

Working Papers on University Reform

Working Paper 41:

Gender Inequity and Precarity in European Neoliberal Academia

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European Universities – Critical Futures

Danish School of Education, Aarhus University

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The current paper results from the project, 'European Universities – Critical Futures', funded by the Danish Research Council. The project addressed the question: What are the future roles of universities in creating social and regional integration in Europe working groups formed around eight issues with members from across Europe. Each fostered a learning community between early-stage and more senior researchers, with the aim of generating new research agendas and highlighting their policy implications. This paper arises from the working group on Gender and Precarity in Academia. Other groups covered Refugees' Access to Higher Education, Alternative Conditions for Knowledge Creation, Trust Beyond Metrics, Higher Education Access for Underrepresented Groups, Changing Dynamics Between Administrators and Academics in European Universities, and Alternative Internationalisms. Eight country teams also researched the effects of the Covid19 pandemic on higher education futures. <https://projects.au.dk/european-universities-critical-futures/>, in a shifting global context?

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1. Summary and recommendations

1.1 Background

This working group was part of the European Universities – Critical Futures project. It met regularly between 2020 and 2023 to discuss ways in which academic precarity (in relation to short-term contracts) is exacerbating and creating barriers to gender and interrelated inequalities. The core group membership was made up of experts in the field from 16 European countries, expanding to a network of over 50 scholars at all stages of their careers. We explored the issue of gender and precarity by sharing our research through symposia, workshops, a seminar series, a knowledge exchange event, policy briefing, a working paper, a literature review and a Special Issue for the journal *Learning and Teaching: International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*. These combined outputs have supported an emergent research agenda which connects academic precarity with considerations of equality and has sought to inform policy organisations and higher education practitioners. A knowledge exchange event in June 2023 identified the key impacts on women in particular, including barriers to career development, everyday experiences of working in universities, impacts on health and wellbeing, and gendered power imbalances. Group members argued that women are trapped in lower-level roles, denied developmental opportunities that bar them from progressing their careers within academia and are prevented from planning for their futures. In short, it was argued that current practices are inequitable, harmful and unsustainable.

The group also contributed to events as part of the wider project. The final conference session was entitled ‘Gender inequity and precarity in European academia: Current issues and future directions’. Having established ways in which precarity is detrimental to gender equality, the group sought to explore the barriers to change which arose in our dialogues with the policy community. It was clear from these discussions that there is a growing recognition of the adverse impacts of precarity and the implications for equalities and a desire for change.

Organisations engaged with included the following: European Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation; European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities; League of European Research Universities (LERU); The Guild of Research Intensive Universities; Spanish National

Research Council (CSIC); ReMO COST Action; FNRS; European Universities Association; European Research Association and Eurodoc.

1.2 Findings

This paper brings together some key findings and insights gained from our collaboration. It outlines the current policy context, recent academic literature and insights from specific contexts. This recognises that there are key differences across contexts; however, there is potentially much that can be done to address precarity and alleviate some of the detrimental impacts on gender equality at national and European policy levels as well as institutional levels. We therefore summarise key policy recommendations in the next section. Our collective work has highlighted significant impacts on individual women and their careers with wider implications for gender and interrelated equalities.

Multiple effects of the use of temporary contracts on women have been identified. These include material forms of precarity such as financial hardship, housing insecurity, impacts on health and wellbeing, enforced mobility and difficulties in family planning. There are also affective dimensions (as identified by Ivencheva et al., 2019) whereby work-life balance, family and relationships and other intimate connections may be forced to the periphery of women's lives due to intense pressures, demands and workloads associated with precarious academic labour. Women on temporary contracts are often rendered more vulnerable to power disparities and abuses, including harassment and gender-based violence. They frequently experience poor working conditions, sometimes lacking the time, resources, training and support to do their jobs effectively and, in addition, may not be able to access adequate support, line management and mentorship. They also often fall between the cracks in policy and may be unable to benefit from worker protections such as sick leave or parental and care leave. Moreover, it can be impossible to develop a coherent career narrative and develop the multiple competencies and outputs required to embark on an academic career. A lack of autonomy to develop their own research agendas or in some cases to engage in research at all also undermines academic freedom. We therefore contend that gender equality in academia cannot be addressed without attention being paid to the needs of those on precarious contracts.

Beyond the impacts on individual women and their careers, there are also implications for academic departments, institutions, the higher education sector, the quality of research and teaching, and the future of research. Pre-existing hierarchies and power disparities are exacerbated and solidified through divisions between permanent and temporary staff and academic collegiality, collaboration and continuity are likely to be affected. The poor working conditions experienced by many on short-term contracts will have implications for the quality of research and teaching; lack of access to

training and resources will affect capacity for future workforces and women and those from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups will be forced out, undermining efforts towards equity, diversity and inclusion.

1.3 Summary of Recommendations for European policy

- Precarity and its gendered effects in academia is a European-wide problem.
- However, the European Union does not currently include guidelines about precarity in the two widely used toolkits for Gender Equality Plans: *Guidance on Gender Equality Plans* (European Commission, 2021) and *Gender Equality in Academia and Research: GEAR Tool (EIGE 2016, 2022)*, so these need to incorporate guidance on countering precarity more explicitly in the future.
- The European Commission now requires applications for funding under Horizon Europe to include a Gender Equality Plan. However, the *Guidance on Gender Equality Plans* (European Commission, 2021) has three important weaknesses:
 - It does not mention the word ‘precarity’, which research indicates is a major issue affecting gender equity
 - It does not give guidance on how research projects should take steps to avoid precarious employment conditions (Tardos & Paksi, 2022; 2024)
 - ‘Fixed-term contracts’ are mentioned only once in relation to work-life balance and parental leave policies, indicating that fixed term contracts should be extended. The gendered nature of precarious contracts is mentioned only in relation to the impacts of COVID-19 indicating the differential impacts on staff with fixed-contract types, including that women might be overrepresented in more precarious roles
- The *Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) Tool* is the other instrument widely used by research institutions for Gender Equality Plans. It also needs to refer to the gender inequalities associated with short-term contracts and give guidance (*EIGE 2016, 2022*).
- Policies on parental and care leave should be improved, so as to include people on short-term contracts and not further disadvantage women

- There needs to be consistent monitoring and evaluation of progress toward the reduction of precarity and gender inequalities in academic research careers;
- Further research – both quantitative and qualitative - is needed on academic precarity, especially in relation to intersections of gender, race and ethnicity, class, disability, sexuality, age and migrant status. Ideally, given the importance of research for the future, funding bodies would prioritise this.

Not acknowledging precarity and its damaging effects on gendered inequalities and inequities in EU guidelines and other relevant official documents is counterproductive and can be seen as discrepant with other EU-led initiatives, such as the recently published European Charter for Researchers, which expands and revises the principles in the 2005 Charter & Code (EC, 2023), or the movement toward Reforming Research Assessment (see Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment [CoARA], 2022).

Finally, UNESCO's Recommendations (1997) is a very influential instrument regarding conditions for academic and research workers. We recommend that to ensure compliance, all universities should be required to publish data on the numbers of temporary workers doing teaching and research and provide a breakdown by gender, race, ethnicity, age and disability. Ideally universities would provide data on their workers on temporary contracts including from the length of time from the start of the first contract. This could also be seen as a quality measure as working conditions are likely to affect the quality of teaching and research. In line with the UNESCO recommendations, the introduction of compulsory Sustainability Reporting in higher education should include data on fixed-term contracts in relation to gender, race and ethnicity and other gender equality indicators (such as equal pay).

2. Introduction

This paper is an output of the project ‘European Universities - Critical Futures’ (2020 - 2023) funded by the Danish Research Council and led by Professor Susan Wright. This project was comprised of a series of working groups involving academics from across Europe. The authors of this paper belonged to a group which focussed on Gender inequality and precarity in academia. Our key concern here is ways in which academic precarity (specifically the misuse and overuse of temporary contracts for core university work) is undermining equality and equity goals. We situate this in the contemporary neoliberal context, which has been shaped by marketisation, managerialism and the imposition of audit cultures across the globe (Shore & Wright, 2024; Slaughter & Leslie, 2004). In terms of precarity we are primarily concerned with the contract status of academic workers in the light of neoliberal management techniques which render large parts of the academic workforces as disposable (Deem, 1998; Sennett, 1998). However, we also recognise the need to take wider, historical and social forms of precariousness into account, especially along gendered, racialised, classed and ableised lines. We understand precarity as having material, social and epistemic dimensions, with those in precarious positions often unable to live well, feel like valued members of their communities or taken seriously as knowing beings. Whilst we foreground early career academics, it is recognised that precarity can affect academics at all stages of their career course (Leathwood & Read, 2018; Le Feuvre et al., 2019).

