

European Policy Brief

Policies Supporting Intersectionality in Higher Education

*Advancing intersectional Higher
Education across Europe*

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Index

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	4
1. INTRODUCTION	6
2. METHODOLOGY	7
3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	8
3.1. EUROPEAN POLICY LEVEL	8
3.2. NATIONAL POLICY LEVELS	9
3.3. INSTITUTIONAL POLICY LEVELS	11

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy brief presents the main policy messages emerging from the knowledge production and dissemination activities carried out in the Erasmus+ project “Intersectionality in Higher education InterHEd” (2023-1-ES01-KA220-HED-000160620) at European, national and regional levels. It highlights key recommendations to strengthen intersectionality in higher education.

At the European level:

- The European Commission, in collaboration with the Bologna Follow-Up Group and Member States, should embed intersectionality as a core principle of higher education policy. In collaboration, it should integrate intersectionality into Erasmus+ and Gender Equality Plan requirements, provide dedicated financial support for the design and evaluation of inclusive teacher training and teaching practices in higher education, and recognise teaching excellence in higher education through EU-level awards to drive the consistent implementation of equitable and inclusive higher education across Europe.

At the national levels:

- Embed intersectionality in national and regional higher education policy instruments

National and regional governments should make intersectionality an explicit and measurable component of higher education policy, legislation, and institutional agreements by integrating it into equality, diversity, and inclusion frameworks, promoting systemic approaches to addressing structural inequalities, and ensuring consistent implementation across higher education institutions.

- Strengthen quality assurance, monitoring, and recognition of intersectionality

National quality assurance and evaluation frameworks should incorporate an intersectional perspective by assessing curricula, teaching, learning environments, and

student experiences through multiple, intersecting dimensions of inequality. Academic evaluation and promotion systems should also recognise and reward inclusive and intersectional teaching alongside research excellence.

- Invest in capacity building and funding to promote intersectionality in teaching and learning in higher education institutions

National and regional governments should provide sustained funding and infrastructure to support intersectional teaching and learning, facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange through national forums and networks involving diverse stakeholders, and invest in institutional capacity to design, implement, and evaluate inclusive educational practices.

At the institutional levels:

- Embed intersectionality in institutional strategy, governance, and quality assurance. Universities should make intersectionality a core principle of teaching and learning by integrating it into institutional strategies, governance structures, curriculum design, programme evaluation, and quality assurance processes. This requires clear responsibilities, coordinated implementation, dedicated human and financial resources, and institutional incentives to ensure that inclusion is embedded systematically rather than relying on individual commitment.
- Strengthen inclusive teaching through capacity building, supportive learning environments, and continuous improvement. Universities should equip staff through training, communities of practice, and practical support while systematically reviewing curricula, teaching methods, assessment, and physical and digital learning environments to remove barriers and hidden assumptions. Ongoing research, monitoring, and transparent support mechanisms should inform continuous improvement, ensuring equitable participation, accessibility, and a stronger sense of belonging for all students.

1. INTRODUCTION

InterHEd aims to advance towards more inclusive and diverse higher education institutions by promoting intersectional mainstreaming in higher education teaching. The project partners shared the understanding of intersectionality as an open and situated process, that allows to move beyond superficial or purely discursive approaches towards meaningful changes in teaching practice. The project focused on reflexive practice of teachers in fostering pedagogical transformation and on participatory processes with students in the design and review of teaching practices. Finally, the project acknowledges that innovation and change in pedagogical approaches and practices also strongly depends on institutional framework conditions.

The workshops and trainings of students show that inequalities are embedded in everyday university life rather than being isolated incidents. Across the higher education systems in Spain (Catalonia), Germany, and Poland, students identified recurring barriers related to participation, unequal access to resources and support, feelings of non-belonging, and the invisibility of diverse experiences and identities. These experiences were consistently described as intersectional. In Poland, economic precarity intersected with disability, rural or urban origin, neurodivergence, gender identity, class, and culture. In Spain, students highlighted intersections involving gender, social status, rurality, origin, cultural and religious diversity, language, care responsibilities, economic situation, mental health, and neurodivergence. In Germany, inequalities were linked to first-generation status, socioeconomic background, language, culture, international student experiences, health, time constraints, and financial insecurity.

