

Alena Křížková, Marie Pospíšilová and Markéta Švarcová

# Chapter 3

## Gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation: Cultural barriers and strategic approaches

### Introduction

Women are underrepresented in entrepreneurship and innovation, although more women than men in EU Member States now have a tertiary education.<sup>1</sup> Gender equality is a key European value (European Commission, 2025a), and gender diversity would bring a necessary variety of perspectives and experiences to small businesses and research and innovation ecosystems, which drive the European economy. Gender inequality and the lack of gender diversity in these sectors are therefore systemic problems for the European market, as well as for democracy, society, and culture (European Commission, 2025b). The lack of gender equality and diversity requires systematic and complex solutions. These solutions must be based on research that uncovers the root causes. This chapter is based on an analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted in 10 European countries with experts from the health, green, and digital sectors and with representatives of the target groups identified in the Quadruple Helix framework (representatives of universities and research institutions, non-profit organisations supporting women's entrepreneurship, businesses, and policy makers) on gendered barriers, opportunities, and good practices in entrepreneurship and innovation.

Previous research has identified key challenges to gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation, including the very definition of entrepreneurship and innovation and wider structural inequalities in the labour market. However, entrepreneurship and innovation are still widely regarded as individual activities, primarily undertaken by people who exhibit masculine characteristics (Ahl, 2006; Marlow, Martinez-Dy, 2018). Conversely, feminist research emphasises the importance of con-

---

<sup>1</sup> In the second quarter of 2024, women represented 47% of all entrepreneurs and 51% of the self-employed in EU Member States, while only 37% of entrepreneurs with employees were women [Eurostat, 2023]. In terms of gender horizontal segregation, women make up 68% of PhD graduates in education and 60% in health and welfare. However, they represent only 21% of graduates in ICT and 27% of graduates in engineering, manufacturing, and construction. Although there is an overall gender balance among PhD graduates, as women make up 48% of all PhD graduates in EU Member States, women account for only 22% of researchers in the business and economic sector, 25% of self-employed in science, engineering, and ICT professionals, and 9% of inventors in EU Member States (European Commission, 2024).

sidering a broader context, such as the situation in the household and caring responsibilities, and adopting an intersectional approach to research on entrepreneurs (Romero, Valdez, 2016; Christensen et al., 2024). Furthermore, the attempts to define the products of entrepreneurship and innovation must shift towards more social and ‘real-life’ solutions to everyday challenges and move away from a predominantly technical and economic focus. Entrepreneurship also needs to be understood in the context of the availability of standard employment contracts, as well as the availability of work-care arrangements in the wider labour market. Attention should also be paid to informal entrepreneurs and false self-employed and to the division of work and care roles within enterprises and households involved in entrepreneurship and innovation (Marlow, Martinez Dy, 2018). More and better data are needed.

Drawing on theories of structural inequality, entrepreneurial agency, and strategic approaches to gender equality and employing a qualitative methodology, this chapter identifies the barriers, opportunities, and best practices for achieving gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation across 10 European countries. We find that the main barriers to gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation are related to gender stereotypes in the cultural and social environment and on the labour market. However, current identified good practices mostly focus on fixing the numbers or institutions, with a notable lack of good practices and systematic efforts to fix institutionalised knowledge and practices through knowledge of the cultural construction of gender and its intersections with other categories of (dis)advantage. Fixing the culture and our everyday practices would be an important leap forward, which would require more long-term support and resources.

## **Structural inequality, entrepreneurial agency, positionality, and the theory of gendered innovations**

Mainstream entrepreneurship theory and policy overlook the social structures that shape entrepreneurial opportunities, portraying entrepreneurship as an individual activity based on agency and meritocracy (Ahl, 2006; Ahl, Marlow, 2019). Based on this assumption, entrepreneurship itself is seen as a means of overcoming disadvantage. However, this approach ignores the fact that social structures cannot be overcome by individual action (Ahl, Marlow, 2019). Because the entrepreneurship norm is dominated by well-educated, urban, white, Anglo-American or European males, entrepreneurship is therefore normatively male (Ahl, 2006). Those who reflect this norm tend to have greater access to privileges such as elite education, managerial experience, personal wealth, powerful social networks, and attributions of masculinity. All of these serve to enact entrepreneurial agency. Conversely, the further individuals

and groups are from the norm — i.e. how less urban, white, male, and wealthy they are — the more marginalised they become (Ahl, 2006; Marlow, Martinez Dy, 2018). Stereotypically female attributes, such as caregiving, do not align with stereotypically masculine attributes of leadership, such as assertiveness and dominance (Bullough et al., 2022). At the same time, it is assumed that social and financial disadvantage can be overcome through a combination of innovative opportunities and hard work, suggesting that entrepreneurship is characterised by the removal of constraints (Rindova, Barry, Ketchen, 2009), such as discrimination by employers in employment relationships. Similarly, structural conditions in the labour market can act as a motivation for entering self-employment. For example, the lack of flexible forms of employment to help people reconcile caregiving responsibilities and paid work often leads them to pursue self-employment as the only viable option. This type of necessity-driven motivation more frequently results in the acceptance of precarious working conditions, such as false self-employment (Hughes, 2003).

