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# **XENIA: Higher Education Inclusiveness Index**

## ***Policy Recommendations***

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XENIA: HE Inclusiveness Index

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Abstract	<p>The <i>XENIA Policy Recommendations</i> consolidates all knowledge produced from the implementation of the XENIA tools, Matrix and Survey, in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Specifically, it benefits drawing from the experience of the partners of the three-year, Erasmus+ co-funded, European project <i>XENIA: HE Inclusiveness Index</i>, gained from the deployment of the XENIA Index and its validation process. Its purpose is to offer a list of clear Recommendations that will enhance any European, or any other Higher Education Institution, to upgrade their level of Inclusiveness on the grounds of sex, gender and sexual orientation. Thus, this set of Policy Recommendations stem from the results of the XENIA Index implementation and target to provide valuable evidence, insight and data for Policy makers to inform and influence the formulation, design and implementation of more effective policies, programs and initiatives to promote inclusion in the HE field. The <i>XENIA Policy Recommendations</i> combined with the corresponding Index, the suggested “Best practices” and the <i>Mainstreaming and Operational Manual</i> can become a valuable set of tools for HEIs to further develop and secure an educational environment that actively supports the participation for all on the basis of the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) principles.</p>
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## Executive Summary

The *XENIA: HE Inclusiveness Index* is a three-year, Erasmus+ co-funded, European project, whose main aim has been to develop a tool, namely the **XENIA Index**, in order to assist European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in evaluating the equality and inclusiveness strategies that they adopt to address diversity on the grounds of sex, gender and sexual orientation within their contexts.

The *XENIA Inclusiveness Index* consisting of three key elements, specifically: a. a Matrix with a series of objective indicators; b. a Survey for Students and Staff of HEIs to gauge their subjective perceptions, and c. the XENIA Index, that is a vector Index that allows to summarise the information collected, has been developed and tested from the HEI project partners.

During its pilot implementation, XENIA Index produced a wealth of knowledge and information on the real dynamics of social inclusion in HEIs across Europe, in the specific contents of sex, gender and sexual orientation. The *XENIA Policy Recommendations* consolidate all this knowledge produced within this context of actions.

This wealth of knowledge relates to the way HEIs perceive the issues and take stock of the phenomena of inclusion (or exclusion); are prepared to tackle the dynamics of sex, gender and sexual orientation inclusion (or lack thereof), and so on. Furthermore, from the results of the implementation of the XENIA Survey, the subjective aspect of the perception of relevant stakeholders (Staff and Students) on the inclusiveness of HEIs has been identified.

All these project by “products” were collected and shaped as the *XENIA Policy Recommendations* in order to inform the evidence-based policy making at all Institutional, national and european levels, targeting to ultimately enhance with a holistic approach the dynamics of inclusion in HEIs for women and LGBT+ target groups.

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## Introduction

### I. The XENIA project

The “XENIA: HE Inclusiveness Index” is a three-year, Erasmus+ co-funded, European project, whose main aim has been to develop a tool, namely the **XENIA Index**, in order to assist European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in evaluating the equality and inclusiveness strategies that they adopt to address diversity on the grounds of sex, gender and sexual orientation within their contexts.

### II. The XENIA Inclusiveness Index

The *XENIA Inclusiveness Index* has been defined based on the results that emerged from a preliminary research phase. This phase has been conducted by the partners during the project’s Work Package 1 (WP1) activities, that led to the identification of the specific **Thematic Areas** and **Indicators** to effectively measure the inclusiveness of Higher Education (HE) settings.

The **XENIA Index** consists of **three key elements**:

- 1. Matrix**, consisting of a **series of objective indicators** that assess the inclusiveness of a HEI;
- 2. Survey for Students and Staff of HEIs** to gauge the **subjective perceptions** of inclusiveness in the HEI, and
- 3. XENIA Index**, that is a **vector index** that allows to: summarise the information collected, record and note changes in specific values of the assessment process.





