. In life sciences, the Institute of Zoology and Institute of Microbiology and Biotechnology have female directors, while the Institute of Physiology and Sanocreatology is run by a man.

In social sciences and humanities, women lead the Institute of Philology and National Institute of Economic Research, while men direct the Institute of Legal and Political Research and Institute of History.

Figure 6. Gender distribution of Research Institutes' Directors in Moldova



The data on women's representation in leadership roles at research-focused institutions presents a complex picture. Despite the elusive nature of parity, women are well-represented and leading in the STEM fields at these institutions. The available statistical data seems to refute some perceptions expressed in the in-depth interview that there is a sort of informal or tacit consensus whereby men are being given preference in institutional and project-related leadership roles and thereby – access to more resources and influence, while women are said to be sidelined in and given junior roles researchers teams. The 2025 data on ANCD-funded projects in Moldova implemented by teams of researches (i.e., excluding postdoctoral projects) shows that female researchers lead 8 out of 15 projects (53.3%) in the "Young Researchers" program, demonstrating strong early-career representation, while in the "Stimulating Excellence in Research" Program, women lead 11 out of 25 projects (44%). With regard to the projects implemented for Capacity building for participation in the Horizon Europe Programme, 2 of three of them are led by women. There is a single project financed by ANCD within the "Innovation Projects 2024-2025" Program, and is being led by a man. On the other hand, 3 out of 6 projects financed by ANCD within the Program „Reziliența Republicii Moldova la situații de criză" are led by women. Within the „Moldo-Turc Program", 3 out of 5 projects are being led by women. With regard to individual projects – the postdoctoral research projects, women are in minority 2 out of 9, although it should be emphasized that this does not signal a lack of access, but it is rather caused by the fact that only 4 out of 12 applications for the 2024-2025 edition of the Program have been submitted by women.

Table 9. Representation of Women in ANCD-Funded Research Projects (2025)

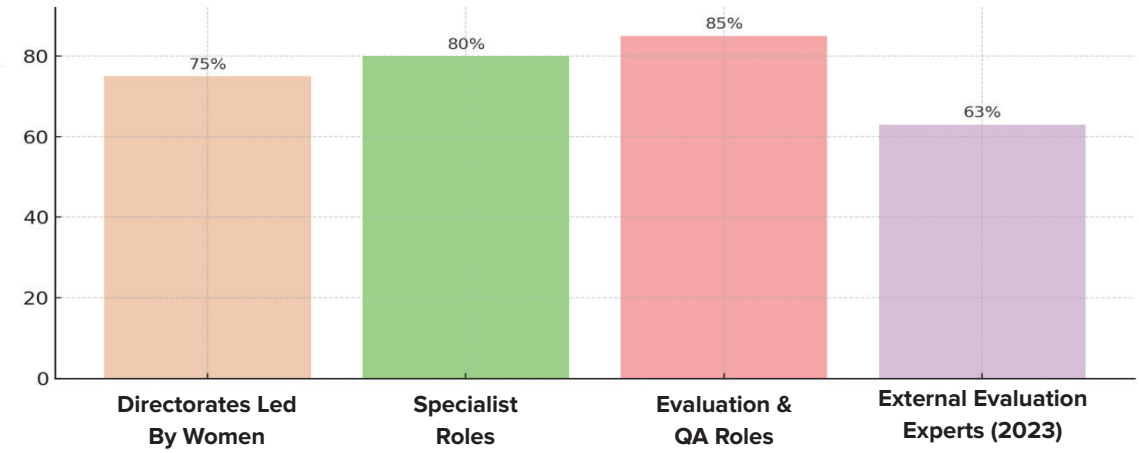
Program Name	Total Projects	Projects Led by Women	% Led by Women
Young Researchers	15	8	53.3%
Stimulating Excellence in Research	25	11	44.0%
Capacity Building for Horizon Europe	3	2	66.7%
Innovation Projects 2024-2025	1	0	0.0%
Moldova's Resilience to Crisis Situations	6	3	50.0%
Moldo-Turkish Program	5	3	60.0%
TOTAL	**55**	**27**	**49.1%**

Women in leadership roles in quality assurance in research and innovation

ANACEC. The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) has the mandate to ensure the quality of services provided by education and research institutions, thus contributing to the fulfillment of the requirements of society and the labor market in the training of competent professionals. The Agency shall stimulate an increase in the level of accountability of education and research institutions for the quality of the services provided.

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) team in 2025 presents a compelling case study of gender representation in Moldova's educational quality assurance sector that showcases that women play a major role, and are successful in the field. Women play a dominant role in ANACEC, holding over 70% of leadership and specialist positions. The agency's president is female, and three out of four directorates are led by women, including key areas like higher education evaluation and continuing education. Among 20+ specialist roles, over 80% are occupied by women, spanning research evaluation, accreditation, legal affairs, and fiscal management. Their presence is strongest in evaluation and quality assurance, where they constitute over 85% of the workforce. This data suggests a prominent level of gender inclusivity, with women not only participating but leading in decision-making and technical roles. ANACEC stands as a model for gender representation in education governance.

Figure 7. Women representation in ANACEC



In 2023, women constituted a majority (63%) of experts in the external evaluation of higher (tertiary) education programs, with 68 national, 8 international, and 2 diaspora female experts, compared to 40 national, 14 international, and 0 diaspora male experts. In vocational and continuing education evaluations, women represented 50% of the 296 experts involved. However, their participation varied by sector: Technical vocational education: 63.7% female evaluators Continuing education: 34.5% female evaluators.

ANCD

The National Agency for Research and Development (ANCD) mandate is to ensure excellence and performance in achieving national priorities in research, innovation, and development.