Recent decades have seen an intensification of what has sometimes been described as the ‘casualisation’ of academia with increasing amounts of academic work being undertaken by staff on temporary contracts, whether hourly paid or fixed-term and this can affect staff at all career levels and some can remain in these positions in the long term (Gupta et al., 2016; Le Feuvre et al., 2019; O’Keefe and Courtois, 2019). Linear or predictable career paths are beginning to disappear in many contexts and there is widespread fragmentation of academic work (Le Feuvre et al., 2019; Vatansever, 2020). In some contexts, the majority of academics are on short-term contracts and this, we argue, has far-reaching effects on individuals, departments, institutions, academic disciplines and cultures, the wider higher education sector, knowledge creation and societies more broadly. This working group explored the impacts of precarity on efforts towards gender and interrelated equalities, sharing and comparing research and insights from contrasting contexts through regular meetings,

workshops, seminars, conference presentations and roundtables. Our collaboration has built on a wealth of research in this field which has emerged in recent years in response to current concerns about academic working conditions and equalities. Yet there is still much work to be done, especially in terms of understanding the lived everyday experiences of those experiencing precarity and the implications for lives and careers; and understanding how academic precarity interacts with broader forms of precariousness, and in particular its intersections with gender, race and ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, age and migrant status. We therefore aim to bring an intersectional lens to bear on our work, recognising how interrelated power disparities can combine to create and compound multiple forms and experiences of discrimination and disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1991).

For the purposes of this paper, the term precarity is understood as multidimensional, encompassing material, affective, social and epistemic domains (Ivancheva et al., 2019, also discussed in Morris, 2024; Morris and Rowell, 2024). It refers primarily to the structural organisation of labour and society which creates economic insecurity, vulnerability and an inability to plan for the future (Leathwood and Read, 2018; Sennett, 1998; Standing, 2011). These conditions are an effect of making individuals, including precarious scholars, entirely responsible for their own resources and fate without recognising the structural factors at play under conditions of neoliberalism (see also Morris, 2024). At organisational and socio-economic levels, insecure conditions are created due to the adoption of a dominant neoliberal business model which requires a disposable workforce (Sennett, 1998). Precariousness in its wider sense encompasses lived experiences in relation to states of insecurity, vulnerability and uncertainty (Butler, 2004, 2009, 2015). Here, we focus on precarity caused by (mis)use of temporary contracts within academia under conditions of neoliberalism but we also recognise wider forms of precariousness that are brought about by global political, economic and social upheavals and are interlinked with histories and lived realities of oppression, discrimination, under-resourcing and marginalisation.

As Le Feuvre et al. (2019) have noted, there will be contextual differences in terms of the labour economy, structure of academic careers, the opportunities available (within and outside academia), along with institutional requirements and research funding structures (see also O'Connor et al., 2023). Precarity will be experienced in different ways by those occupying different national, social and institutional locations. Some contexts (notably in the United Kingdom) are seeing a separation of teaching and research with a rise in teaching-only

contracts often taken up by those in the post-doc career phase, whereas previously academic careers would typically be integrated (ibid.). Such contracts involve the delivery of core teaching and can inhibit career development by preventing academics from accessing the training, support and resources necessary for full engagement in research. In other contexts, obtaining a full-time permanent post in academia is almost impossible – especially in those contexts (such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Belgium) where permanence is only accorded to those at the top of the academic hierarchy, referred to as the ‘Humboldt’ tradition (ibid.).

Adverse effects of job insecurity have long been recognised and these include health and wellbeing, safety, housing insecurity, an inability to develop a sense of belonging or to plan for the future. It has been argued that precariousness is a widespread feature of modern life under capitalism (Berlant, 2011; Sennett, 1998). Whilst academics may be thought of as relatively privileged this does not mean that they are necessarily protected from these adverse effects, especially when faced with multiple challenges, disadvantages and forms of discrimination, and wider forms of precariousness. They may be unable to sustain their livelihoods or meet their basic needs., They are often unsure if contracts will be offered or renewed or when their next pay cheque is coming. This is coupled with a lack of security in terms of sick pay, holiday pay or pensions which other workers take for granted. In addition to this they and their families are frequently forced to change location in the pursuit of academic work and may be faced with uncertainties relating to citizenship status. This renders academic careers unsustainable for all but those who are the most privileged and have access to financial resources from partners and families to supplement their income (see also Morris, 2024).

There are gendered implications of this, which are potentially damaging to the sector beyond those individuals whose lives are impacted. If only those who are most privileged are able to develop careers in academia, this means that the most historically marginalised voices, perspectives and approaches are absent or struggling to be heard. In material terms, precarity means women in particular are more likely to be forced into positions of dependency. There are likely to be health and wellbeing implications of prolonged stress. Years of precarity and the structure of some contracts may contribute to severe career setbacks with further implications for pay and pensions. Many individuals who might have much to offer research

and teaching will simply be forced out before their careers have begun. Day-to-day working conditions and relationships with colleagues and students may be subject to intensified power imbalances, with precarity undermining collegiality and creating new hierarchies or exacerbating previously existing inequalities. In addition, academic freedom may be constrained due to a lack of autonomy, status and lack of access to resources for pursuing their own research agendas (Vatansever and Kölemen, 2023).

In summary, precarity undermines equalities and destroys the fabric of academic work and life in the long-term.

Our main focus and contention in this paper is that precarity is damaging to gender and interrelated forms of equity (which recognises the specific needs of different groups and individuals). Conversations around gender inequity in academia must include attention to the harmful effects of casualisation. In this paper, we aim to:

1. Show the effects of (mis)use of short-term / insecure contracts on gender equity.
2. Demonstrate the implications of gendered precarity for research / knowledge creation.
3. Make recommendations for change linked to key policies and frameworks.

It is recognised that beyond women's representation in terms of numbers, addressing precarity is a step towards their full inclusion and conditions for enabling them to flourish and fulfil their potentials. What follows in this paper is a summary of our project and the key recommendations generated by research group members followed by overviews of the policy context and academic literature in the field. We then share case studies from contrasting contexts; the UK, Hungary and Switzerland.

3. Background and Policy context

Filomena Parada¹

Gender equality and equity are fundamental human rights and key drivers of all dimensions of Sustainable Development (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2018). Because these rights are far from having been fully achieved, the UN included Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls as an explicit goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). In the European Union (EU), gender equality, equal opportunities for all and inclusiveness are foundational values, with the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination being consecrated in EU Treaties and embedded in several of the strategies and the legislation of the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament produced over the years (EC, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation [EC-DGRTD], 2021c). The EU's continued commitment to the advancement of gender equality resulted in a wide spectrum of policies and policy instruments that include binding directives applying widely to all sectors of society, namely in research and innovation and the labour market. In many cases, these have been incorporated into national, sectorial, and organizational laws and regulations (EC-DGRTD, 2018a). Other recent examples of broad legislative initiatives at the EU level that also have implications for research include:

1. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (EC, 2020b), which is the EU's roadmap for progressing toward gender equality and where the EC establishes its commitment to and strategy for gender equality across EU policies.

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2. The Work-Life Balance Directive (European Parliament and the Council 2019), which aims to improve families' access to flexible work arrangements and family leave.

3. The U Pay Transparency Directive that will come into force in 2024, and whose rules aim to ensure that the principle of equal pay for equal work finally becomes a reality in the EU (EC, Directorate General for Justice and Consumers [DG JUST], 2023).