The gender stereotypes surrounding entrepreneurship and innovation pose an economic and cultural problem. Previous research has demonstrated the benefits of gender diversity for innovation and entrepreneurship (Nilsen, Bloch, Schiebinger, 2018). Nielsen, Bloch, and Schiebinger (2018) suggest gender diversity should be achieved in three areas: (1) in teams focusing on the equal representation of women; (2) in methods; and (3) in the questions we ask and the priorities we set for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship. They also emphasise that other types of diversity, including age, class, ethnicity, and nationality, would benefit the economy and society (Nielsen, Bloch, Schiebinger, 2018, p. 732). Therefore, they advocate for an intersectional approach.

Intersectionality theory has emerged as an approach to understanding the interaction between different categories of inequality, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2016; Nash, 2008), as opposed to conducting separate analyses of women, ethnic minorities, and so on. This approach captures the social location of an entrepreneur in a more complex way than focusing solely on gender or other categories (Romero, Valdez, 2016). The social location of an entrepreneur and the context in which they pursue the processes of entrepreneurship and innovation give rise to the concept of social positionality (Essers, Benschop, 2009; Marlow, Martinez-Dy, 2018). According to Anthias (2013), positionality is defined as the space that lies at the intersection of structure (social position/social effects) and agency (meaning and practice). Entrepreneurial agency is the result of the interaction between social structures (i.e. systems of relationships between social positions) and culture (i.e. belief systems and ideologies, such as stereotypes and media images). Positionality highlights how these concepts, particularly access to resources, are impacted by the interaction between social structure and culture. Martinez Dy (2020) employs the concept of positionality to analyse how entrepreneurship is embedded in a structural context and culture that shape lived experiences, opportunities, and behaviour. Cultural con-

text and intersectional perspectives are critically important elements of entrepreneurship research (Marlow, Martinez Dy, 2018).

## **The theory of gendered innovations and three strategic approaches to gender equality**

How can gendered, intersectional, and contextual inequalities be captured theoretically? As outlined in Chapter 1 of this volume, *Gendered Innovations* (2020) is a transatlantic project developed jointly by Stanford University and the EU Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG Research) to answer this question. Led by Londa Schiebinger, the project has been closely linked to Europe's ambitions since the inception of the EU to be a global leader in technology and innovation. It has addressed three strategic approaches taken by universities and research institutions in recent decades to create a gender-inclusive innovation and entrepreneurship strategy. These three approaches represent specific concepts, methods, and strategies.

The first approach, called 'fix the numbers', focuses on increasing the participation of women and underrepresented groups in existing structures and addressing statistical underrepresentation. With a focus on individual-level strategies and education (Burkinshaw, White, 2017; Kabeer, Natalli, 2013), this approach has evolved into a model of 'business feminism' based on rational and economic arguments for gender equality. It includes calls for more training and education in entrepreneurship for women or specific groups of women, such as women with a migration background, to address their underrepresentation. It is therefore sometimes referred to as 'fixing the women' (Foss et al., 2019). While this approach may help women to develop the specific skills they need, it cannot overcome wider structural inequality. It has been criticised for its focus on individual solutions and for not addressing systems of disadvantage, such as legislation, market regulation, taxation, and other policy-related areas (Foss et al., 2019), which involve the use of different regulations for different groups or have a differential impact on groups in different positions. Furthermore, by emphasising the need for women to acquire more knowledge and skills, it perpetuates the stereotype that women are inherently not sufficiently able to pursue entrepreneurship and innovation or certain aspects of it.

The second approach addresses structures that are unfriendly to women and families, calling for changes to institutions and services (Recalde, Vesterlund, 2020). The 'fix the institutions' approach promotes inclusive equality in careers by implementing structural changes within organisations, such as gender quotas and gender equality plans. This approach recognises the social experiences of women and other groups and is associated with standpoint/societal feminism. It has the potential, for example, to institutionalise support for a work-life balance or mechanisms for increasing the representation of women in decision-making within specific organisations, using tools such as action plans for gender equality. While this approach has an equalising poten-

tial in that it removes barriers, for example, for women with caring responsibilities, it has recently been criticised. Having an action plan for gender equality does not automatically mean that the barriers faced by disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are removed (Linkova, Mergaert, 2021).