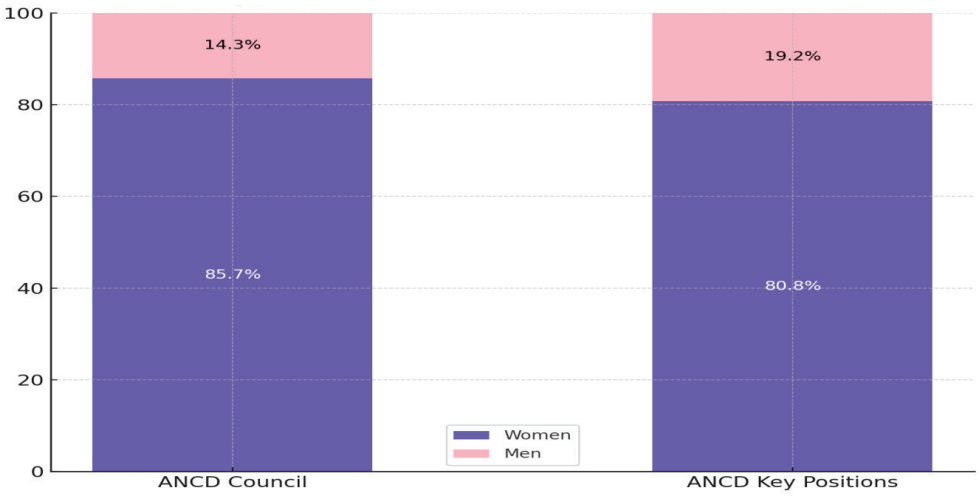
The leadership structure of ANCD in the Republic of Moldova reflects a strong majority of women in both executive and administrative roles. This trend is visible at all levels of the organization, from top management to operational departments.

The agency's Director General is a woman, and within the ANCD Council, out of seven members, only one is male. The other six seats are held by women representing institutions such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Academy of Sciences, and the Council of Rectors. This means over 85% of the council members are women, indicating a strong female influence in decision-making processes.

Within ANCD, women hold most key positions. Out of the twenty-six listed positions, twenty-one are occupied by women (80.8%), while only five are held by men (19.2%).

At the leadership level (heads of departments/services/sections), out of seven managers, six are women, and one is a man. In specialized departments, women occupy all specialist, consultant, and expert roles. Traditionally male-dominated fields, such as the IT department, are also led by a woman, challenging gender stereotypes. The few exceptions where men hold positions are in legal services, internal audit, and a few technical roles.

Figure 8. Women representation in ANCD leadership and positions



Solutions and recommendation stemming from analysis of statistical data

- Women are well represented in the research and innovation field in terms of recognized merit as expressed in scientific titles (except for that of academicians), despite lingering perceptions of cultural or stereotypically induced bias.
- There are no legal or institutional barriers limiting women access to compete in the research and innovation field in Moldova.
- Women constitute a majority of the R&D workforce, maintaining a consistent representation since 2017. While in total number of Researchers workforce shrank from 2017 to 2024 by 22% (from 3,180 to 2,478), women's share rose from 48.5% to 53%, indicating resilience in their representation despite systemic reductions. Their presence is particularly strong in medical sciences (65%), social sciences (69%), and humanities (57%).
- Between 2022 and 2024, the share of women among PhD students gradually increased from 56.1% to 59.5%, while the total number of students decreased. This reflects a strong presence of women in research and innovation activities. By gender, the breakdown of the number of students by scientific fields reveals that in three fields, women remain predominant, such as humanities (65.3%), medical sciences (64.8%) and social and economic sciences (60.4%), while in three others – engineering sciences and technologies (65.0%), agricultural sciences (56.7%) and natural sciences (53.7%) – men predominate.
- With regard to recognition, leadership and advanced academic roles, women researchers represent hold 54.3% of PhDs titles across all fields, but their representation declines among habilitated doctors (35.2%). This trend varies by field – social sciences show a 71 % female share at PhD versus 59 % at habilitated level, medicine moves from two-thirds to just over two-fifths, whereas engineering from 25 % at PhD to only 20 % at habilitated level.
- In patent ownership, men hold a larger share (69.4%) compared to women (30.6%), with only one woman appearing in the top 25 Moldovan inventors. Overall, women play a significant and growing role in Moldovan research, particularly in certain disciplines, though disparities persist in leadership, advanced academic titles, and patent ownership. The data reflects a sector where gender distribution varies across fields and career stages.

- Up to 2021, state-owned R&D units accounted for 76.1% of the sector, indicating strong government support. However, the lack of gender-disaggregated data made it difficult to assess whether women faced systemic barriers in accessing resources.

- It may be inferred, based on the data on leadership position in institutions, that women have the same access to resources as men, this holding true especially at faculty and research facility's level, and to a lesser extent when it comes to rectors. Anecdotal evidence, gathered from interviews suggests, however, that men are favoured in assuming project leadership roles in projects implemented by teams of researchers and might, therefore, have better access to resources based upon that, although this is not supported by ANCD data.

- In 2023, 73.5% of doctoral students were funded by the state budget, a decrease of 7.6% from 2022. Women, who constituted most doctoral students, benefited from this funding, but the lack of gender-disaggregated data limits a full assessment.

- R&D expenditures increased by 6.5% in 2023, reaching 671.1 million lei (0.22% of GDP). However, public institutions' share of R&D expenditures decreased from 84.1% in 2022 to 82.2% in 2023. Most R&D expenditures (96.5%) were allocated to current expenses, with 77.4% dedicated to personnel costs. Women benefit from public funding and R&D expenditures, yet the lack of gender-disaggregated data makes it difficult to assess whether they face any barriers in accessing resources. The decline in state budget funding for doctoral studies may disproportionately affect women, who constitute most doctoral students.

- Responses in the interview indicate the lack of adequate financing as a major difficulty for women in the research field. The Ministry of Education and Research forecasts that only a very small proportion of teachers, i.e. Only some of the most qualified, will reach the average salary in 2025, which the State Tax Service forecasts at 16100 lei. Salaries in research, which are below the average for the economy, are also not a motivation for university professors to increase their qualifications through additional work, especially since the law does not allow them, as public employees, to opt for only a fraction of the normal salary.

- The available data presents a nuanced picture of women's leadership in Moldova's research and higher education sectors. Women hold 31.25% of university rector positions (5 out of sixteen institutions), with slightly higher representation in public universities (33.3%) compared to private ones (25%).