Students also identified barriers within learning environments, including overstimulating classrooms for neurodivergent students, limited physical accessibility, inadequate support for students with sensory impairments, technological constraints, and a lack of inclusive spaces. International and minority students often reported feeling disconnected from the wider university community. At the same time, the workshops and trainings of teachers showed that curricula, teaching practices, and assessment frequently reproduce exclusion through implicit cultural, linguistic, and epistemic assumptions. Although educators expressed strong commitment to inclusion, they reported that rigid curricula, fixed learning outcomes, limited resources, and institutional requirements constrained their ability to respond to diverse student needs. Participants

of teacher training also noted that conventional assessment methods and the expansion of online and hybrid teaching can disproportionately disadvantage students experiencing intersecting forms of inequality.

The project as planned has produced a range of outputs that help enhance reflective and inclusive practice using intersectionality as an integrative element of curriculum design, pedagogy, learning environments and assessment: <https://mon.uvic.cat/interhed/activities-and-results/>. Besides the practice reports, the findings were also published in open access special issue co-edited by L. Leišytė, R. Deem and I. Načinovič Braje in *Social Inclusion*. The German project team's InterHEd poster won the second place in the university wide Global Gallery competition for the innovative and impactful international project at the TU Dortmund University in 2024.

2. METHODOLOGY

The project employed qualitative and participative methods of data collection, including workshops with students and teachers from various disciplines in the three case study universities, training of academic staff and students as well as closely working with early career researchers and students in a participative way. The disciplinary range includes: Biology, Audiovisual Communication, Journalism, Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Social Education, Business and Economics, Engineering, Sociology, Gender Studies, Translation and Interpreting. The focus of the study included learning environments, curriculum, pedagogy, as well as assessment as the core elements of teaching practice in higher education. The findings were validated through three national multiplier events with the stakeholders, internal capacity trainings, project final conference as well as webinars and meetings with relevant stakeholders in the national contexts that were held between March 2026 and September 2026, bringing together over 200 participants (including lecturers and professors from universities, students, administrative staff, university managers, such as deans and vice rectors, researchers and other stakeholders). In addition, the results were presented at European conferences and feedback was used to improve the project outputs (e.g. ECER 2026, EAIR 2026, Scuola Democratica 2026) as well as invited talks (New York University).

3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings of the project, a set of recommendations were developed at the European, national and institutional levels. National and institutional recommendations have been developed for each studied higher education context and participating university.

3.1. EUROPEAN POLICY LEVEL

- The European Commission (DG EAC), in cooperation with the Bologna Follow-Up Group, should develop assessment tools and accountability mechanisms to capture how multiple dimensions—such as ethnicity, class, gender, disability and sexuality—interact to shape access, participation, persistence and outcomes in higher education, ensuring a more consistent implementation of the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process across Member States.
- European funding programmes such as Erasmus+ should tackle inequalities and include intersectionality more explicitly as a quality criterion in projects that address higher education teaching and learning. This would help ensure that projects do not only refer to diversity in general terms, but also consider how structural barriers affect students and staff differently.
- Gender Equality Plans (GEP) should include intersectionality across higher education by expanding GEP requirements to explicitly include intersectionality in curriculum, assessment, and learning environments and the broader teaching ecosystem.
- Establish an Award for Intersectional Teaching in higher education and tie it to recognition such as rewards similar to EU Award for Gender Equality Champions managed by the European Research Executive Agency (REA).
- Provide financial resources to design, implement, monitor and evaluate teaching programmes that integrate intersectionality.

3.2. NATIONAL POLICY LEVELS

GERMANY

- State-level higher education policies and higher education agreements between Ministries and universities in Germany should integrate intersectionality into existing HE regulations regarding equality, diversity, and inclusive teaching in higher education.
- Quality assurance frameworks of Quality Assurance and Accreditation agencies in Germany should encourage study programs to reflect on how curricula, teaching methods, and assessment practices address diversity and intersecting inequalities.
- German federal higher education project funding programs should provide dedicated support for intersectional teaching and learning projects.
- Federal HE monitoring tools should make it easier to analyze student experiences through an intersectional perspective, rather than through single diversity categories.

POLAND

- National funding programmes coordinated by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (for universities) and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (which oversees art academics) should allocate targeted resources for intersectional teaching and learning initiatives, including investment in the academic infrastructure (e.g. dormitories, canteens) to address the needs of different students and staff groups.
- Intersectionality should be made an explicit and defined element of Polish national HE strategy and regulation, jointly developed by Ministry of Science and Higher Education and Ministry of Culture and National Heritage with measurable objectives and shared national dashboard collecting data on the needs of academic community. Existing equality instruments (such as gender equality

plans) may serve as one channel of interpretation, but the standard itself should not depend on project-based or EU-fundings-linked obligations.