However, improvements have been slow and, in areas like women's participation and advancement in the Research and Innovation labour market, progress has stayed relatively unchanged for the past decade, with important gender gaps persisting in the EU despite the numerous sectoral policy initiatives that have been implemented over the past 20 years (EC-DGRTD, 2022). Added to these persistent gender inequalities, there are systemic barriers stemming from working conditions and culture in Research and Innovation, which continue to be deeply infused with gender biases and discriminatory practices, either pushing women away from academia at different stages of the career pipeline – a phenomenon known as the *leaky pipeline* – or hindering their access to the highest positions at which research is conducted – a phenomenon known as the *glass ceiling* effect (EC-DGRTD, 2021c). As the League of European Research Universities (LERU) acknowledged in their report on *Implicit Bias in Academia*, academia remains a male-dominated environment, with gender stereotyping and (unconscious) gender biases negatively influencing the assessment of women's academic excellence (Gvozdanović & Maes, 2018). From the start of their careers, male and female researchers are often evaluated in a non-gender-neutral way that is not based solely on the recognition of merit, and that has been constraining women's access to power and resources, including salaries, research funding, and senior and leading positions at universities (Gvozdanović & Maes, 2018). In addition, there is a culture that systematically (often also implicitly) devalues the research associated with women and their research traditions, which can differ from those of men, and that further lessens women's retention and progress in academia (Kim et al., 2022). At the institutional level, these structural barriers and cultural problems create a 'chilly climate' for women (Britton, 2017).

This *chilly climate* makes women more vulnerable to bullying and harassment, unfriendly departmental and classroom environments – including their exclusion from mentoring and networking, biases in recruitment and promotion processes, being overburdened with the teaching and advising of undergraduate students, performing administrative roles with little decision-making power, as well as having their

achievements less acknowledged, for example, regarding co-authorships, citations, awards, or funding (Britton, 2017). To these patterns of inequitable (everyday) behaviour additional non-gender-sensitive policies make it harder for women, who usually have the greatest responsibilities as home and caretakers, to balance work and family life. In addition to this, the precarity of research careers is particularly challenging for women (OECD, 2021a). Inequalities and precarity are likely to increase if, besides gender, there are other intersecting personal characteristics or identities such as country of origin, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability or socioeconomic status (Buckingham et al., 2020). The intersections between these identities and power structures in academia are largely ignored by the EU's Research and Innovation policy. That policy has been mainly concerned with the development of measures and initiatives that target women in general, and it does not adequately consider the heterogeneities resulting from these intersecting identities (Täuber, 2020). Furthermore, key policy information instruments, such as the *She Figures*, largely rely on quantitative data and approaches that do not easily capture women's intersecting identities and heterogeneities, although they can be an important signalling device for inequalities in need of further investigation by using other, better suited (qualitative) approaches (Täuber, 2020).

3.1 Key European policies for promoting gender equality in Research and Innovation

Over time, as the EU has adopted various strategies and policy instruments, its commitment to the eradication of inequalities and the promotion of gender equality and equity has assumed different forms (Jacquot, 2017). First, the emphasis was on equality of rights and ensuring equality through the law. Then, the focus shifted to the acknowledgement of a discriminatory culture and practices limiting women's equality of opportunities, with positive action or positive discrimination measures becoming the preferred means for acting. Finally, from the 1990s onwards, gender mainstreaming - deriving from the principle of equal impact, which conceives equality between women and men as resulting from the complementarity between difference and equal rights - was adopted as the main policy strategy for addressing gender inequalities (Jacquot, 2015). Gender mainstreaming has been the EC main equality policy strategy for

Research and Innovation since the mid-1990s. However, gender inequalities in higher education and research only started to be explicitly addressed as a policy priority from the late-1990s onward, when the promotion of equal opportunities in research was set as a priority in the Fifth Framework Programme (1998-2002) for research and technological development (Leišytė, 2019).

Through the mainstreaming of the principle of equality between men and women, the EU set gender equality as a horizontal priority requiring EU institutions and Member States to adopt a gender perspective and to consider gender equality as a transversal goal of their activities (Vilagómez et al., 2018). Gender mainstreaming broadens the scope and relevance of gender equality by introducing a gendered perspective to all phases of the policy or intervention cycle from the definition and conception of policies to their implementation; this requires the involvement of all actors engaged with the different levels of the policy-making process (Jacquot, 2015). This is simultaneously the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of gender mainstreaming (Stratigaki, 2005). Gender mainstreaming limits the compartmentalization of gender equality policies into target groups, as well as into policy devices and procedures. It also limits compartmentalization in the distribution of human and financial resources, which can also be problematic (Stratigaki, 2005). This is because it relies on a strategy which in turn relies on action; however, it does not require the allocation of specific means, structures and staff to promote gender equality and equity (Jacquot, 2015). As a result, gender mainstreaming is sometimes used as an excuse for restricting the allocation of essential resources (human or financial) and for eliminating other gender-specific policies (e.g. legislation, mechanisms, actions to address specific interests of women, research and training), which are a prerequisite for the successful implementation of this policy strategy (Stratigaki, 2005).

Since 2012, gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research have been a priority in the efforts to establish the European Research Area (ERA) (European Commission, 2012). ERA was first launched by the EC in 2000, in the context of the Lisbon Strategy, and later revitalised in 2018, with the aim of better responding to the many societal, environmental and economic challenges the EU faces, including the changing needs of Research and Innovation (EC-DGRTD, 2022). With ERA, the EC aims to overcome the fragmentation of the EU's

national Research and Innovation systems and reduce disparities in their regulatory and administrative frameworks by creating a single borderless market for research, innovation and technology. Through ERA, European countries have been encouraged to converge in and improve their Research and Innovation policies and programmes, namely in what concerns the achievement of gender mainstreaming and of gender equality goals (EC-DGRTD, 2020). The EU's commitment to ERA's vision and approach was reinforced with the 2020 ERA Communication, which also strengthened existing priorities and initiatives promoting gender equality (EC, 2020a). Consistent with a gender mainstreaming strategy, these priorities and initiatives entail a structural approach to change across all levels of the Research and Innovation system involving the following three main areas for action:

1. Promoting gender equality in careers by removing barriers – legal and other – to the recruitment, retention and career progression of women researchers.
2. Ensuring gender balance in decision-making.
3. Strengthening the gender dimension in Research and Innovation content and programmes (EC-DGRTD, 2022).

Simultaneously, when setting the rules for participation and dissemination of its main funding instruments – first, the Horizon 2020 and, then the Horizon Europe Framework Programme – the EC established gender equality and gender mainstreaming as cross-cutting issues in the EU's Research and Innovation policy (European Parliament and the Council, 2021).

Specifically with the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, all relevant actors – research performing organisations, funders, national governments, and the EC – are encouraged to jointly commit to the promotion of institutional change supporting the sustainable achievement of gender equality by:

1. integrating the gender dimension as a default requirement across the whole programme
2. instituting Gender Equality Plans as an eligibility criteria for Horizon Europe funding of public bodies, research organisations, and higher education establishments

3. setting funding for actions supporting the development and application of inclusive and sustainable Gender Equality Plans and the implementation of the ERA policy agenda
4. introducing measures and activities for promoting gender equality under the European Innovation Council (EIC),
5. including gender balance among the research teams as a ranking criterion for proposals with the same score (EC-DGRTD, 2021a).

As is highlighted in the Declaration issued by the Slovenian Presidency of the European Council on *Gender Equality in Research and Innovation* – known as the Ljubljana Declaration - Gender Equality Plans in particular have the potential to become one of the most transformative policy instruments in the creation of gender-equal working environments in Research and Innovation. They can help address issues like gender-based violence and harassment, for which there is a manifest lack of specific policies, legislation or regulation, monitoring protocols and reporting procedures, institutional experts and other authority representatives, as well as up-to-date prevalence data (Slovenian Presidency of the European Council, 2021).

However, to be effective, Gender Equality Plans require institutions to allocate important human and financial resources to their design, implementation and monitoring (Gender Equality Academy, 2021). Gender Equality Plans also require institutions to have capacity regarding knowledge (e.g., about the institution, gender or organisational change) and the skills needed to facilitate and monitor change (Gender Equality Academy, 2021). Gender Equality Plans mainstream gender through the implementation of broad sets of action to be executed along well-defined timelines, and monitored through specific indicators, such as the number of women in decision-making positions or the integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content (EC-DGRTD, 2021a). Although gender monitoring initiatives already exist in most ERA countries, neither the resources nor the capacity for implementing and monitoring Gender Equality Plans are readily available in institutions, which may undermine the ability of Gender Equality Plans to support sustainable change (Gender Equality Academy, 2021). Furthermore, as the data from gender monitoring initiatives indicate (e.g. She Figures), the implementation of gender-equality and equity policies has been uneven in the EU, with existing resources and capacity being irregularly

distributed across countries, disciplines and institutions, such as universities, research centres, funders and public bodies (Striebing et al., 2020). Countries, disciplines and institutions also tend to vary (sometimes greatly) in their social structures and level of gender equality (Striebing et al., 2020). Consequently, important gaps persist between the policies and strategies adopted and their implementation at the institutional level (EC-DGRTD, 2018b, 2021b). Such discrepancy is likely to be explained by the greater emphasis that has been placed on the design of the policies - at the EU, national or institutional levels – rather than on their monitoring and evaluation (Slovenian Presidency of the European Council, 2021).