The third approach focuses on excellence in science and technology by integrating sex, gender, and intersectional analyses into research. This approach emphasises that gender is a cultural construction. The ‘fix the knowledge’ approach aims to promote the gender dimension in research evaluation and improve knowledge by using gender-disaggregated data and analysis and intersectional analysis (Nielsen, Bloch, Schiebinger, 2018; Nielsen et al., 2025). It has the potential to capture the interconnections between systems of disadvantage through rigorous, evidence-based analysis. However, as it is specifically focused on research and research funding institutions, it is somewhat limited in its application to the wider area of entrepreneurship and innovation.

The GILL project introduces a fourth approach: ‘fix the culture’. This would represent a significant advancement, shifting the focus from limited economic and technical perspectives of innovation to more social and practical real-life solutions. It would also entail long-term efforts to dismantle the masculine norms of entrepreneurship and the stereotypes surrounding the roles of women and men in paid work and family life. This approach aims to transform practices and norms to dismantle structural inequality and increase gender sensitivity (see Chapters 1 and 6 of this volume).

## Data and methodology

To take a more holistic approach to entrepreneurship and innovation and to move beyond individual experiences, we chose expert interviews as a suitable method for answering our research question about the main barriers and opportunities for women in entrepreneurship and innovation. Our analysis is based on 36 semi-structured interviews with experts in entrepreneurship, innovation, and women’s support collected in 2023, in 10 European countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom). The 36 experts represented all four areas of the quadruple helix: academia (12), government (4), industry (10), and citizens/NGOs (10). The experts included representatives of entrepreneurship support programmes, university programmes and NGOs supporting women in innovation and entrepreneurship, gender studies experts, policy-makers, and officials at ministries. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the interviews were anonymised. Participants were recruited using the snowball technique by interviewers, and the average interview duration was one hour. The interviews were based on a common interview guide focused on barriers, opportunities, and good practices for gender equality in entrepreneurship and

innovation. Common analysis summary templates were completed for each interview. The analysis employed the ‘structural reading’ approach outlined by Erel (2007), focusing on the impact of social structures on individuals and institutions. During the analysis, uniform analytical templates were used for each interview, and the barriers, opportunities, and good practices discussed were coded according to the strategic approaches to gender equality: fix the numbers, fix the institution, fix the knowledge, and fix the culture. The following findings section is divided into two analytical parts. First, we discuss the identified barriers and opportunities, followed by an analysis of the good practices. Finally, we present our conclusions and ideas for further research

## **Barriers and opportunities for gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation**

### **Barriers and risks**

Experts mentioned culture, values, and gendered norms as the most significant barriers to gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation. Thus, the main barriers were those related to gender stereotypes and expectations, the differential behaviour expected of women and men, and the values expressed in language and unconscious biases. Experts also spoke about prejudice and gender-insensitive language, as well as androcentrism, whereby masculine characteristics are seen as the norm against which women are measured. Some experts also mentioned the intersection of personal characteristics such as gender, race or ethnicity, and education, which reinforce and multiply the disadvantages women face in the labour market, entrepreneurship, innovation, and society at large, including private life. Gender stereotypes, gender norms, gender bias in assessing individual and business capabilities, and homosocial practices excluding women and other minorities were similarly identified as the main barriers in the reports, recent research publications, and grey literature in selected EU countries (Christensen et al., 2024).

Specifically, digital transformation experts described biases against women in male-dominated industries, such as engineering, and stereotypes about women’s lack of technical or leadership skills. These prejudices can lead to discrimination in funding, hiring, partnerships, and recognition. They also pointed out that innovation developers are predominantly white men, and that gender and racial stereotypes are replicated in the development and use of digital technologies and AI. This manifests itself in language, job descriptions that suit men, and a narrow definition of innovation as purely technical. Consequently, experts observe low confidence among women entrepreneurs in ICT, the underrepresentation of women in IT start-ups, and poorer access to finance for women to support their businesses and innovation projects.