- At the dean level, women surpass men, occupying 52% of positions overall, with particularly strong representation in pedagogical (62.5%) and humanities faculties (67%).

- In research institutes, 39% of directors are women, with no field entirely dominated by one gender. Women lead in life sciences (e.g., microbiology, zoology) and social sciences (e.g., economics, philology), while men prevail in engineering, geology, and political research. Notably, women direct institutions in traditionally male-dominated fields like physics (Institute of Applied Physics) and chemistry.

- In academic hierarchies, women earn 51.7% of PhDs and 47.6% of habilitated doctorates, but their representation declines at higher ranks – 45.5% of university professors and only 31.4% of habilitated doctors. However, Disciplinary disparities persist women dominate in medical (60%) and social sciences (66.7%) but remain underrepresented in engineering (2.7% of PhD holders) and technology (5.9% of habilitated doctors).

- Within the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, women's representation has risen to 12.5% (9 out of seventy-two members), though they hold only 5.3% of titular academician positions.

- Conversely, in quality assurance (ANACEC), women dominate leadership, holding 70% of directorates and 80% of specialist roles, including the presidency.

- Similarly, at ANACEC the Director is a woman, and 85% of the council members are women, indicating a strong female influence in decision-making processes. Within the ANCD, women hold most key positions. Out of the twenty-six listed positions, twenty-one are occupied by women (80.8%), while only five are held by men (19.2%).

- This study cannot ignore the fact that it is being produced amidst a developing debate on the value of principles of diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

- The problem of women's representation or gender equity in research and innovation is one entirely independent from, or parallel with, that of the level of quality, significance of the results in the field. Namely, the fact that women are, generally speaking, well represented both in the workforce and in leadership position, does not seem to influence, either for better or worse, the results of the Moldova research, as the Moldovan institutions are completely absent from international rankings that reflect the results of higher education/ research institutions such as the QS World University Rankings, Shanghai Ranking, or Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings.

- The National Education Strategy 2030 states that "due to poor research performance, universities in the Republic of Moldova are not present or occupy modest places in international rankings", and this poor performance is put in that programme document on account of the fact that "most of the scientific and teaching staff in universities are overloaded with teaching tasks and do not have enough time for research performance". This, however, is not the real cause of poor academic performances of Moldovan researchers. Statistical data show that Moldova has 58941 students in tertiary education institutions, and 3699 scientific and teaching staff with different scientific and professor titles. So the overall student-teacher ratio in Moldova is 15,9:1, which is a better indicator than in public higher education institutions in the USA where the ratio is 15:1, or in private higher education institutions 12,9:1; in the EU we have similar ratios in many universities – ranging from 16:1 to 19:1, as well as in the UK. However, the level of qualifications of academic professionals is questionable, as illustrated by the fact that Moldova is non-existent in international scientific ratings of higher tertiary institutions.

- A gender equity oriented reform may contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of women in the field, while, on the other hand, it should be stressed there is no reason to assume that it would trigger outcomes in terms of improvement of quality or significance of the results of the Moldovan research and innovation, as there is no evidence linking the current lack thereof with actual or perceived gender imbalances.

- The best way to improve women's impact on research, innovation and scientific progress in Moldova is to raise the professional standards across the field, as it is currently clear, from international rankings, that the Moldovan professional academic standards are low compared to those of many other countries.

- Overall, the goal should be to make the academic and research field a less bureaucratically involved and regulated, and much more competitive environment – both financially, and in terms of recognition.

- There should be instituted more solid links between academic recognition and remuneration – on one side, and actual and valuable scientific results – on the other side, to stimulate competition and academic excellence for both women and men.

- Improvement of general working conditions and decreasing bureaucratic workload on scientific researchers is important. Given that, the average salary of a researcher is currently below the average salary in Moldova, a research career is not only difficult to pursue from an economic standpoint, but it is also regarded as a less valuable and prestigious one per se.

- It is essential to eliminate from funded research programs all bureaucratic requirements that are not focused on scientific research but, but on formalism, such as counting the number of participations in various events and in various capacities – instead of focusing on the value of the actual research product. Such approaches discourage actual work being and encourage formalism and superficiality.

Solutions and recommendations stemming from study on perceptions based upon interviews

The analysis of the sixteen interviews, highlights a complex picture of the situation of gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova. On the one hand, women are present in many fields and have notable achievements, demonstrating that *they "have the same possibilities... I see no impediment"* to succeeding, according to one of the researchers. On the other hand, there are several **structural and cultural problems that** make their path significantly difficult and limit their access to top positions. Below we summarize the main findings:

- **High participation, but underrepresentation in leadership.** Women make up about half or even most research staff in many institutions, but they occupy far fewer management positions (project heads, institute directors, members in academic fora). This disparity indicates a *"glass ceiling"* – not formal, but a result of socio-cultural and institutional factors.

- **Key barriers to women's careers.** The chronic lack of research funding affects all researchers, but it strikes women more strongly, who often remain in lower positions (and therefore more vulnerable to underfunding). Job instability (contracts per project) creates professional insecurity. The *double burden of family-care especially weighs* on women, leading to interruptions in activity, slower pace of advancement and prejudices about their availability.

- **Gender discrimination in subtle form.** Although no cases of direct institutionalized discrimination have been reported, there are many subtle manifestations: Stereotypes (e.g. the idea that certain subjects "are not for women"), tacit preferences for promotion low visibility of women's contributions (ignoring university researchers in statistics). These accumulated "micro-inequalities" have a significant impact on women's confidence and opportunities.

- **Lack of dedicated support measures.** Until recently, academic and research institutions *had no internal policies focused on* promoting women. Women have succeeded through their own perseverance and informal help. Only in recent years have initiatives such as gender equality plans, gender criteria appeared in projects and awareness events, but they are at the beginning and have not yet significantly changed the underlying situation.

- **Emerging positive trends.** With all the problems, the situation is slowly improving. There is more awareness and talk about gender equality, some young researchers benefit from mentors and support, and the national legal framework begins to align requirements (e.g. The presence of women in project teams) with European standards.

Recommendations for promoting gender equality in research and innovation.