3.2 Gender equity in the Research and Innovation sector: The long road ahead

For the past two decades, access to all levels of tertiary education has been rising consistently and more rapidly for young women than for young men. Women are outnumbering men in all levels of tertiary education except for the doctorate where women represented 49% of the new entrants (OECD, 2022). According to the *She Figures*, in 2018 in Europe, the ratio of women entering a doctorate was equal or lower than the ratio of men in the same circumstances across all fields of research (EC-DGRTD, 2021c). Gender parity has also almost been reached for new doctoral degree holders. In the EU, 48.1% of the new doctoral degree holders were female in 2018 and 47.5% in 2010 (EC-DGRTD, 2021c). However, women are underrepresented in STEM fields and overrepresented in health and welfare and education (OECD, 2022). For example, across the EU in 2018, women represented more than 60% of the doctoral graduates in education, while in the fields of ICT and engineering, manufacturing and construction they were less than a third of all graduates – 22.4% and 29.4%, respectively (EC-DGRTD, 2021c).

Despite these improvements, important gender gaps continue to exist for the field of research and employment, which indicates that strong gender biases have persisted relatively unchanged (Encinas-Martin & Cherian, 2023). At the same time, women continue to be underrepresented in the Research and Innovation workforce, and not even their increased participation in the Research and Innovation labour market or the overall widening gap in their favour for educational attainment at the tertiary level has changed this situation (OECD,

2020). On average in OECD countries, in 2016, women represented 40% of the labour force in the governmental, higher education, and private non-profit sectors (OECD, 2019). In business, that number was significantly lower – approximately 23% of the researchers were female. According to the *She Figures 2021* (EC-DGRTD 2021c), where the following data come from, similar trends are observed in the EU, where women continue to be under-represented in the EU's research workforce and, especially, in academia's highest-level positions. The figures show:

1. Across sectors of economic activity, women are more likely to work as support staff and less likely to work as researchers in the total Research and Innovation personnel.
2. Women account for slightly less than one third of the total researcher population and for about 40% of the researchers working in the higher education sector, which is the main source of employment for researchers in Europe.
3. Even though during the past decade the proportion of women researchers has been increasing at a faster pace than that of men, women continue to be mostly represented in the lowest ranking positions in academia, where they correspond to nearly half of the researchers.
4. Women continue to be a minority in top academic and decision-making positions, with female researchers being twice less likely than male researchers to occupy such high-ranking positions – 17.7% for men against 7.6% for women.
5. Women represent less than one quarter of the heads of higher education institutes and of board leaders, and they also are just over 30% of the board members.

Additional gender imbalances or inequalities result from six further facts. First, 9% of women and 7.7% of men in the EU worked (not necessarily by choice) part-time or precariously in 2019. That is, they had no contract, or had a fixed-term contract of up to one year, or had another type of contract usually associated with student status (EC-DGRTD, 2021c). Second, female researchers – and especially non-white female researchers – were more weakly represented in research teams, either as team members or as team leaders, and faced additional (often invisible) barriers when accessing international or disciplinary networks that open doors to mentorship or collaborations (Reardon, 2022). Third, female researchers

published less and they also are more likely to be excluded from authorship despite having contributed to the research, or to see their contributions underestimated by (typically male) senior or leading researchers (Ross et al., 2022). Fourth, under similar personal and job circumstances, female researchers who were authors tended to earn, on average, 5%-6% less, even though there is no evidence their publications are less cited or the journals where they publish less prestigious (Bello & Sarrico, 2020). Fifth, female researchers are less likely to be successful in accessing funding (EC-DGRTD, 2021c; Mothers in Science, 2023). Sixth, for the past five decades, female authors have represented a low percentage of members of journals' editorial boards. Overall, 26% of journal authors are women. However, only 14% of the editorial board members are women and only 8% are editors-in-chief (Liu et al. 2023).

More women than men are the victims of bullying or harassment, and experience or witness discrimination, and many also consider that no appropriate action would be taken if they revealed their concerns around these issues (Wellcome, 2020). Furthermore, female researchers are more likely than their male colleagues to have a partner who also works in academia or to be single parents (Morgan et al., 2021). and some research highlights how some women fear disclosing their caring responsibilities (Moreau and Robertson 2019). Women also report an imbalance between work and family-life, and feel that certain aspects of their working life – such as the need to be mobile, the lack of stable income, the high workloads – very much affect their private life (Parada et al., 2023). Given the dominance traditional gender models have in how academic and research careers are shaped, these disparities have an especially damaging effect in the careers of (young) female researchers with children (Bozzon et al., 2018). These women are confronted with – often deep – incompatibilities between their professional and their family commitments, and struggle more than any other group of researchers, including men in similar circumstances or other women researchers, to secure a stable position in academia (Bozzon et al., 2018). They not only receive fewer job offers after becoming mothers, but also face decreases in productivity and inequalities in salaries and promotion (Powell, 2021). As studies over the past decades and across many fields of research have been showing, researchers who are mothers pay a high penalty for their parental status concerning their productivity measured in number of publications (Morgan et al., 2021). Although most concentrated in the years immediately following the birth of a child, this gap often persists over time, with mothers publishing on average ten fewer papers than fathers nine years after the birth of their first child (Powell, 2021). Overall, female academics, particularly early career female researchers or women

from under-represented minority groups, are more likely than their male colleagues to feel intellectually inadequate or that their success is unearned – that is, to feel like an impostor (Muradoglu et al., 2022).

As a result, women researchers not only are less satisfied with several aspects of their jobs – such as workloads, status and recognition, including access to full-time or decision-making positions, or rewards, including job and social security as well as pay – but also tend to be more pessimistic about their future career than male academics (EC-DGRTD, 2018b, 2021b). As the Eurodoc² Postdoc Survey results showed, female and male researchers clearly differed in their perception of career barriers and in their career plans, with female early career researchers identifying more (serious and very serious) barriers to career development and support than male early career researchers (Parada et al., 2023). According to the Eurodoc Postdoc Survey results, female early career researchers were less likely to seek a professorship and more likely to consider a career outside academia or alternative roles within academia, such as science communication, research management or in technology transfer. Moreover, female researchers, particularly those who are mothers of young children and who are at the early stages of their careers, were more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic than male researchers (EU, 2023; Myers et al., 2020). In comparison to men, women were more vulnerable to losing their jobs, as they are more likely to work under precarious contracts (OECD, 2021a). They also found it harder to spend time on their research during the pandemic, which further enlarged the gap in the specific number of publications needed to access a permanent position. According to a study conducted among members of a Young Academy,³ during the pandemic, researchers with children under the age of 10 and women especially, spent at least 8 extra hours in home and caretaking responsibilities, often slept less than seven hours, and experienced added stress or burnout (Swider-Cios et al., 2021).⁴

² Eurodoc, The European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers is an umbrella organization of 25 national associations (NAs) representing doctoral candidates (DCs) and junior researchers (JRs) in 23 countries of the European Union (EU) and of the Council of Europe. In 2018, Eurodoc launched the Eurodoc Postdoc Survey to examine the working conditions, career prospects, and work-life balance of postdoctoral researchers working in Europe.

³ Young Academies have members who are post PhD and at the start of their academic careers.

4. Overview of academic literature

Charlotte Morris

As part of the working group activities, a search of research studies undertaken between 2018 and 2023 investigated precarity in relation to gender in academia across Europe. The search found over forty relevant articles in this timeframe and the key overarching themes identified were 1) impacts on careers; 2) working and living conditions; 3.) gender inequality and power. These interlinked themes provide a starting point for addressing ongoing gender disparities; they are summarised below with reference to selected studies in this field. It should be noted that precariously employed academics are far from a homogenous group but rather encompass a vast array of roles and terminologies depending on context. They include, but are not limited to, adjunct professors, teaching or research associates, assistants or fellows, or hourly paid lecturers. It is acknowledged that career pathways, working conditions and power dynamics will vary from context to context in Europe and beyond (Le Feuvre et al., 2019; O'Connor et al., 2023). However, there are also commonalities between different contexts which illuminate that precarity and its gendered effects in academia are a European-wide problem, limiting and constraining opportunities and possibilities, and perpetuating inequalities. Studies have shed light on multiple detrimental impacts of short-term contracts and precarity for individuals in academia which ultimately undermines goals of gender and interrelated equities.