Experts working in business support and innovation, as well as supporting women entrepreneurs, mentioned the male bias in entrepreneurship and innovation. They said that entrepreneurship focuses too much on economic growth, financial gain, risk, and competition — values that are not traditionally associated with femininity in Western culture. This can lead to women's entrepreneurship being perceived as inferior, less successful, and less prestigious than men's, as it often does not prioritise these values. Other experts also mentioned the lack of systematic support for women-led enterprises (e.g. start-ups) or the lack of promotion of women in entrepreneurship and innovation specifically. Furthermore, with regard to gender stereotypes and male bias in entrepreneurship and innovation, the experts identified the issue that women (especially those with a migration background) are often treated as exceptions to the rule. This occurs both informally, when they are often in a token position in various situations, and formally, when various support mechanisms are designed solely for women, thereby perpetuating the stereotype that women require special support (for examples of these formal and informal inequalities, see Chapter 2).

Another barrier is the lack of gender sensitivity and willingness to address gender inequality at different levels. On the one hand, men were found to have lower gender sensitivity than women concerning the structural causes of gender inequalities, and men were found to be less willing to engage with these topics. On the other hand, there was also a reluctance to discuss gender equality with some groups, such as students, expressing the view that the issue has already been widely discussed without significant progress being made.

The interviews also revealed that socialisation plays a significant role in perpetuating the false belief among women that they are incapable of learning and performing difficult tasks, such as excelling in IT and other traditionally masculine fields. From a very early age, we are exposed to gender stereotypes embedded in social institutions, according to which we act and judge others. Socialisation was identified as the cause of the low percentage of women in male-dominated fields of study such as IT, technology, and science (STEM subjects) and the cause of gender segregation in the labour market in general.

Both horizontal and vertical gender segregation were identified as strong barriers that are present not only in the education system, but also in the labour market and the wider economy. Women are disadvantaged not only in the areas in which they work, but also because they are underrepresented in decision-making and leadership positions at the business and political levels, and because important decisions are made without considering women's life experiences. Overall, gender segregation in the labour market and business is driven by gender stereotypes, socialisation, the isolation of women in highly masculine environments, a lack of networks and access to men's clubs.

Some experts, particularly those specialising in entrepreneurship, have highlighted women's lower willingness to take risks, e.g. when considering loans. Those focusing on supporting women in male-dominated fields highlight women's

lower self-confidence and their belief that they cannot succeed in certain fields. In this context, the lack of mentors and role models who can demonstrate to women that they can succeed in traditionally male-dominated fields was discussed.

Barriers related to policies for balancing work and family life and the gender division of labour at home were mentioned. In particular, it was noted that women are expected to take on a greater share of caring responsibilities, which often leads them to reduce their working hours. If they refuse, they are criticised for being bad mothers. It was also acknowledged that family and social policy frameworks, such as the conditions and support for maternity and parental and paternity leave affect families' real lives and can reproduce gender stereotypes. Discrimination against women with children in the labour market was noticed, particularly in access to male-dominated fields such as ICT.

An important barrier is the lack of political will and commitment to promoting gender equality and diversity. It was emphasised that politicians do not perceive the issue of gender equality as crucial. Furthermore, where political representatives and stakeholders are already making efforts to promote gender equality and diversity, change is too slow. The underrepresentation of women in politics was also identified as a problem.

The experts interviewed identified a lack of support for women entrepreneurs and innovators as an important barrier. This includes a lack of infrastructure and support for women entering male-dominated fields, a lack of inclusive programmes, and a lack of support from their own families. Almost all the experts had experience with grant funding (often from the EU, national grant competitions, etc.) for projects and activities that promote gender equality. They know that a key barrier for women entrepreneurs, as well as for various support organisations and projects is the lack of access to finance, microfinance, and other types of funding. However, when they do find and successfully obtain funding to address this it is usually short-term, which makes it impossible to implement long-term activities or sustain long-term support for gender equality issues after the project ends.

Experts generally agree that the most significant barriers are related to culture, where gender stereotypes prevail and men and women are expected to perform different activities and demonstrate different levels of commitment at home and in the workplace. This also influences the actions, strategies, and opportunities that experts consider important for strengthening gender equality and promoting gender diversity.

## Opportunities

The most frequently mentioned opportunity was the need for cultural change, such as the use of female role models. There was also a strong call for gender awareness-raising activities, campaigns, and training programmes, etc., at different levels and

for different actors, such as workplace management, men, and people working in different support and funding structures. Benefits have also been seen in promoting gender diversity at the organisational level (e.g. companies and universities). The experts representing citizens called for opportunities to be created for underrepresented groups to network, share experiences, and talk openly about challenges and for increasing communication and the sharing of results. Some experts saw these measures as an opportunity for entrepreneurship and innovation. An interviewee from the digital industry in Romania pointed out: ‘Having more women in this field also means that digital products will be better adapted to female markets and buyers.’