Based on the insights obtained from the participants, but also for the explicit suggestions made by them, a series of **recommendations for** improving gender equality in research and innovation in the Republic of Moldova can be drawn up. These recommendations concern both the **national level of public policy** and **the institutional level** (universities, research institutes), as well as **cultural changes**.

1. **Mainstreaming gender equality in national research strategies and funding.** Participants underline the importance of clear objectives for women's participation in strategic documents (National Research and Innovation Strategy, plans etc.) *The integration of gender equality in national strategies for research and innovation is* fundamental, including **monitoring mechanisms and performance indicators on** the gender component. It is also recommended to **introduce funding lines dedicated to** female researchers or projects to balance access to financial resources. Such grants would help propel young researchers and bridge gaps (e.g. post-maternity return grants).

2. **Instituting measures to ensure equal opportunities.** Active policies such as **transparent and non-discriminatory recruitment and promotion procedures**, gender-balanced competition committees and criteria that consider clear and objective procedures for career selection and advancement, eliminating gender stereotypes should be implemented in universities and institutes. Also, at institutional level, **anti-harassment and anti-discrimination codes of conduct are recommended**, accompanied by effective referral and reporting mechanisms, so that any discriminatory behaviours can be promptly combated.

3. **Supporting work-life balance – personal life.** This is an almost unanimous recommendation. Institutions should adopt measures such as flexible working hours, the possibility of partial teleworking for researchers (where the nature of the work allows), and facilities for young parents. Participants mentioned the need for childcare services on campuses or close to work. Also, promoting parental leave taken by fathers would more equitably distribute the burden of childcare and reduce the pause in mothers' careers.

4. **Mentoring and professional support networks.** Many women benefit enormously from mentoring and the visibility of successful models. It is recommended to create **mentoring networks** to connect young researchers with senior women in the field for guidance and support. At the same time, regular events presenting women's achievements in science (conferences, round tables, special prizes) could combat stereotypes and inspire the new generation. Promoting female models, for example, media campaigns about Moldovan women scientists – is seen as a key component in changing organizational culture.

5. **Increase transparency and data collection on gender equality.** Participants often signalled a lack of clear information about how things are (for example, who wins projects, who is promoted/awarded). One recommendation is that funding institutions and bodies collect and publish gender statistics such as: The share of women applying and winning grants, the share of women in management positions, the average wage differences by category. These data would allow monitoring of progress and indicate where there are specific problems that require intervention. Gender experts should also be involved in an evaluation committee to ensure that the gender perspective is considered in any decision.

6. **Cultural change and combating stereotypes through education.** Eventually, gender equality in science depends on changing mentalities even in the pre-university environment.

   It is important for young girls to be encouraged to follow STEM and for boys to be shaped by respect for their peers as intellectual equals. The curriculum could include examples of women scientists and inventors to normalize the idea that women also contribute a major scientific progress.

   Such educational interventions will erode stereotypes among the new generations, creating a more friendly climate for the women researchers of tomorrow.

7. **The implementation and effective financing of existing plans.** Finally, a general recommendation is the operationalization of current strategies. National plans and programs (such as the Gender Action Plan in Research) must be accompanied by budgets, responsibilities, and deadlines. Agencies and ministry should continuously monitor progress (e.g. Whether the number of women project leaders has increased, the pay gap has been reduced, etc.) And adjust policies accordingly. Only through a **consistent and responsible approach** can they achieve obvious results.

   - The best way to improve women's impact on research, innovation and scientific progress in Moldova is to raise the professional standards across the field, as it is currently clear, from international rankings, that the Moldovan professional academic standards are extremely low.
   - Overall, the goal should be to make the academic and research field a less regulated and much more competitive environment, both financially, and in terms of recognition.
   - There should be instituted more solid links between academic recognition and remuneration – on one side, and actual and valuable scientific results – on the other side, to stimulate competition and academic excellence for both women and men.
   - Improvement of general working conditions and decreasing bureaucratic workload on scientific researchers is important. Given that, the average salary of a researcher is currently below the average salary in Moldova, a research career is not only difficult to pursue from an economic standpoint, but it is also regarded as a less valuable and prestigious one per se.
   - It is essential to eliminate all bureaucratic requirements that are not focused on scientific research but, but on formalism, such as counting the number of participations in various events and in various capacities – instead of focusing on the value of the actual research product. Such approaches discourage actual work being and encourage formalism and superficiality.

Many of these recommendations come directly from the experience and ideas of the participants and can form the basis for an **indicative roadmap for** decision-makers Their implementation would require political will, resources and collaboration between institutions, but the potential benefits are major: A more inclusive research system that capitalizes on all available talent, a reduction in female "brain loss" and, ultimately, an **increase in scientific excellence through** full participation of both genders.

Recommendations of the participants in the discussions on the study in order to ensure gender equality in the field of research and innovation in the Republic of Moldova

In addition to the interviews and statistical analysis, on May 15, 2025, on the premises of IDIS „Viitorul" with the support of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) (through the measure of integrating the feminist development policy into the portfolio of technical cooperation in the Republic of Moldova, the Fund for Studies and Specialists II, implemented by GIZ Moldova), group discussions were organized in which participated the interviewed respondents together with representatives of funding institutions, universities and research agencies. The session, moderated by the team of researchers, lasted about 1.5 h and aimed at validating the main preliminary findings of the study, as well as identifying concrete measures to improve gender equality in research and innovation. The discussion was broken down into three thematic groups. The participants' main directions and measures are presented in a structured format, along with a brief analysis.

1. **Extending research to secondary and vocational education.** It highlights the need to analyze the pre-university and secondary education levels of specialties to accurately capture gender disparities from the early stages of vocational training. Obstacles and gender stereotypes often originate in middle school and high school (e.g., the choice of technical or scientific specializations by girls vs. boys), influencing the subsequent course of women in research careers. By expanding the scope of study to these levels, it will enable a deeper understanding of gender equality and promote the vocational potential of girls in science.