A range of institutional and economic factors affect the structures of academic careers and exacerbate gender asymmetries (Murgia and Poggio, 2019). Widespread processes of commodification of higher education combined with limited resources mean that fields where there tend to be a higher percentage of women – particularly in the social sciences and humanities – are continually under threat (Bozzon et al., 2019; Finnborg et al., 2019; Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2018). Steinþórsdóttir et al. (2018) argue that in Iceland, set against a backdrop of global competition around higher education, early career academics are rendered particularly vulnerable. They analyse ways in which the three early stages of a research career are gendered (including doctoral, postdoctoral and associate professor). The concept of

‘gender budgeting’ is utilised to deconstruct contemporary financial and managerial processes and procedures set against the backdrop of neoliberal academia and the adoption of corporate managerial techniques. The study identified that institutions and the current system favours those in male-dominated STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects through more funding, status and better publication and career opportunities. Furthermore, those working in feminised Social Science and Humanities fields tend to have higher teaching loads, which further prohibits participation in career enhancing activities such as publication and funding applications. Such conditions exacerbate pre-existing inequities and gendered division of academic labour. This work stresses the need for institutions to recognise gendered structural barriers and incorporate a gender budgeting lens throughout all decision-making processes.

Significant impacts on career development have been identified for women who all too often become trapped in temporary positions, sometimes in the long-term. O’Keefe & Courtois (2019), writing about Ireland, point out that whereas these academics are doing key, frontline work, the conditions of their employment are exploitative, entailing inadequate pay, benefits, legal protections and progression opportunities. In short, O’Keefe and Courtois (2019) argue, staff are treated as ‘non-citizens’ of the academy (see also Sümer, 2020). They argue that individualising career progression in meritocratic terms and as a reflection of talent, serves to obscure structural processes and inequalities that create these conditions.

De Angelis and Grüning (2020) examine why fewer women than men in Italy progress to senior academic roles, why they seldom arrive at tenured (permanent or continuing) positions or else remain in the lower ranks of hierarchical structures. Comparing working conditions between men and women adjunct professors, the researchers identify a range of factors which contribute to gender discrimination, including the additional uncertainty women may face due to family responsibilities, childbearing and childcare; gender bias, especially within science disciplines; heavier teaching responsibilities and less encouragement for research and publication activities; the stress of juggling multiple jobs; less sense of belonging and poorer pay which combine in making it more challenging for women to withstand precarity in the long-term. They further note how the presence of temporary workers is often ignored in official narratives and institutional statistics.

Women across Europe, particularly for those from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic backgrounds, often face structural barriers in relation to accessing development opportunities,

networking and mentoring thereby compounding isolation, exclusion and discrimination (Briscoe-Palmer and Mattock, 2021). Key barriers include a lack of access to childcare, structural inequalities and sexist cultures which are all compounded by precarity. Briscoe-Palmer and Mattock (2021) note that in an increasingly competitive job market there is pressure to quickly obtain multiple skills and competencies. They recommend that universities and departments should take more responsibility to address these barriers and that there should be standardised programmes to prepare for a challenging labour market rather than leaving it to individual supervisors.

Maddrell et al. (2019) point to continuing challenges in gendered career progression and professional interactions within the contemporary discipline of geography in the UK. These challenges are associated with employment precarity and inflexible work practices, life choices and domestic and care obligations, discrimination and bullying and also include less tangible gendered norms and cultures in the workplace. On the basis of a nationwide qualitative survey, while the term 'glass ceiling' still has significant relevance, Maddrell et al.'s findings show a more complicated picture including what they call 'stone floors' and stumbling blocks referring to the multifaceted and impenetrable barriers to career paths and progression. The intersection of early-career job precarity, reproductive decisions and associated family responsibilities was particularly highlighted in this study. Such 'pinch points' where these factors come together in creating barriers to career development disproportionately affect, but are not limited to, female early career scholars. Suggested strategies for change include highlighting the importance of individual university and department protocols and practices, changes in the attitudes of line managers and other senior colleagues and leadership in creating workplaces with an equality-driven ethos and structures that allow individuals to flourish.

The incompatibility of academic careers with family, care, domesticity and intimacy is a running theme throughout the literature. Alderson et al. (2023), in a UK context, report ways in which precarious employment is incompatible with wider life goals or priorities such as family and relationships. This forces researchers and women in particular into difficult life decisions and trade-offs (also noted in Paksi et al., 2022). The instability and financial insecurity which are prohibitive to starting or supporting families mean that women participants may be less prepared than men to remain working in these conditions. Alderson et al. (2023) make a number of recommendations including improved policies on parental

leave and flexible working; enhanced mentorship schemes; more considerate recruitment procedures; transparency on pay and promotion and a reduction in short-term contracts. Ivancheva et al's (2019) work undertaken in the Irish context, draws attention to the need for higher education institutions to address contractual insecurity and also to take affective relational security into account. This qualitative research drew on interviews with academic women, exploring the intersection of paid work and care in their lives. It highlights how contemporary neoliberal academic cultures value (masculinised) and normalised ideals of competitiveness, overwork and mobility, whereas care and carers are undervalued. Women who opt out of these norms are more at risk of precarity and yet if they conform, they are vulnerable to affective precarity; in other words, they are forced to push the caring, emotional and relational dimensions of their lives to the periphery.

Research focussing on people on teaching contracts has also indicated the poor resourcing attached to precarious contracts which makes it difficult to do their jobs effectively, thus creating further barriers. Read and Leathwood's (2020) qualitative research in the UK with a sample largely comprised of women, revealed ways in which professional agency is undermined when temporary staff are compelled to teach courses designed by others. They are ill-equipped when there is poor or last minute communication about what they will be teaching and when they are denied office space and visibility as part of the department. Ultimately this can undermine staff-student relationships with teaching staff feeling the need to 'cover up' for the inadequacies of institutional resourcing and support for employees. Audit cultures where quality of teaching is often measured through student surveys exacerbates the shame and anxiety temporary academics may face as their livelihoods depend on how they are ranked (ibid.). The questioning of staff as legitimate knowers and professionals will inevitably impact more severely on women and minoritized staff whose legitimacy is already not taken seriously (see also Blell et al., 2022).

Coin (2018), writing from the Italian context, observes that academic work is often presented and internalised as a labour of love for women. This can lead to women working overlong hours, working beyond their contracts, doing unpaid work and enduring isolation and hardship in the hope of eventually securing permanent work. The impacts on individuals are profound, on emotional as well as material levels. Other studies have highlighted the emotional and wellbeing impacts; precarity can be internalised as shame (Read & Leathwood, 2020), can foster anxiety (Loveday, 2018) and can have devastating effects in relation to confidence and

self-belief, with precarious workers positioned as ‘failures’ (Clavero & Galligan, 2021). This entrenches and compounds gendered and interrelated power disparities, creating a two-tier gendered system wherein gender inequity and precarity reinforce each other (Zheng, 2018). Precarious employment renders women vulnerable to exploitation and also abuse and harassment (Cardwell & Hitchin, 2022; UCU, 2021; Wånggren, 2023). The problems are not only personal: epistemic injustices stem from the low status accorded in particular to Black and minoritised women who have tended to not be seen as legitimate ‘knowers’ in academia and are more likely to have their authority challenged (Blell et al, 2022; also observed in Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012). Precarity can also be detrimental to academic freedom and autonomy (Blell et al., 2022; Clavero & Galligan, 2019; Leathwood & Read, 2020; Megoran & Mason, 2020; Vatansever & Kölemen, 2022).

In summary, precarity can have devastating impacts on individuals and their careers, with particular effects on women academics. These impacts will differ in degree depending on the positionality, circumstances and resources available to those affected and also in relation to the broader institutional, societal and economic context (Le Feuvre et al., 2019). Beyond individual wellbeing and career opportunities, such conditions are potentially damaging to academic departments, institutions, research culture, learning and teaching, and knowledge creation. It is clear is that the implications for gender equity in academia are significant and this needs to be better understood and addressed as a matter of urgency.