- Regular conferences /working meetings / forums on intersectionality in teaching should be organised by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education in collaboration with Ministry of Culture and National Heritage including various actors, such as faculty, students, administration. These fora should be a space to present and discuss recent research and share good practices for integrating intersectionality across higher education sector institutions as well as provide practical operational guidance.
- National academic evaluation frameworks in Poland should formally credit inclusive and intersectional teaching, so that this work is recognised and rewarded alongside research rather than remaining subordinate to it.

SPAIN

- The Equality and Diversity Units should systematically integrate an intersectional perspective into their mandates, functions and practices, in order to effectively guarantee non-discrimination and equal treatment across multiple and overlapping dimensions of inequality.
- The Spanish Ministry of Universities should promote the adoption of comprehensive intersectional approaches in higher education institutions, moving beyond fragmented and compliance driven diversity policies towards systemic strategies that address structural inequalities and power relations.
- The Spanish Ministry of Universities should ensure that the implementation of intersectionality is systematically monitored within the evaluation and follow up mechanisms by integrating specific indicators that assess how structural and overlapping inequalities are addressed across higher education institutions.

3.3. INSTITUTIONAL POLICY LEVELS

TU Dortmund University

- Embed intersectionality in TU Dortmund University's teaching and learning strategy. Establish clear responsibilities, coordination structures, and dedicated resources to ensure that implementation is systematic, institution-wide, and not dependent on individual initiatives.
- Integrate intersectionality into teaching-related governance. Make intersectionality a guiding principle in decision-making, quality assurance, and governance structures that shape teaching and learning across the university.
- Embed intersectionality in curriculum design and programme evaluation. Ensure that programme reviews and curriculum development systematically consider how intersecting forms of inequality are addressed in learning outcomes, course content, teaching methods, and assessment practices.
- Apply an intersectional approach to learning environments. Design, manage, and continuously improve physical, digital, and social learning environments to promote equitable access, participation, belonging, and support for all students.

Jagiellonian University Krakow

- Embed intersectionality into institutional strategy and governance. Assign dedicated resources (financial, human and organisational), clear responsibilities and coordination mechanisms, so implementation is systemic, monitored and sustainable, not symbolic or ad hoc. Build on existing university structures (e.g. Department for Safety and Equal Treatment - Safe JU, Accessibility Centre, Centre for Academic Support) and strengthen cooperation between them, and expand their capacity to assess intersectionality within their existing remit.
- Strengthen staff capacity through tailored training and evidence-based research. Deliver institution-specific training on intersectionality for academic teachers,

leadership and management, and specialist staff, and regularly research the diverse needs and experiences of students, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff.

- Embed intersectionality across teaching, curriculum, and learning environments. Review curricula, teaching materials, assessment, and physical and digital spaces to remove barriers and hidden assumptions and ensure accessibility and inclusive design. Recognise this work in workload allocation and staff evaluation, and include inclusive teaching as a criterion in JU teaching awards.
- Communicate available accommodations and support clearly to students and staff in a way that meets communication and information accessibility standards. Present this information at first-year orientation meetings and include it in the first-year information package. Deliver the same information to all employees through onboarding training, periodic refresher sessions and HR communication channels.

University of Vic – Central University of Catalonia

- Integrate an intersectional perspective into UVic's training model by systematically embedding it in the UVic UCC continuous professional development plan offered by the Innovation and Training Unit (CIFE), in coordination with the Equality and Diversity Unit (UID), and including it in induction programmes for new teaching staff.
- Introduce institutional incentives for inequality sensitive teaching by incorporating intersectional criteria into teaching evaluation and quality assurance systems, under the responsibility of the Vice-Rectorate for Academic Planning.
- Promote communities of practice and pedagogical innovation by establishing a cross-faculty group for reflection and innovation on intersectional teaching, building on and strengthening the existing network of innovation referents.

- Strengthen institutional commitment to inclusion and diversity by allocating the necessary human, financial, and organisational resources to effectively implement the 4th UVic-UCC Equality Plan and ensure that UVic-UCC Diversity Plan advances a structurally inclusive university.



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