2. **Integration of sexual harassment and sexist language into the analysis.** The participants pointed out that sexual harassment and the use of sexist language are specific forms of gender discrimination that must be systematically studied in the academic context. The phenomenon of sexual harassment in the educational environment is real and under-reported. By including these issues in the research on women's involvement, one can highlight the negative impact of a hostile climate (tolerant of microaggressions and abuse) on the professional path of women. This approach would underpin the adoption of zero tolerance policies for harassment and sexist communication, promoting a safe and non-discriminatory working environment.

3. **Recognition of the triple role of women (reproductive, productive, and community).** The analysis of women's involvement in science must consider the triple role they play in society: the reproductive role (maternity, childcare, and domestic work), the productive role (paid work in the economy) and the role of community administration (involvement in civic and voluntary community service). These cumulative responsibilities generate the so-called double work-family burden, which can limit the time and energy that women can allocate to the development of their research careers. Gender studies show that women, especially those on low incomes, end up fulfilling all three roles at the same time, while men focus mainly on productive activities and community leadership, which usually bring them remuneration, status and power. Incorporating this perspective will allow for a more accurate assessment of the constraints that weigh on researchers (for example, limited research time due to household tasks) and may subsequently develop support policies (care services, family life reconciliation programs with work, etc.).

4. **Presentation of statistical data with weights and percentages.** To highlight more clearly the dynamics of women's participation in research, it is proposed to supplement statistical tables with percentage indicators and relative distributions, not only with absolute figures. The use of percentages highlights trends and gaps: for example, according to official data, in 2022 women represented 1429 of the total of 2809 researchers in the Republic of Moldova (approx. 51%). However, distribution by field is uneven – women are the majority in the humanities (61.3% of researchers), in the medical sciences (60.2%), and social/economic (56.4%), while in the agricultural, engineering, technological, and natural disciplines, they are strongly underrepresented. The presentation of these weights helps to identify sectors with pronounced gender segregation and to monitor progress over time towards balancing participation.

5. **Examination of the management structure of educational institutions from a gender perspective.** It is recommended to analyse the representation of women in academic leadership positions (University Senate, boards of directors, positions of vice-rector, dean, etc.) in order to identify possible barriers to access decision-making positions. Even in institutions where gender parity is almost reached at staff level, women may be underrepresented at the top of the academic hierarchy, a phenomenon known as the glass ceiling. Such an assessment, applied to the situation in the Republic of Moldova, would highlight whether the local academic governance structures reflect (or not) gender diversity and would guide the necessary measures to promote women in academic leadership positions.

6. **The introduction and consistent use of the concept of „equal opportunities."** The explicit integration of the concept of gender equality in policy documents (national strategies, institutional regulations, research development plans, etc.) is essential to align the strategic framework with the principles of non-discrimination. Consistent use of this terminology underlines the authorities' commitment to ensuring equal treatment and prevents divergent or formal interpretations of gender policies. By including the phrase in a uniform manner (accompanied by clear operational definitions), it is also facilitated to monitor the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, ensuring coherence between the different levels of regulation and application (from national legislation to the university book or the code of ethics of research organizations).

7. **Rethinking the university teaching norm by creating an integrated norm (teaching + research).** The measure aims to optimize the workload of academics by officially recognizing research as an integral part of the basic rule alongside teaching hours. In the current system, academic staff (especially at the beginning of their career) often have to fulfil their full teaching norm and conduct scientific research in parallel, which equates to a double professional task. This situation may disadvantage researchers who, in addition to professional overwork, often carry the majority burden of family responsibilities. An integrated rule would relieve pressure on time by allowing for the formal allocation of part of the hours for research and would encourage scientific performance (teaching staff should no longer do research outside the norm alone, unpaid). In the long run, such a shift could increase academic career attractiveness and research productivity, providing a more gender-equitable work environment.

8. **Developing institutional ethical codes against gender inequality and sexual harassment.** It is proposed that each research institution and university adopt a code of ethics that clearly provides for the prohibition and sanctioning of gender discrimination and sexual harassment behaviours. In the absence of explicit internal rules, harassment cases can be minimized or managed informally, perpetuating a culture of impunity. Currently, there are notable shortcomings: for example, the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova does not expressly oblige educational institutions to implement procedures to prevent and combat harassment, and the University Charters and codes of ethics of many institutions either do not include a clear definition of sexual harassment, or do not provide effective mechanisms to prevent and sanction it. The adoption of revised ethical codes aligned with international best practices (prevention policies, confidential reporting channels, independent inquiry committees) would convey the message of zero tolerance of abuse.

9. **Family-friendly policies in academia and research.** The participants emphasized the need to create a family-friendly academic environment that allows both women and men to reconcile family life with their research career. Such policies may include flexible working hours (or partial time) for researchers with young children, the possibility of teleworking where the nature of the activity allows, extending the duration of paid parental leave and encouraging fathers to use it, as well as facilities such as nurseries or kindergartens close to university campuses. Return mechanisms (re-entry schemes) could also be envisaged for researchers who temporarily discontinued their work for family reasons, for example, grants or exemptions from certain teaching obligations upon returning from childcare leave. These measures would reduce the career penalty following motherhood/paternity and would reduce the double burden felt particularly by women, contributing to the retention of female talent in universities and research centres.

10. **Financial incentives dedicated to women in innovation and research startups.** It was proposed to set up targeted financial instruments to directly support innovative researchers and women. Examples include competitive grant funds reserved for women-led research projects, incubators and acceleration programs for women-founded start-ups, and national awards or scholarships for young researchers with innovative ideas. The rationale for these measures is to counter the funding gap faced by women: international statistics show that female entrepreneurs attract less investment than

their male counterparts, and researchers may have difficulty obtaining grant funding if they do not already have a consolidated network. Dedicated funds would act as temporary affirmative actions to balance starting conditions and encourage women to initiate ambitious research and innovation projects. In the long run, the success of these initiatives would demonstrate the high potential of women-led projects and help normalize the presence of women in the cutting-edge areas of innovation.