5. Case study countries

5.1 UK

Barbara Read, Marie-Pierre Moreau and Charlotte Morris

While, in the UK, higher education represents a key sector of employment, the considerable expansion of doctoral provision has not been matched by a growth in academic employment. The expansion of doctoral provision and doctoral routes (including Professional Doctorates and PhDs by publication) has taken place against a context of rising uncertainties linked to changes to migration laws (including student visas) and to the funding mechanisms of higher education, as well as to the UK's exit from the European Union. UCU, the national union for academics, has made a campaign against casualisation one of its national priorities. Higher Education Statistics Agency data show that 46% of universities and 60% of colleges use zero hours contracts to deliver teaching, while over two-thirds of research staff in higher education are on fixed term contracts, with many more dependent on short-term funding for their continued employment - and there is an overrepresentation of women and minoritised ethnic staff in these figures (UCU, 2021). Megoran and Mason (2020) argue that this casualisation has four main effects on staff, including rendering them invisible, vulnerable, curtailing their agency and academic freedom, and depriving staff of meaningful careers. On the one hand, research shows that academic careers have become increasingly precarious, with recent doctoral degree holders particularly affected. On the other hand, there is evidence that some institutions and subjects are struggling to fill some academic positions (Leathwood & Read, 2020). Access to an academic position and experiences of precarity are inextricably linked to 'raced', classed and gendered relationships of power (*ibid.* see also Moreau et al., 2024).

Research on the transition to post-doctoral employment remains relatively rare. Likewise, national policy intervention has overwhelmingly focused on undergraduates. Policy and academic texts tend to favour a practical, under-theorised approach which minimises the way equity issues affect post-doctoral pathways. The literature also often fails to acknowledge the disruption and 'messiness' of the transition from doctoral student to academia. This is

particularly so as the boundaries between doctoral student and employee have become blurred (Macoun & Miller, 2014).

In a recent project funded by the British Academy, Moreau, Hoskins and McHugh (2022) considered how individuals who have received a PhD from a UK university less than 18 months ago navigated the transition process and how this process was affected by the influence of the supervisor and mediated by gender, class and race. Interviews conducted with a diverse sample of 26 Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and 6 PhD supervisors highlighted significant diversity in terms of the support provided by the institution and supervisor, including in negotiating the transition from PhD student to academic or to other ('alt') careers. On a structural level, it became apparent that

the effect of the institution extended well beyond the viva stage as students can build the relevant capitals through access to research and teaching opportunities and networks. ECRs with a PhD from an elite institution were more likely to be routinely given access to teaching undergraduates, while also getting access to an array of formal and informal networks as part of the supervisory relationship and the broader institutional support available (*ibid.*, 13).

The study also showed that the extent and nature of the support provided through the supervisory team is also mediated by gender, ethnicity and social class, leading to the conclusion that 'the supervisory team represents a crucial, yet understudied, mechanism in challenging or reproducing inequalities in terms of access to academic and other jobs constructed as desirable by doctoral students and ECRs' (*ibid.*, p. 6).

A previously unpublished study undertaken in 2019-2020 by Morris sought to identify the factors that supported or inhibited the career development of women who identified as early career researchers but who were on non-permanent contracts. Data from a survey conducted as part of this project is shared here in order to illuminate some of the concerns of these women. As part of this study, a free-text survey (62 participants) was conducted. The findings support the wider literature in relation to the corrosive effects of short-term contracts on women's careers especially if reliance on such contracts extends over a protracted period of time (corresponding with findings from O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019). A small number of respondents (8) did not report negative effects – saying that their current role was a good opportunity, that a short period of short-time work was to be expected or that their part-time

post was manageable alongside family responsibilities. However, the majority (27%) said they had been in these roles for over five years with some (8%) being in these roles for over 10 years. They conveyed the damaging effects extended precarity can have on finances (with 58% affected by financial instability), problems with housing (including homelessness) (39%), impacts on mental health and wellbeing (32%), uncertainties about the future (32%), family and relationships (26%), uncertainty about whether it would be possible to have children (18%), being unsure whether to stay in academia (11%), work-related performance anxiety (10%) plus negative impacts on confidence / self-esteem (8%). Other factors mentioned included difficulties juggling multiple jobs, enforced mobility, heavy workloads, low status and feelings of non-belonging, lack of resource to do their jobs effectively, lack of time – especially with time spent on the bureaucratic juggling contracts and institutions, with recruitment processes often taking up more time. The negative impacts on participants' overall wellbeing were striking, as indicated in these quotes:

'No security in family planning, housing, mental health, financial insecurity.'

'Insecure employment so can't end other work commitments and fully commit. No adequate pension contributions. Doesn't provide secure income to make family plans and support commitments to children'.

'My insecurity of contract impacts upon my self-esteem and how I interpret the value placed upon my work by the University. It often makes me feel demoralised and not valued'.

'Additional stress and anxiety about future professional and personal prospects. Uncertainty about where my family and I will live as jobs often involve relocating.'

'Financial stress (I am the sole provider for two children), the added load of piecing together multiple schedules and contracts, causing significant chronic worry.'

A majority of participants (61%) said that they felt their non-permanent status impacted negatively on career development. Reasons given for this included finding it difficult to complete their PhD, other research activities or writing for publication in view of heavy teaching and administration loads. Many found it necessary to accept jobs below their competency level, qualifications and experience and some said they were aware of processes of deprofessionalisation (also observed by Ivancheva and Garvey, 2022). Some experienced a process of de-skilling as their low-level work meant they were unable to use, develop or

update their skills. Some also experienced a loss of professional status and confidence. It was felt that the low status attached to short-term contracts meant they were more vulnerable to bullying, exploitation (feeling the need to say ‘yes’ to everything) and also self-exploitation in the form of overwork which was nevertheless felt to be necessary (echoing Ivancheva et al., 2019). In addition to these challenges, it was found that the construction of contracts (especially teaching-only or fractional contracts) meant participants were ineligible to undertake career-enhancing activities such as PhD supervision, or joining or leading funding applications (internal and external). Some who had teaching-focused roles (such as tutors, teaching fellows, associate lecturers or lecturers on fixed term contracts) were not deemed to be researchers despite often having doctorates and were therefore unable to access developmental opportunities that were for ‘researchers only’. They were sometimes excluded from mentoring schemes and found networking challenging due to workloads and the timing of events at non-family friendly hours. There were also reports of being unable to access higher level teaching development and support for qualifications such as Postgraduate Certificates and Senior Fellowships of the higher education academy. High levels of mobility and the necessity of continually changing jobs meant it was difficult to establish networks or experience continuity with institutions. It was sometimes impossible to access opportunities, such as support for conference attendance, which were available to permanent members of faculty and so at the moment where it was needed the most, this support was not available - unless these academics paid for it themselves. Indicative quotes are provided below; these suggest how difficult it is to develop careers and remain research active while managing on precarious contracts:

‘I watch those with permanent lecturing posts being more able to set priorities for their work whilst I feel like I am in the longest job interview in history and it is a position of on-going precarity which is invisible to those I work with.’

‘Difficult to do field work, need to teach new courses every year (whatever is needed), thus very little time for writing.’

‘It can be difficult to be strategic as I often take on additional work. Doing so makes it hard to establish your own research/teaching trajectory and identity. It can also be hard to build and grow networks when you are moving from institutions regularly’.

'I wrote a grant recently but it had to be submitted under the name of a PI, who only read it just before submission, as I was not eligible to submit.'

Further factors inhibiting careers included research funding not allowing time for 'writing-up' research, developing outputs or engaging in impacts. In addition, there was unlikely to be time to write subsequent applications for research funding. The short-term nature of roles made it challenging to develop a coherent academic identity or career narrative. They felt a lack of control over their own careers due to the need to undertake survival work which limited the possibility of being 'strategic'. Coping with everyday precarity, lack of time, and workload issues also impacted the quality of their work, which in turn also rendered them vulnerable to losing their positions. Some expressed a lack of power; positioned as 'non-faculty' they were unable to meaningfully input into curriculum or take part in decision-making. Chiming with Read and Leathwood's (2020) research, a lack or loss of autonomy was apparent in many of the qualitative comments with one stating 'I feel like I'm always doing other people's work'. At times the health problems caused by the lack of secure income also took a toll and began to negatively impact on career development.