Another step that could help to remove barriers would be to introduce policies that directly promote the inclusion of women in innovation. Various measures have been suggested, including gender quotas in political and economic decision-making processes. It is important to note that the level of debate surrounding gender quotas varies between countries. While gender quotas are widely implemented in politics and business in many countries, in others, such as Spain and the Czech Republic, the debate on gender quotas still leads to tensions and discussions about compromising meritocracy. Other concrete measures mentioned include positive action, equality certificates, the promotion of inclusive practices, and gender mainstreaming in strategic and equality plans. European gender equality policies are considered a valuable starting point for effecting change at the national, company, and local levels and for transforming the gender order in society. The requirement for all institutions applying for EU-funded projects to have a gender equality plan, for example, has been highly valued as an impetus for change in many universities and research institutions. Including gender diversity in research teams and gender equality in research content as project evaluation criteria is also an effective way of increasing the representation of women and the attention given to gender equality in innovation.

The interviewed experts agreed with the development of support systems for women entrepreneurs, such as mentoring programmes, networking opportunities and initiatives to build self-esteem, and the inclusive leadership model. These systems should be available at all stages of an entrepreneurial career, not just for start-ups. Digital skills were also identified as a very important area where these measures would be beneficial. The experts also identified the following as valuable measures: focusing on the younger generation and supporting them to start new ventures and innovations; supporting women to enter non-traditional fields of study and start careers in the STEM and ICT sectors through talent retention measures, social media, and role models. In addition to networking and educational and training support, financial support was identified as an important development opportunity. The experts called for financial resources, such as micro-credits, to be targeted at women and other underrepresented groups.

A key area for improvement that was discussed was work-life balance, including the need to normalise the idea of women combining paid work and care and of men providing care.

The very definition of innovation was also discussed and challenged in relation to the cultural context. A more innovative perspective on what innovation is was also considered a new opportunity for increasing gender equality. For a long time, innovation has been understood as more technical and taking place in the private sphere. However, women predominate in public sector employment, and innovation can also be non-technical – for example, social innovation.

**Table 3.1:** A summary of key barriers and opportunities.

<b>Barriers and risks</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Gender stereotypes	Awareness-raising activities
Gendered socialisation	Financial resources
Gendered values	Mentoring
Masculine bias	Role models
Gendered norms	Sharing experiences
Low self-confidence of women	Networking
Low willingness to take risks	Support systems for women
Gendered policies	Work-life balance support
Horizontal and vertical gender segregation	Gender equality policies (quotas)
Lack of access to finance	Promotion of gender diversity
Sexual harassment	Redefinition of gendered concepts of innovation, entrepreneurship
Violence against women	Cultural change
(Unsystematic) Support for equality	

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The expert interviews identified obstacles and risks to achieving gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation, as summarized in Table 3.1. These challenges stem from a gendered culture that shapes our fundamental understanding of who can innovate and how. Overcoming these hurdles and fostering gender equality, according to the experts, primarily involves dismantling gender stereotypes related to abilities, interests, and labour division, as well as creating opportunities for women through changes in the entrepreneurial and innovative landscape. The next section will delve into good practices for achieving gender equality in innovation and entrepreneurship, as highlighted by these experts.

## Good practices

During the interviews, we asked the experts to identify good practices for achieving gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation that they have been part of or that they know about in their area. Based on the 36 expert interviews, 41 good practices

were collected. These good practices can be categorised based on three strategic approaches to gender equality: fix the numbers, fix the institutions, and fix the knowledge (see Table 3.2). However, it is important to recognise that all three levels of analysis are necessary; therefore, the three levels are not hierarchical, they are all interrelated. For example, efforts to increase women's participation will not be successful without integrating methods of sex and gender analysis into knowledge production (Schiebinger et al., 2010). None of the good practices collected focused on fixing the culture.

## Fix the numbers

Among the good practices mentioned, 29 can be summarised in the category 'fix the numbers'. These good practices mostly focus on training and the empowerment of women in terms of supporting women's self-confidence, developing specific skills, especially those that will help them to succeed in business, providing a safe space for the discussion and exchange of experiences, including between junior and senior entrepreneurs, etc. These good practices also focus on the representation of women, mostly in occupations or fields where women are underrepresented.