11. **Increasing the visibility of female researchers and the research profession.** To inspire new generations and dismantle gender role stereotypes in science, an effort is needed to increase the visibility of female models in research, as well as a general promotion of the research profession as an attractive career option. National media and social media campaigns can be organized to present the scientific achievements of researchers in the Republic of Moldova, highlighting the diversity of areas in which they work and the impact of their work. Also, public conferences, science slams, or scientific exhibitions could have sections dedicated to women in science, providing opportunities for them to become visible as experts in the public space. Partnerships with schools are also important, through mentoring programs, workshops and visits to laboratories led by women, students can be given concrete examples of success, broadening their aspirational horizon. Overall, enhancing the visibility of female researchers will strengthen the prestige of the research profession and convey the message that scientific excellence has no gender.

12. **Undetermined employment contracts after promotion through public competition.** It has been proposed that after a researcher obtains a post through public competition (for example, at the position of lecturer or scientific researcher titular), the employment contract is transformed from fixed-term to indefinite (permanent). This measure would provide career stability, in contrast to the fairly widespread practice in academia of keeping staff on temporary or fixed-term contracts, even after multiple positive assessments. Lack of job security disproportionately affects women, who may have to take career breaks (for example, to raise children), and they risk not having their contracts renewed in their absence or being discouraged from returning. An indeterminate contract, obtained on merit, would remove a major source of precariousness and allow researchers and researchers to plan their work and family in the long run without the constant fear of unemployment. At the same time, institutions would benefit from the retention of valuable staff and continuity in research projects.

13. **Recognition of doctoral years and research internships in retirement.** This direction aims at social equity for those pursuing long careers in training and specialization. Doctoral studies (of ~3-4 years or more) and post-doctoral or international research internships (*Fulbright scholarships, Marie Curie internships, etc.*) are personal investments in intellectual capital, but from the perspective of the social insurance system, they are often not accounted for as seniority in work. Thus, a researcher can enter the formal labour market late, accumulating fewer years of contributions to the pension fund. The proposal is that these periods dedicated to advanced training should be considered in the calculation of the pension, either through their direct accreditation as seniority (possibly up to a certain number of years) or through compensatory mechanisms

(for example, retrospectively paid contributions or pension bonuses for a doctorate). The measure would encourage young people, including young women, who may also have interruptions for motherhood to pursue a doctorate and research career, knowing that these efforts will not diminish their material security in old age. At the same time, the value of doctoral research as an activity contributing to the development of society, similar to other recognized forms of work, would be implicitly recognized.

14. **Ensuring inclusion at all levels of education (teaching and auxiliary staff).** Gender equality in research and innovation must be addressed systemically, by ensuring an inclusive environment not only for students but also for all employees in the education and research system. Participants recommended the application of the principles of inclusion at the level of recruitment, professional development, and evaluation of teachers and auxiliary staff. For example, anti-discrimination criteria and guarantees (making sure that women have equal opportunities in positions and advancement) should be integrated into the employment and promotion processes, and lifelong learning programs for teachers should include modules on equal opportunities and awareness of involuntary prejudices (unconscious bias). Only through cross-cutting application of inclusion policies at all hierarchical levels can an organizational culture be created that truly supports gender equality, eliminating discrimination not only for students and researchers, but also for employees in other categories.

15. **Regulation of research activity in the private sector (partnerships and equal access to resources).** As innovation takes place in the public academic sphere, participants suggested extending policies to support and monitor gender equality and private sector research. This could involve stimulating public-private partnerships in research, provided that the principles of equality are respected (for example, partner companies promote women in project teams or adopt diversity plans themselves). Mechanisms could also be put in place to ensure that private researcher women have fair access to research resources and infrastructures (joint labs, professional networks, inter-institutional mentoring programs). The aim is to prevent the creation of a dualism (gender-sensitive public sector vs. neglected private sector) and to ensure that innovative women also have equal opportunities for affirmation in the private economy, benefiting from a supportive environment similar to that promoted in state institutions.

16. **Clear separation of powers between the Rectorate, the University Senate, and the Management Board.** For an efficient and transparent university governance, it has been proposed to explicitly delimit the responsibilities of each of these governing bodies, including in terms of developing and implementing gender equality policies. In practice, role ambiguity or overlapping between the Rector (executive leadership of the university), the Senate (for academic decisions), and the Board of Management (for strategic and financial decisions) can lead to institutional bottlenecks or a lack of accountability in adopting reformative measures. A clear separation would create internal checks and balances mechanisms. The clarity and transparency of governance also enhance the confidence of the academic community that declarative commitments (including those related to equal opportunities) translate into concrete, properly monitored and evaluated actions.

17. **Rethinking and adequate remuneration of the evaluation of scientific products.** The quality of the evaluation process in science (peer review, evaluation of research projects, institutional evaluations) is important for academic integrity and progress. Participants stressed that the work of expert evaluators (often experienced teachers or researchers) should be professionalized and rewarded to the extent of its importance. Currently, involvement in evaluation committees or referencing scientific articles is perceived rather as a collegial duty or academic volunteering, being symbolically remunerated or not at all, which can lead to overloading a small number of experts, delaying assessments, and sometimes decreasing rigor. A rethink of this system would require both formal recognition (for example, an additional score in the assessment of academic performance for the valuer activity) and direct financial incentives (decent honour for evaluation reports, especially in the case of large projects or time-consuming evaluations). Adequate remuneration would attract a wider number of competent specialists to participate in evaluation processes, reducing the burden that often weighs on the shoulders of a few experts. It could also increase impartiality – a fairly remunerated valuer has a professional interest in doing his job with increased objectivity and attention. For gender equality, this measure also has indirect implications if the evaluation tasks are valued and distributed fairly, women researchers will have the opportunity and motivation to get involved in these processes (not only as evaluated authors, but also as evaluators), gaining visibility and recognition in the scientific community. Overall, the professionalization of scientific evaluation reinforces meritocracy and quality in research, benefits that are felt on everyone, regardless of gender.

