



Statement on Gender and Diversity

Recommitment to Inclusive Innovation

June 2025

6.6.2025

Executive Summary

Gender gaps in Europe's innovation landscape continue to limit our competitiveness. Despite progress, women remain significantly underrepresented and underfunded across the innovation ecosystem — from leadership roles to investment decisions. Addressing these gaps is not just a matter of fairness, but of economic strategy¹. EIC Board reaffirms its commitment to an inclusive innovation model and sets out practical ways forward.

Context

In 2021, the European Innovation Council (EIC) Board issued its first statement on Gender and Diversity², calling for systemic change in Europe's innovation landscape. Four years on, progress is visible—but the structural gaps remain.

Despite women making up **42% of STEM graduates in the EU**, and they are:

- **Underrepresented in leadership:** fewer than 1 in 4 STEM chairs are held by women;
- **Underfunded:** women-led startups raise less and take longer to reach unicorn status;
- **Undervalued:** yet their companies outperform at IPO and non-IPO exits;
- **Underrepresented in investment:** fewer than 20% of funds include a woman decision-maker.

This is not only a question of fairness—it is a question of economic competitiveness.

¹ closing the gender innovation gap **could generate €181 billion for the European economy**-[HOME - GENDEX](#)

² [EIC Gender Diversity statement June 2021.pdf](#)

Background

Key EIC Initiatives Supporting Women

Following its 2021 reflection, and within its advisory and strategic role, the EIC Board has welcomed and supported a number of targeted initiatives launched by the EIC:

- **EIC Women Leadership Programme³**: – Providing mentoring and networking for women in funded projects.
- **Women TechEU⁴**: – Offering €75,000 grants and coaching to early-stage women-led deep-tech startups.
- **GENDEX – Gender & Diversity Index** – A data tool tracking diversity in innovation and investment.
- **European Prize for Women Innovators⁵**: – Celebrating exceptional women entrepreneurs.
- **Gender Gap in Investments⁶ (2025)** – A dialogue series with investors and policymakers to scale best practices.
- **EIC Role Model Campaign** – Highlighting EIC-supported women founders to inspire the next generation.
- Gender parity on the EIC Board, juries, and evaluation committees.

Where We Stand: EIC Progress Since 2021

Based on available data and observed outcomes, the Board notes several positive trends:

- **EIC Accelerator**:
- The **share of women-led companies⁷** in the EIC Accelerator increased significantly from **8% in 2020 to 30% in 2024**.
- Over this period, the programme **invested €363 million** in women-led companies.
- This marks a **notable outperformance compared to the market**, where:
 - Women-led deep tech companies represent only **22%** of the total.
 - That broader 22% figure includes *any leadership role*, while the Accelerator's measurement is stricter, focusing only on **CEO, CTO, and CSO** roles.

The EIC Accelerator is setting a benchmark in gender leadership by investing at a higher rate in women-led firms than the deep tech sector at large.

- **EIC Pathfinder**: More than 25% of funded researchers are women, though the growth has slowed.
- **Visibility**: More women are now active in evaluation panels and featured in public communications.

³ [EIC Women Leadership Programme - European Commission](#)

⁴ [Women TechEU](#)

⁵ [European Prize for Women Innovators powered by EIC & EIT - European Commission](#)

⁶ [Gendergap Investments - Homepage](#)

⁷ Defined as companies with a female CEO, CTO (Chief Technology Officer) or CSO (Chief Scientific Officer).

These trends suggest that **well-designed, well-resourced interventions can yield measurable impact**. However, sustained efforts are needed to consolidate progress and close remaining gaps.

Advice from the EIC Board: Strategic Areas to Consider

To help maintain momentum and ensure Europe remains competitive by fully tapping into its innovation talent pool, the Board advises continued focus on the following areas:

1. Support Mechanisms and Inclusive Access

- **Scale up Women TechEU** to reach more early-stage women-led deep tech ventures.
- **Explore a Seal of Excellence (SoE) pathway** for high-scoring, unfunded proposals from women-led teams, and promote gender-focused national co-funding schemes.
- **Promote tailored IP and legal support** in Business Acceleration Services to address structural barriers faced by women innovators.
- **Consider facilitated curated access to strategic networks**—create targeted entry points for women at closed investor events and build structured matchmaking with corporates and investors.

2. Visibility, Representation and Cultural Change

- **Promote gender balance across all EIC communication** activities.
- **Continue spotlighting women's leadership** and excellence through recognition campaigns and awards (e.g. the European Prize for Women Innovators). And strengthen it through **a new award specifically for EIC Accelerator projects** demonstrating strong commitments to gender equality.
- **Use investor dialogue platforms** to raise data-driven awareness of gender bias in valuations and encourage adoption of transparent diversity criteria in public-private co-investments.

3. Metrics, Targets and Budget Alignment

- **Integrate** gender monitoring tools as the Gender Innovation Index into EIC programme planning and performance tracking.
- **Align indicators** with EU-wide frameworks like "She Figures" to enable consistency and benchmarking.
- **Propose an accelerator KPI target** for 50% of funded companies to include at least one woman in a top leadership position (i.e. CEO, CTO or CSO) taking into account also shareholdings in the company.
- **Recommend increasing** the budget for gender-related activities, supported by a proposal indicating which elements could be deprioritised to enable the shift.

Final reflection

The EIC should lead by example and act as a role model for national and regional initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality in innovation. The barriers women face in innovation are

systemic—but solvable. We call on the entire ecosystem to match this ambition and make inclusive innovation the norm.

Statement approved by the Members of the EIC Board

6 June 2025

The European Innovation Council Board is a high-level body established under the Horizon Europe legislation to advise the European Commission on the strategy and implementation of the European Innovation Council, a €10 billion programme of the European Union to turn disruptive European science and innovation into leading edge companies. The Board brings together expertise and perspectives from the innovation ecosystem (entrepreneurs, investors, research and technology transfer, and innovation experts) to ensure that the EIC meets the needs of innovators and effectively supports breakthrough innovations, deep-tech startups, and scale-ups across Europe.