These good practices included the following activities:

- Organising events, meetings, etc., of women (entrepreneurs, academics, women in IT, etc.), either with other women with similar life experiences or with women in senior positions who can provide women in the early career stage with advice on how to develop their careers. These meetings are therefore also based on the method of working with female role models. The main objective of the events and meetings is to support and share knowledge for women, while raising awareness of the successes and challenges that women face in specific fields.
- Communication campaigns aimed at presenting women in leadership positions as role models to encourage other women to work in masculinised fields and leadership positions.
- Competitions and training programmes focusing on providing women with specific skills to improve and expand their businesses.
- Good practices devoted to networking, that is, not just on meeting but on targeted networking – for example, between businesswomen and investors. One good practice focuses on networking between immigrant women and potential employers with the aim of increasing the representation of women with immigrant backgrounds in professional occupations.
- Specific projects at the company level or projects realised by NGOs aimed at increasing the number of women (who are underrepresented), usually in masculinised fields, such as IT.

## Fix the institution

This type of fix focuses on institutions and organisations where changes should take place to promote gender equality (Recalde, Vesterlund, 2020). Nine good practices were identified focusing on changing structures and policies, aiming at breaking down structural barriers in institutions, mainly workplaces. Since 2010, the European Commission has moved towards promoting gender equality at the institutional level in funding projects, encouraging research organisations and universities to implement multi-annual action plans to address institutional barriers, such as in recruitment, promotion and retention policies, management and research evaluation standards, and work-life balance policies. In line with this development, six of the nine good practices were identified by experts in the field of higher education, as the focus of the good practices was mainly on academic institutions setting up gender equality committees, and developing gender equality strategies and plans.

Good practices included the following activities:

- Gender equality plans and gender equality policies and quotas for the underrepresented gender. These activities aim to increase the number of women in certain positions within the institution, such as women in senior management, as well as to promote gender diversity and strengthen gender equality in other areas of the organisations, such as work-life balance policies.
- Some good practices focused on specific groups, identifying their needs and designing and developing policies and activities to improve their working conditions. One example is a good practice focusing on immigrant women in agriculture in Italy, which also adopts an intersectional perspective.

These good practices aimed to improve working conditions and motivate companies to employ women with caring responsibilities, for example, thus adapting working conditions for this specific group of workers and increasing the number of people in vulnerable positions in the labour market. These good practices focus not only on improving the situation of a specific group, but also on institutional change within private companies or universities. For example, a good practice might focus on creating gender commissions or associations that identify key issues in promoting gender equality and diversity and propose ways to address these issues. Within private companies, this may take the form of a specific HR measure aimed at a particular group of workers (e.g. carers).

## Fix the knowledge

There are also 3 good practices that fall into the category of ‘embedding knowledge’ or ‘gendered innovation’, which promotes excellence in science and technology by integrating sex, gender and intersectional analysis into research. Of these 3 practices, 2

were identified by experts from academia, and 1 by an expert from the government. These specific and complex projects require many human and financial resources, as well as a significant knowledge base, and are therefore better suited to government and university actors.

In this category, 2 good practices focused on tackling male bias and promoting gender equality in grant competitions and application assessment procedures. National Foundations for applied research in Italy and Czechia encourage gender equality by requiring that submitted applications have a gender-balanced team, by evaluating the impact of the project and its results on men and women, and by generally introducing gender equality as a criterion in the evaluation of research projects.

And 1 good practice in this category comes from Coventry University in the UK, where research has focused on improving knowledge of health inequalities, particularly those relating to preterm birth. The project uses an intersectional analysis, collecting data from various participants at the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity.

**Table 3.2:** The specific content of the good practice strategic approaches.

<b>Fix the Numbers (29)</b>	<b>Fix the Institutions (9)</b>	<b>Fix the knowledge (3)</b>
– Training	– Gender equality plans	– Promoting gender
– Networking	– Gender equality policies	equality in grant
– Role models	– Quotas	applications
– Mentoring	– Improving and adapting	– Improving knowledge by
– Increasing the interest/ participation of specific groups	working conditions (e.g. work-family needs)	collecting and analysing intersectional data

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

## The missing focus on fixing the culture

Although the experts identified various barriers to gender equality that are rooted in stereotypically gendered understandings of entrepreneurship and innovation, as well as in practices and normative structures that reproduce gender inequalities, the good practices identified did not predominantly focus on dismantling these root causes. Their focus was primarily on the provision of training and other measures aimed at changing individual women's behaviour to increase their representation, as well as changing institutions. Therefore, what is still missing and needed to truly dismantle the root causes of the barriers identified is the transversal fix focused on the culture, requiring contextual methods, the fourth fix suggested by the GILL project (see Chapter 1 and 6 of this volume).