Conclusions and future directions

The present analysis, based on interviews with policy actors from the research and innovation ecosystem of the Republic of Moldova, reveals a situation in the process of transformation, but still marked by significant gender imbalances. Based on the findings detailed in the report, we can **draw the following conclusions:**

- **Gender equality is recognized as an objective, but implementation remains insufficient.** At the declaratory level, both national policies and institutional actors support the principle of gender equality. However, until recently, few concrete measures have been taken. The lack of dedicated institutional plans and implementation mechanisms has left gender equality at the stage of desideratum. Only in recent years have the first specific interventions appeared (gender criteria in funding, maternity adaptations, etc.), which indicates an emerging will to change things – but the implementation is still fragmented and needs to be accelerated.
- **A "glass ceiling" persists in women's research careers.** Women are well represented numerically among students, junior researchers, and even middle-class academic staff, but they remain under-represented in leadership and decision-making positions. Traditional cultural norms, gender stereotypes and informal male networks contribute to such a situation. Even in the absence of formal discrimination, subtle bias makes it harder for women to advance. There are, however, signs of positive change – the example of women leaders in important structures has broken the myth of women's incompatibility with decision-making in science, offering new models and inspiring young generations.
- **The main obstacles for women in research are related to family responsibilities and stereotypes.** Maternity and social expectations about the role of women in the family often put a brake on their scientific careers, especially in the absence of support measures (well-paid leave, childcare services, flexible work schedules, etc.). In addition, the prejudice that women are less suitable for *"technical" areas* or for scientific leadership positions persists in the collective mind, influencing employment and funding decisions. Balancing work and personal life remain a major challenge, not yet addressed sufficiently in research institutions.
- **The overall underfunding of the research sector affects both men and women but has specific gender implications.** Low wages and limited resources in research make the profession unattractive to many potential candidates (especially men who prefer higher-paid sectors), leading to *feminization of some* branches (women remain predominant, although often in lower-status positions). On the other hand, women who remain in research are often burdened by the need to supplement their incomes, which reduces the time and energy available for scientific work. Thus, the issue of funding also has a gender dimension: Improving research funding would help keep and motivate female researchers, as well as attract more men in areas where they are under-represented – gradually balancing the balance.

- **The academic community is in a process of awareness and mobilization.** The fact that gender equality has become the subject of discussion, that studies and interviews are being conducted on the subject (as in this research), that data is being gathered, and recommendations are being made indicate a change of attitude. There is a critical mass of researchers and researchers who recognize problems and want to contribute to solutions. New generations also seem more open and less willing to tolerate inequalities, which creates the premises for a change in thinking in the coming years.
- **A structured approach (roadmap) for gender equality in science is needed.** From the ideas and proposals under review, sporadic action is not enough – a coherent and multilateral strategy with clear short, medium, and long-term objectives is needed to ensure gender equality in research and innovation. Such a strategy should involve both the legislative and policy level (ministries, agencies) and the executive level of institutions (universities, institutes) and, finally, civil society and the academic community itself. It is only by coordinating these efforts that a lasting impact can be created and practices and mentalities that maintain inequalities can be structurally changed.

By implementing the proposed roadmap, women researchers will not only be given the confidence, but also the concrete support needed to make their dream – and the vision of a society based on equality and meritocracy – a reality in the years to come.

Overall, the Republic of Moldova is at a **turning point in** terms of gender equality in science, first, the issue was identified and accepted, certain positive steps were taken, and now it is necessary to amplify them in a planned and monitored way. The consistent implementation of the recommendations and roadmap elements proposed in the qualitative analysis report requires effort and contribution to succeed in transforming the principle of gender equality from a simple formal provision into a daily reality in the scientific community.

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Annexes

Interview guide – Gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova

Good afternoon! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Our discussion focuses on your experiences and perspectives on gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova. We want to understand the challenges, opportunities, and viable solutions to improve women's access to this area. Privacy: All answers will be used for research and analysis purposes only, without being associated with your name without consent.

(**Note:** Depending on the role of the interviewer, the interviewer will use the relevant set of questions in the sections below.)

Introduction	**Please introduce yourself and talk a little about your role in the organization you represent.**
Career path and motivation	1. What made you choose a career in science and innovation? 2. How has your academic and professional career been so far? 3. Have you had female mentors or models in science that inspired you? (*for women)* 4. What do you think were the biggest obstacles you faced in your career?
Experiences on gender equality in science and innovation	5. Do you think there is a balanced representation of women in your field of activity? 6. Have you ever felt that gender was **an obstacle or advantage in** your professional career? 7. Are there differences in treatment between men and women in access to finance, promotion, or leadership opportunities? 8. What institutional policies (in universities, research institutes) are there to support women in science?
Gender discrimination and challenges	9. How has the situation in research and science evolved from a gender equality perspective? 10. What are the dynamics/statistics in comparative terms in ensuring gender equality in research and science? 11. To what extent are the principles and standards of gender equality respected in public research and science policies? Are there any good practices, positive trends? Negative? 12. To what extent do adapted policies ensure gender equality following research and science optimizations?

	13. Have you experienced or witnessed cases of gender discrimination in academia or research? 14. How do cultural and social norms affect women's access to leadership positions in science? 15. Do you think there are differences in pay between men and women in science and innovation? 16. How does motherhood and family life influence the professional progress of women in this field?
Solutions and recommendations	17. What measures should be implemented to ensure a fairer representation of women in science and innovation? 18. How could work-life balance policies for women in research be improved? 19. What role do academic and governmental institutions play in promoting gender equality in science? 20. What is your message to young women/girls who want to pursue a career in science?
Conclusion	21. Thank you for your time and answers! The answers provided will help us to better understand the challenges and outline solutions for promoting gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova. *If you would like to add other comments or suggestions, please share them.*

Questions for government officials

(*Addressed to representatives of the ministry or government agencies involved in research and innovation)*