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### III. Policy Recommendations

The *Policy Recommendations* have been developed based on the XENIA Index pilot results and findings from five European HEIs, and its target is to inform the evidence-based policy making at all Institutional, national, and European, levels, ultimately targeting to ultimately enhance with a holistic approach the dynamics of inclusion in HEIs for women and LGBT+ target groups.

This Deliverable will be disseminated to the widest possible audience of stakeholders, potential users and interested parties, through all the dissemination and visibility means at disposal of the project consortium. The target is to reach organizations and persons work on Policy making/ are Policy makers or in position to influence policy making both within HEIs, but also in official positions at national and/ or European level.

The XENIA upscaling strategy will hinge on the mobilisation of the formal and informal networks of the consortium, together with the mobilisation of the associated partners. Within this context, partners intend to introduce XENIA to Policy makers as a tool to advance Policy and finally promote gender and LGBT+ EDI in HE settings.





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## **XENIA Policy Recommendations**

### **Results and lessons learnt from the pilot**

**Based on the key findings from the XENIA project implementation, a number of trends and dynamics on gender and LGBT+ inclusion in the HEI ecosystem have been observed resulting to the XENIA take-away for policy formulation that include bottlenecks for Inclusive HEIs.**

Specifically, the combination of the two Xenia tools, Matrix and Survey, and its use on five different, european HEIs, highlighted notable findings on the:

- 1. HEI readiness.** There seems to be a common understanding in all Institutional settings participating, that sex, gender and sexual orientation inclusiveness is a policy priority that has to be further advanced and steadily supported at all levels, including at HEIs' Policies and Programmes.
- 2. HEI readiness.** There are significant achievements indicated by the HEIs which participated in the XENIA Index, to advance considered and sustained interventions aiming at challenging the institutional discriminations on the grounds of sex, gender and sexual orientation. However, the insights offered by the Xenia Matrix, also highlight that there is still a way to go to make visible the gains achieved by communicating these clearly to the diverse constituency of Students and Staff (Faculty, Administrators, etc).







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**3. Disconnection between inclusiveness Policies/ Programmes and perception.**

Thus, there has been identified a disconnection between the stated as existing HE Inclusiveness Policies/ Programmes and the perception of the stakeholders regarding them. This statement has been evidenced by a number of discordant findings between the scoring of the Matrix (objective indicators) and how these are perceived by the HE community (Xenia Survey). It is being concluded that there is a need for greater synergies between the two to advance the EDI of the HE ecosystem. The need to ensure a closer alignment between the objective measures put in place by the HEI and how these are perceived in real time by the community has to be addressed.

**4. Need to continue to listen to LGBTQI+ and gender specific voices across the community** so that the the EDI vision at HE settings continues to be relevant, meaningful and realisable.

**5. Key drivers for gender and LGBT+ inclusiveness.**

There is a need to further support the existing 'knowledge-bridge' established through the suite of EDI specific Committees, individuals and services in HEIs. While these mechanisms pave the way for meaningful dialogue between the HEI community and HEI leadership to ensure the emerging needs of the LGBTQI+ community do continue to be voiced and heard, based on the research findings, these could be operating at a more effective level to increase institutional knowledge and awareness on these issues.





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6. **Sustained commitment of the participating HEIs towards advancing an ambitious, data-driven and policy-led diverse, inclusive and equity-oriented University infrastructure.** The Matrix results highlight the participating HEIs' institutional commitment to the idea of a community approach to sex, gender and LGBTQI+ equity. New professional development and training programmes for Staff in the area of EDI that have been identified in three out of five participating Institutions also reflect some HEIs commitment to challenging all forms of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct and violence in the HE context. As a result, it is clear that initiatives and infrastructure to support LGBTQI+ and gender equity depends highly on the specific HE Institution. Thus, although there are cases for an example of HEIs with specific training activities or/ and gender neutral facilities, these need to further be developed and applied in all HE settings.
  
7. Lastly, although there has been evidence of notable advances related to LGBTQI+ inclusion and Trans\* specific interventions there seems that there is an unequal development on these depending heavily on each HEI's policy and institutional priorities.