## Conclusions and further research

This chapter aimed to identify the barriers, opportunities, and good practices for gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation, as seen by experts from various quadruple helix areas (academia, citizens, industry, and government). The prevailing view among experts in the 10 European countries is that the main barriers are related to the cultural and social environment, where men and women are subject to stereotypes and expected to fulfil different roles and demonstrate different levels of commitment to family life and the workplace. This also influences the actions, strategies, and opportunities that the experts consider important for strengthening gender equality and promoting gender diversity. The main problems identified by the experts are gender-stereotypical cultural beliefs and norms, masculine bias, gender segregation, a lack of funding and microfinance, a lack of policies to support work-life balance, and a lack of political will and empirical evidence to discuss working conditions and remove barriers. These findings are consistent with previous research emphasising the role of the male norm in entrepreneurship, the importance of the cultural context, and the need for access to resources, resulting from social structures and culture (Christensen et al., 2024; Marlow, Martinez Dy, 2018; Martinez Dy, 2020). The opportunities for change in the direction of greater gender equality identified in the interviews largely correspond to these barriers and highlight the role of key actors, such as the EU, in setting standards that can be disseminated further to the national, local, and organisational levels.

In terms of efforts to overcome existing barriers, projects that focus on increasing the number of women in underrepresented fields, occupations, and management positions predominate. These projects tend to focus on the individual skills of women, an approach that has been criticised in feminist literature (Ahl, 2006; Marlow, Martinez-Dy, 2018) as reproducing the stereotypes about women having insufficient skills. However, we also identified a group of good practices aimed at fixing institutional structures of inequality, primarily in academia and the public sector, but also in some companies. These practices aimed to make working conditions more compatible with caring responsibilities and combat male and racial bias. These good practices, as well as the good practices focusing on increasing the number of women with a migrant background, demonstrate that intersectional approaches are needed to plan and implement effective action in favour of gender equality and diversity. Only 3 of the collected good practices focused on addressing knowledge gaps by introducing gender-sensitive criteria in research.

There is a paradoxical relationship between the barriers identified and the good practices collected: the barriers and opportunities indicate that a change in the culture is needed; however, the identified good practices mostly focus on fixing the numbers and the knowledge of women individually. There is still a lack of good practices and systematic efforts to fix institutionalised knowledge and practices through knowledge of the cultural construction of gender and its intersections with other categories

of (dis)advantage. Therefore, we call for initiatives aimed at a fourth fix as developed by the GILL project: to fix the culture of entrepreneurship and innovation (see chapter 1 of this volume). This would mean challenging gender stereotypes such as the norm of the male entrepreneur and female carer. This could be done by changing the practices that disadvantage women and other specific groups in access to their life choices and careers, including increasing the representation of underrepresented groups and changing institutional structures and practices.

The context for the implementation of good practices is also very important, as their successful implementation depends on the cultural context of society, the willingness of key stakeholders to address inequalities, and the financial and human resources available, which determine the sustainability of implemented activities. Overcoming culture-based barriers is the main challenge to achieving gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation. To this end, a stable and sustainable institutional structure is needed to support gender equality (as also shown in Chapter 7 of this volume on lessons learnt), including sufficient human capacity and funding. We found that organisations conducting good practices and activities for gender equality in entrepreneurship and innovation do not have stable, long-term funding but are dependent on short-term project funding. This significantly limits the actions that can be planned and implemented to short-term planning. However, a profound and lasting change in institutional structures and culture takes a long time and requires many iterations, as well as monitoring and evaluation (as demonstrated in Chapter 6 of this book on gender-responsive methods). Activities to increase the participation of underrepresented groups are very important, but a more long-term approach should be adopted (see Chapter 7). There should always be further objectives, even if equal participation is achieved. Further objectives and future research should focus on strengthening institutional and knowledge-based solutions, as well as addressing cultural issues (Bullough et al., 2022) and securing stable resources for long-term actions.

The research presented here is limited by the small number of experts in each EU country. Therefore, we were not able to analyse their accounts based on the specific country context. Further research should focus on the diversity of cultural contexts within individual countries or regions, providing a more in-depth picture of cultural barriers and opportunities. At the same time, we must broaden our perspective on gender. To this end, Marlow and Martinez Dy (2018) suggest thinking about gender broadly, researching masculinities and family dynamics in the workplace and home, and incorporating discussions around sexuality, gender identity, migration status, race, and class.