'It has impacted my emotional and mental health, creating feelings of insecurity around my skills and expertise'.

'It can cause quite a lot of worry which can mean I work harder and am less likely to put time towards my career development due to the need to perform to demonstrate I am good enough to have a more permanent status. It can also affect confidence which is needed to give a good impression to others.'

'Due to funding limitations, projects cannot be completed. This results in publications not getting finalized and makes it difficult to apply for external funding.'

'[It] makes me less productive because I am constantly changing jobs / applying for jobs / taking on consultancies to fill in the gaps; b) the instability is stressful and also impedes productivity; c) can't commit to supervising students / hiring a post-doc because I don't know how long I'll be here which means I end up with fewer co-authored papers.'

When asked about how the effects of precarity were gendered, many of these respondents mentioned the challenges of balancing the high demands of their work with caring responsibilities and a lack of institutional support for caring (in line with Ivancheva et al., 2019). Some mentioned this affected their decisions about whether to have a family; some were forced into more financial dependence on their partners, which is concerning in relation to gender equity; some did not have access to maternity leave and those who did were anxious about this leave affecting their ‘outputs’, given the current emphasis on productivity. There were also concerns around pension contributions, especially combined with career breaks due to caring responsibilities. Reports of sexism and discrimination arose, with perceptions of favourable treatment given to male colleagues in recruitment, promotions, access to resources and study leave. Furthermore, there were instances of sexist bullying, not being taken seriously by male colleagues, and gender bias in meetings. Gender bias in publication and not being properly credited for work were also seen as barriers. Negative attitudes towards those in teaching-only positions (perceived as gendered) were also shared. It was mentioned that students tend to rate women lower than men. In some fields (especially sciences) a lack of women role models was perceived and there were reports of ‘boys club’ cultures in some departments. It was also suggested that a lack of confidence meant some women were less likely to advocate for themselves: ‘Not arguing for higher pay or promotion, tolerating unfair or stagnant working conditions, not receiving their dues in terms of rewards and accolades for work they have done.’ Indicative quotes are provided below:

‘Fewer role models (who also have a family life/life besides academia), it being a boys club’;

‘Men selling my ideas as their own’;

‘White heterosexual middle-aged men seen as more authoritative. I’m pretty sure people would believe in me more if I was male’;

‘As a young woman, I often feel patronized, mansplained and not taken seriously by older male colleagues’.

The above comment about being treated differently as a young woman indicates the need to look at the intersections between gender and age, which has previously been neglected. There were also comments from more mature women who had sometimes returned to study and

pursued academic careers after having children. There was a feeling that there was discrimination around this: *‘Potential employers look at my CV and wonder what I was doing for the ten years prior to returning to education where I was raising my daughter and working part-time in a non-academic environment.’* Further intersectional factors that participants mentioned as barriers were ethnicity, citizenship status (especially where there were visa problems), and managing disabilities alongside associated prejudices.

In terms of the improved support these respondents wanted to see put in place for early career women on non-permanent contracts, they were very basic and what most employees take for granted: They wanted to experience dignity, respect and freedom from discrimination; to experience full inclusion in their departments and associated activities alongside better visibility and to be included in communications; to have better rights in terms of parental and sick leave protections; time and support for their development, including a proper induction, line management meetings and access to research training and, finally, access to hardship funds if they experienced a sudden loss of income. These are achievable aims which mean institutions taking more responsibility for those they employ and recognising the benefits of a workforce that is well supported and properly resourced, and that is included and enabled to do their jobs effectively. Meeting these basic needs is a baseline for allowing women to achieve their potential and for achieving equity.

5.2 Switzerland

Marie Sautier

As a part of the European Research Area created in 2000, Switzerland's academia has become an attractive and highly Europeanized research market, with more than half of its workforce coming from abroad. Switzerland has the third highest Research and Development expenditures per capita in Europe (Eurostat, 2023). Despite Swiss public research being a well-funded system, precarious employment has become the norm in the Swiss public research system, with close to 80% of researchers working under short-term employment conditions (OFS, 2022). PhD holders pursuing an academic career after their defence typically face years of precarious employment. Moreover, this probationary period very rarely results in obtaining a professorship. According to the Swiss Science Council (CSS,

2022), only 2% of PhD holders who decide to pursue a postdoc after their defence have obtained a professorship position five years later. Academic precarity is associated with the heightened competition for secure academic jobs in Switzerland and can be attributed to several simultaneous factors (Le Feuvre et al., 2020). Firstly, there has been a significant increase in the number of PhDs being conferred by Higher Education and Research institutions in the last decades. Switzerland is currently characterised by the second-highest rate of PhDs in Europe, with close to 3% of the population holding this degree (OECD, 2021b). Secondly, the number of permanent faculty positions available for potential academics to be recruited into remains low. Swiss Universities hire around 300 professors every year, while awarding each year more than 4000 doctoral degrees (Swiss universities, 2024). Thirdly, a significant proportion of PhD holders, facing the absence of stable positions, but driven by the hope of stabilising their position in the future, engage in one of the many temporary and often part-time contracts that have become more common in the Swiss system, due to the rise of project-based research. Finally, postdoctoral researchers operate in an increasingly transnational marketplace: 80% of temporary postdoctoral researchers hold a non-Swiss passport, often European, out of which 75% directly moved from a foreign country to take a post-doctoral position (Conseil Suisse de la Science CSS, 2022).

The precarity of research positions has been the object of acute criticism and social protest in recent years. In 2020, the social movement "Petition academia" called on the Federal Assembly to "improve the working conditions of researchers, protect their health and family life, and thereby ensure the excellence of scientific research in Switzerland, through the creation of a significant number of permanent positions." In 2022 and 2023, the main federal union, SSP Vpod, conducted a national campaign called "Stable jobs, better science," pointing out the structural precarity affecting academic workers, and calling for more stable working conditions.

Although precarity issues have become a more visible topic among institutional actors and academic stakeholders in recent years, little attention has been paid to the way academic precarity and gender inequalities are intertwined phenomena. Not only are women three to four times less likely than men to hold a stable or tenure-track professor position in the Swiss system, but when working under temporary contracts, they are more likely than men to hold very short contracts (under 12 months) or part-time positions: 19% of men are paid part-time,

but 31% of women academics occupy these precarious positions (European Commission, 2021). In a recent survey commissioned by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF), assessing the working conditions of 3,900 researchers working under an SNF contract (Legler et al., 2022), the authors found no difference between men and women regarding career aspirations, but women employed at the doctoral or postdoctoral level were less often able than men to devote working time to their career goals. The authors also showed that women were two to three times more likely to experience discrimination or harassment in the academic workspace. In 2021, a study conducted at a leading Swiss university showed that 26% of female mid-level research staff reported having been a victim of moral harassment in the workplace, and 6% experienced sexual harassment (Galliot & Zossou, 2022).

The global issue of *gender inequalities* in academia is rather well identified in Swiss universities, and has been the subject of action plans for several decades, with mixed results. On the other hand, the issue of *academic precariousness* has gained significant visibility in recent years. However, the literature on how these two phenomena intersect remains underdeveloped, and funding agencies and the universities rarely integrate these two aspects together. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Swiss academic institutions took some measures (such as extending temporary contracts by a few months) to address the pandemic's specific effects on precarious postdoctoral workers. However, despite evidence that the pandemic deeply affected women postdocs, specifically mothers, universities did not implement specific measures targeting the gendered effects of the pandemic (Ballif & Zinn, n.d., see also Fitzsimons et al., 2022; Górska et al., 2021), with the risk of creating a 'lost generation' (Ibid.) of women among the precarious workforce.

Studies conducted about the research workforce also drew attention to the ways employment and precarity intersect with gender and other social characteristics such as race and ethnicity, disability (Legler et al., 2022), citizenship (Courtois & Sautier, 2022) or care responsibilities. For example, among postdoctoral researchers who are parents, a majority of women devote one full day or more during their week to look after a child rather than doing research, while this was the case for a minority of fathers holding similar temporary positions (Legler et al., 2022). The Swiss system, which has been described as "neo-maternalistic" (Giraud & Lucas, 2009), tends to reinforce gender imbalances among the academic workforce by discouraging women from working full-time. This is particularly due to tax incentives that penalise dual career couples, and a lack of affordable day-care options, within and outside academic

institutions. Women academics in precarious positions are likely to experience strong financial and social obstacles when trying to go back to full-time research activities after a maternity leave. In addition, they are also often faced with the challenge of convincing their peers and mentors of their "deservingness" to pursue an academic career, despite societal expectations that their role as a mother or caregiver in the Swiss context is incompatible with a full commitment to science (Le Feuvre et al., 2020).