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## ***XENIA Set of Policy Recommendations***

### **A. Higher Education Institutions**

Based on the aforementioned points conducted from the XENIA pilot results, a *Set of Policy Recommendations* addressed to Higher Education Institutions has been developed.

- I. More effective communication, dissemination and awareness raising actions are required, in order to ensure that the range of any initiatives and interventions that have been already developed by the HEIs targeting to advance a meaningful EDI agenda and challenge discriminations based on gender and sexuality in their context are made visible and accesible across all the HEI community of Students, Faculty and Staff.
- II. This could be enhanced by an extended promotion, which will lead to an increased visibility of the range of possibly existing Policy and Programme innovations related to gender and LGBTQI+ issues, throught harnessing the potential of the official HE institutional websites, social media and signage opportunities.
- III. A possible way further includes the development of an 'EDI Literacy' campaign that can enhance and increase the familiarity of the whole educational community on the understanding of EDI language, policies and initiatives across the diverse institutional community.
- IV. HEIs need to keep on developing data informed, policy-led interventions, to build LGBTQI+ inclusion and challenge sex and gender-related barriers. This can be achieved or supported through the planning and implementation of EDI specific research projects or/ and the gathering of institutional, GDPR compliant, data analytics, and can conclude to a number of initiatives such as specialised training opportunities for all the HE community.

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- V. Development of dedicated programmes of support. For an example programmes for LGBTQI+ Erasmus and International students to prepare for their exchange experience and increase their levels of participation and engagement in such opportunities.
  
- VI. In case accommodation is provided in the context of the HEI, the engagement with institutional stakeholders to review existing on-campus accommodation options and potential accommodation barriers for LGBTQI+ students.





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## B. Policy Makers

Besides the policies developed and implemented at the level of HEIs there are certain recommendations that can be set forward, aiming to influence decision taken by Policy makers at a national, European and transnational (if possible) context.

These refer both to horizontal actions that aim to advance inclusion policies in all facets of the public space, and also to further introducing relevant policies in the context of educational framework, part of which HEIs are.

I. Inclusion policies need to be supported and connected to specific funds that will be allocated in order to develop and implement such. An evaluation mechanism is needed in order to measure not the only the existence of these but also the final gains of the HEI community. XENIA Index can serve as a good practice example since it combines the objective but also the subjective data/ information.

II. A general framework of inclusion policies that would look into sex, gender and sexual orientation inequalities and rights would benefit HEIs as well. These policies need to be accompanied by the design of specific Action Plans. Two examples on this are: to push forward the obligation of all public administration to use inclusive language forms and to respect the right of the person to change the gender option (if any) on these forms, etc.

III. National and European policies can further support the HEIs' EDI principles by:  
a. setting an EDI Framework as a prerequisite for participation in all national and international (co-)funded Programmes; b. supporting relevant Networks already in place, and c. enhancing further the knowledge exchange through the introduction of new specialized Committees, Networks, and other relevant opportunities and initiatives.

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## Concluding points

Building an inclusive ecosystem is a responsibility of all systematic stakeholders. HEI Institutions are the places that knowledge development and expansion, policies, programmes and practices on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion principles need to not only be respected, turning them into safe places, but promoted, expanded and further mainstreamed.

Policy makers both within and outside HEIs should realize that creating a stable inclusiveness framework can give the opportunity for education to all without any accessibility obstacles. This would confirm and further expand the role of HEIs as safe spaces for the continuous development and advancement of knowledge and creativity, and as institutions that respect and support the rights of all for quality education.

Policies, actions, programmes and any other kind of initiatives can be developed and implemented, but what seems as the main necessity is a systematic and holistic approach at all levels, that will take into consideration all the already accumulated relevant knowledge, such as the specific document and all the XENIA Higher Education Institutions' Index results, inputs and Deliverables, in order to move forward to turning HEIs to what they have to and deserve to be: safe places for all, and examples on the successful implementation of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion principles in their context.





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XENIA project approved proposal (internal document).

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