## References

- Ahl, H. (2006). Why research on women entrepreneurs needs new directions. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 595–621. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2006.00138.x>
- Ahl, H., & Marlow, S. (2019). Exploring the false promise of entrepreneurship through a postfeminist critique of the enterprise policy discourse in Sweden and the UK. *Human Relations*, 74(1), 41–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719848480>
- Anthias, F. (2013). Hierarchies of social location, class and intersectionality: Towards a translocational frame. *International Sociology*, 28(1), 121–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580912463155>
- Bullough, A., Guelich, U., Manolova, T. S., & Schjoedt, L. (2022). Women's entrepreneurship and culture: gender role expectations and identities, societal culture, and the entrepreneurial environment. *Small Business Economics*, 58(2), 985–996. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-020-00429-6>
- Burkinshaw, P., & White, K. (2017). Fixing the women or fixing universities: Women in HE leadership. *Administrative Sciences*, 7(3), 30. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci7030030>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Erel, U. (2007). Constructing Meaningful Lives: Biographical methods in research on migrant women. *Sociological Research Online*, 12(4), 35–48. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.1573>
- Essers, C., & Benschop, Y. (2009). Muslim businesswomen doing boundary work: The negotiation of Islam, gender and ethnicity within entrepreneurial contexts. *Human Relations*, 62(3), 403–423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708101042>
- European Commission. (2024). *She figures 2024*. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5912cfbb-e82a-11ef-b5e9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- European Commission. (2025b). *2025 report on gender equality in the EU*. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2838/5262357>
- European Commission. (2025a). *A Roadmap for Women's Rights EN*. [https://commission.europa.eu/document/0c3fe55d-9e4f-4377-9d14-93d03398b434\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/document/0c3fe55d-9e4f-4377-9d14-93d03398b434_en)
- Eurostat. (2023). *Tertiary education statistics*. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tertiary\\_education\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tertiary_education_statistics)
- Foss, L., Henry, C., Ahl, H., & Mikalsen, G. H. (2019). Women's entrepreneurship policy research: a 30-year review of the evidence. *Small Business Economics*, 53(2), 409–429. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-018-9993-8>
- Gendered innovations. (2020). *What is Gendered Innovations?* <http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/what-is-gendered-innovations.html>
- Hancock, A.-M. (2016). *Intersectionality. An Intellectual History*. Oxford University Press. <https://openlibrary.org/books/OL27709142M/Intersectionality>
- Hughes, K. D. (2003). Pushed or Pulled? Women's Entry into Self-Employment and Small Business Ownership. *Gender Work and Organization*, 10(4), 433–454. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00205>
- Christensen, H. R., Breengaard, M. H., Stensgaard, S., Křížková, A., Marková Volejníčková, R., Pospíšilová, M., & Vohlídalová, M. (2024). *Roadmap for GRSIE*. Deliverable D1.1. GILL project.
- Kabeer, N., & Natali, L. (2013). *Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is there a Win – win?* IDS Working Paper, 147. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2013.00417.x>
- Linkova, M., & Mergaert, L. (2021). Negotiating change for gender equality: identifying leverages, overcoming barriers. *Investigaciones Feministas*, 12(2), 297–308. <https://doi.org/10.5209/infe.72319>
- Marlow, S., & Martinez Dy, A. (2018). Annual review article: Is it time to rethink the gender agenda in entrepreneurship research? *International Small Business Journal Researching Entrepreneurship*, 36(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242617738321>

- Martinez Dy, A. (2020). Not all Entrepreneurship Is Created Equal: Theorising Entrepreneurial Disadvantage through Social Positionality. *European Management Review*, 17(3), 687–699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12390>
- Nash, J. C. (2008). Re-Thinking intersectionality. *Feminist Review*, 89(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2008.4>
- Nielsen, M. W., Bloch, C. W., & Schiebinger, L. (2018). Making gender diversity work for scientific discovery and innovation. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2(10), 726–734. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0433-1>
- Nielsen, M. W., Gissi, E., Heidari, S., Horton, R., Nadeau, K. C., Ngila, D., Noble, S. U., Paik, H. Y., Tadesse, G. A., Zeng, E. Y., Zou, J., & Schiebinger, L. (2025). Intersectional analysis for science and technology. *Nature*, 640(8058), 329–337. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-025-08774-w>
- Recalde, M., & Vesterlund, L. (2020). *Gender Differences in the Negotiation and Policy for Improvement*. Working Paper 28183. [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w28183/w28183.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28183/w28183.pdf)
- Rindova, V., Barry, D., & Ketchen, D. J. (2009). Entrepreneurship as emancipation. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), 477–491. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.40632647>
- Romero, M., & Valdez, Z. (2016). Introduction to the special issue: intersectionality and entrepreneurship. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(9), 1553–1565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1171374>
- Schiebinger, L., Klinge, I. (eds.), Arlow, A., & Newman, S. (2010). *Gendered innovations. Mainstreaming sex and gender analysis into basic and applied research. Meta-analysis of gender and science research – Topic report*. <http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/what-is-gendered-innovations.html>