Recent studies indicate that a better understanding of how gender and precarity intersect is essential to address the complexity of gender inequalities in Science. The concepts of "probationary citizenship" (Le Feuvre et al., 2020), "mobility fatigue" (Schaer, 2022), and "geoccasional work" (Sautier, 2021) have helped identify a variety of mechanisms through which women's trajectories in Swiss academia are disproportionately affected by the casualization of academic work. For example, the concept of "geoccasional work" highlights that the very high rate of international mobility among postdocs, far from solely stemming from the European ideal of scientific discovery, and free circulation, also constitutes an important *marker* and *vector* of precarisation for short-term academic workers. The interrelation between mobility and precarity comes with specific effects for women and under-represented groups in particular (Sautier, 2021). These studies illustrate why the casualization of academic work, at play across several European countries, often appears in direct contradiction with public policy efforts to advance equality and diversity in science.

5.3 Hungary

Veronika Paksi and Katalin Tardos

The proportion of fixed-term contracts among the employed labour force aged 15-64 has decreased in the last decade in Hungary (from 7.7 to 5.2% between 2011 and 2021). However, women's slightly advantageous position (7.1%) compared to men's (8.2%) at the beginning of the decade has vanished and, moreover, the proportion of women on fixed-term contracts has recently become higher (5.6%) than that of men (4.8%) (HCSO, 2021). Compared to the general trends in the Hungarian labour market, the proportion of fixed-term, precarious contracts in higher education is significantly higher than in other sectors. Furthermore, the highest proportions of precarious contracts among *women researchers* in higher education

(HE) can be found in Hungary (16.2%) among the EU27 members. This ratio is almost double compared to women's average for the EU27 (9.0%), and also to the proportion of Hungarian men (9.1%). The significantly more precarious employment conditions of Hungarian female researchers are prevalent in all four stages of researchers' careers. For first-stage (up to the point of PhD) and recognised researchers (PhD holders) with precarious contracts, the proportion of women is critical in the EU27 as well, but more significantly for Hungary compared to the EU27 average. Women's proportion is one-third higher (40.5%) than that of men's among first-stage researchers (31.8%), and more than five times higher among recognised researchers (28.3% for women compared to 5.5% for men) (She Figures, 2021).

Taking a closer look at the relationship of family status and precarity in Hungary, we find that the proportion of *women researchers in couples with children* with precarious contracts is almost three times higher than for men living in couples with children (11.1% versus 3.4%). It is striking in the that while the proportion of *single female researchers with children* with precarious contracts in the EU's 27 member states is only 1.2%, this data is 20% for Hungarian women. Moreover, while the proportion of *single male researchers without children* with precarious contracts is 7.1% in Hungary, for women it is 27.3% (She Figures, 2021).

In Hungary, only a few studies have examined precarity in academia. Alpár and his colleagues (2018) surveyed 1535 PhD holders under the age of 45. Their findings showed that one-third of them were employed with fixed-term contracts: 54% of them were working at research institutes, and 20% were working in higher education. The lowest rate was in social sciences and humanities (26.7%), in the field of life sciences it was 39.6%, but in physics, astronomy and biology the rate was over 50%. Almost one-third of the women experienced negative discrimination, or more precisely contractual segregation, due to their parental status. The authors developed 12 intervention points, where four points particularly targeted the need for calculable career paths, long or open-ended contracts, and the support of women researchers.

Paksi, Nagy and Tardos (2022) examined the barriers to the motherhood of young female engineers, mainly working in higher education. The results of 27 semi-structured interviews showed that half of the PhD students received 2 to 12-month fixed-term contracts, meanwhile, their male partners or peers with the same qualifications received permanent contracts at the beginning of their employment. Women frequently voiced their fears about reintegrating into the labour market after childbearing. They were openly warned by their employers that they should not "dream" about receiving permanent status if they planned to become mothers.

Accordingly, mothers' short-term contracts were typically terminated right before or during maternity leave. They also could not establish families due to the low income they received; moreover, engineering does not allow long career breaks, particularly not the expected three-year maternity leave that is typical in Hungary. In summary, precarity, low income and related negative discrimination were strongly responsible for women's leaking out from the academic pipeline.

Fényes et al. (2020) surveyed the trends of international mobility of 147 Hungarian researchers working abroad. Though there was a variety of motivations for working abroad, the authors identified that precarity, low income, and insecurity in Hungary, especially of young researchers, also contributed to increased international mobility. However, fixed-term contracts are typically applied at least in the initial period of international employment, too.

In Hungary, as a result of the precariousness of the employment conditions, the attractiveness of careers in research has considerably decreased, especially for women. While the proportion of women in research has been increasing in the EU member states, the opposite trend can be observed in Hungary. Those few research studies in Hungary show that precarity is significantly responsible for the slow career advancement of women and their abandonment of science, and also partly for the brain drain. However, neither quantitative nor qualitative research has addressed the issue of precarity in higher education as its main focus, and there is a need to explore the characteristics of precarity, its intersection with gender and its consequences on academic careers (insecurity, horizontal and vertical segregation, leaving science, discrimination, devaluation of women and their knowledge, single parenting etc.) Research that targets the organisational level, such as decision-making bodies and stakeholder positions is also needed. Moreover, even the EU does not regulate/include passages on precarity in the suggested toolkits for Gender Equality Plans (Tardos & Paksi, 2022). Future research may explore this gap and develop tools accordingly. As it is partly a post-soviet legacy that the country is lagging behind in gender equality, therefore all initiatives and regulations to promote gender equality need to be started with awareness raising for all stakeholders in Hungary.

6. Conclusions: Impacts and Implications

This working paper has highlighted the manifold detrimental impacts of academic precarity for women in particular. We recognise that these will manifest differently in different contexts and for different social groups. Nevertheless, when considering European and global imperatives for gender equality and the importance of research to address gender inequalities, the gendered impact of precarity is concerning and requires urgent research and policy attention. The poor working and living conditions precarity engenders serve to damage the sustainability of research careers with profound implications for mental health and wellbeing. Women are often faced with the prospect of choosing between academic careers and caring responsibilities (especially in contexts where it is the norm for women to undertake the majority of care and domestic labour). They may be trapped in the long-term in exploitative temporary contracts and unable to progress (O’Keefe & Courtois, 2019) or compelled to undertake unpaid labour. In some contexts, they may also be forced to choose between research and teaching or simply have to take whatever is available for their survival in a context of widespread fragmentation of academic work (Le Feuvre et al., 2019). They are also often denied opportunities for development, networking and promotion and endure poor conditions in relation to maternity pay and pensions. Their ability to do their jobs effectively is further challenged by a lack of basic resource such as office space (Leathwood and Read, 2020). Short-term contracts can also exacerbate inequalities and unequal power relations in departments, institutions and across the sector, rendering women in particular more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Moreover, especially in intersection with other power disparities, women may be denied the status of being legitimate ‘knowers’ (Blell et al., 2022). This has implications for knowledge creation and dissemination, especially if only the most privileged members of societies are able to withstand the poor conditions which characterise many early academic careers.

We recommend that these issues are taken seriously at a policy level (see the summary of practical recommendations at the beginning of this document) so as to identify areas where gender and precarity could helpfully be viewed in relation to each other as a starting point for addressing these widespread conditions. It is hoped that there will start to be more

accountability and transparency in relation to precarity across the sector and that the links with gender and interrelated inequalities will be taken seriously. We would also recommend further research in this field which attends to intersectionality, foregrounding ways in which gender intersects with race and ethnicity, class, disability, sexuality and age in creating barriers for women academics. Beyond representation in terms of numbers, it is important to understand the complexities of women's lived experiences in order to meet their needs, address these barriers and create conditions that would enable their flourishing. Gender equity in academia has come a long way but there is still much work to be done; improving working conditions and environments so that equity is at the heart of academia. Making it possible to thrive rather than just survive in an academic career would be a good place to start.

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