Introduction	Please introduce yourself and talk a little about your role in the organization you represent.
National gender equality policies and strategies	1. What are the main national policies and strategies in place that promote gender equality in research and innovation (e.g. National gender equality strategy, sectoral action plans or requirements associated with participation in EU programs such as Horizon Europe? 2. How have these policies been developed and what are their key objectives? 3. How is your institution involved in implementing and promoting these strategies?
Challenges at the national level	4. From your perspective, what are the biggest **challenges in** ensuring gender equality in the national research and innovation system? 5. What **barriers or** inequalities persist for women in research careers or in access to innovation opportunities? Can you give us concrete examples of tricky situations or obstacles that you have tried to overcome at policy level (such as underrepresentation of women in certain STEM areas or lack of women in leadership positions)?
Measures implemented	6. What **measures did you specify** implemented (or plan to implement) at government level to reduce gender disparities in research and innovation? Please describe initiatives such as funding programs dedicated to women in science, legislative changes, awareness campaigns or **new requirements imposed on research institutions** (e.g. requiring the adoption of a gender equality plan to access funds). 7. How have these measures been received by the research and innovation community so far?
Impact of current policies	8. How do you assess the impact of current policies and initiatives on gender equality in research and innovation? 9. Have you noticed **notable progress or changes in** recent years – for example, an increase in the number of female researchers in senior positions, a better gender balance in certain research areas, or a change in attitude among research institutions? Are there any recent internal data, studies or assessments that reflect these developments?
Conclusion	10. Thank you for your time and answers! The answers provided will help us to better understand the challenges and outline solutions for promoting gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova. *If you would like to add other comments or suggestions, please share them.*

Questions for department/research institute/committee directors

Introduction	**Please introduce yourself and talk a little about your role in the organization you represent.**
Policy/strategy of the institution /The department	1. Are you aware of national policies and strategies on gender equality in research and innovation? 2. How are these national directives reflected in your own strategy or policies of the institute you are running? Has your institution adopted an internal plan or concrete measures to ensure gender equality (e.g. an institutional equal opportunity plan or internal anti-discrimination rules)?
Institutional challenges	3. What are the main challenges you face in your effort to ensure a fair and inclusive research environment in your institute? 4. Are there gender gaps in certain departments or positions (e.g. a lower number of women in leadership roles, in technical fields or in academia)? 5. What practical or cultural obstacles have you noticed for research workers (e.g. difficulties in balancing family responsibilities with career requirements, stereotypes about women's science skills, etc.)? Please provide specific examples, if possible.
Measures implemented	6. What **actions or initiatives did you** take within the Institute to promote gender equality and support researchers? For example, have you introduced mentoring programs for young researchers, **fair recruitment, and promotion policies** (ensuring transparency and equal opportunities for employment/advancement), training for staff on combating stereotypes and harassment, or facilities to help combine family and career life (flexible schedule, childcare services, etc.)? 7. How did your employees and colleagues react to these measures and what degree of support did you notice among the community in the institution?
Impact	8. Have you noticed **positive changes** because of the measures implemented? You can share with us results or examples that indicate an improvement in gender equality in your institute – for example, an increase in the number of researchers involved in important projects, a **more balanced representation in** management positions or increased staff awareness of the importance of gender equality? 9. How do you monitor or evaluate these progress (are there internal statistics, feedback from employees, regular assessments of the working environment from the perspective of equal opportunities)?
Recommenda-tions	10. Based on your experience and perspective, what recommendations would you have for national or institutional decision-makers to **improve gender equality in** the research and innovation sector? Are there any new policies, initiatives, or changes that you consider necessary (e.g. additional funding programs for young researchers, measures to support academic career after maternity breaks, mentoring networks, **campaigns to promote science among fetters, etc.**)? Also, what **advice** would you give to other leaders in the field to create a more inclusive and equitable environment?
Conclusion	11. Thank you for your time and answers! The answers provided will help us to better understand the challenges and outline solutions for promoting gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova. *If you would like to add other comments or suggestions, please share them.*

Questions for members/program coordinators/research and innovation projects

Introduction	**Please introduce yourself and talk a little about your role in the organization you represent.**
Aligning the program with gender policies	1. As coordinator of a research/innovation program, to what extent do you take national gender equality policies into account when designing and implementing the program? 2. Does your program include explicit goals or criteria for promoting women's participation? (For example, encourage the implementation of women-led projects, impose a gender balance in funded research teams, or integrate the gender dimension as a criterion for evaluating project proposals.)
Challenges in the program	3. What **challenges** do you face in ensuring a balanced participation of women and men in the innovation program you are coordinating? Have you noticed that women are under-represented among applicants or beneficiaries of funding? If so, what do you think are the reasons for this underrepresentation (e.g. fewer women in eligible STEM fields, reluctance to apply, lack of visibility of the program among researchers)? 4. Are there specific obstacles that can discourage women from participating in the program (such as lack of mentoring, bias in the selection process, stereotypes in the innovation community)? Please detail with examples if you have.
Measures and best practices in the program	5. What **measures do you** implement under the program to reduce gender disparities and encourage women's involvement? Please describe any concrete actions: For example, information campaigns specifically targeted at women researchers/innovators, mentoring sessions or training to support participants, ensuring gender-diverse evaluation committees, adapting language from project calls to be inclusive, or working with profile organizations (such as women's associations in science) to promote opportunities. 6. What **were the results of** these initiatives so far and how were they perceived by the participants?
Impact on participants and projects	7. How do you assess **the impact of these** measures on the program and participants? Have you seen measurable or qualitative changes, such as an increase in the number of women applying or receiving funding, greater diversity in project teams, or better gender mainstreaming in the topics of funded projects? 8. Can you share with us a successful example – for example, a project led by a woman who had a significant impact or a participant who, thanks to the program, has advanced in his career? Do you also have monitoring mechanisms or indicators to track progress on gender equality under the Program?

Recommendations	9. Based on your experience and perspective, what recommendations would you have for national or institutional decision-makers to **improve gender equality in** the research and innovation sector? Are there any new policies, initiatives, or changes that you consider necessary (e.g. additional funding programs for young researchers, measures to support academic career after maternity breaks, mentoring networks, **campaigns to promote science among fetters, etc.**)? Also, what **advice** would you give to other leaders in the field to create a more inclusive and equitable environment?
Conclusion	10. Thank you for your time and answers! The answers provided will help us to better understand the challenges and outline solutions for promoting gender equality in science and innovation in the Republic of Moldova. *If you would like to add other comments or suggestions, please share them.*