



POLICY BRIEF

# Bridging the Gender Gap in research by Enhancing the role of Female Taxonomists

## Executive summary

Taxonomy—the science of classifying and naming organisms—is foundational to biodiversity conservation, agriculture, medicine, and environmental policy. However, the field remains male-dominated, especially at senior and decision-making levels. Is this the case among TETTRIS consortium composed of natural science collections holders? How have the partner Institutions and cascade grants beneficiaries implemented gender equality among their activities? Increasing the representation and recognition of women in taxonomy is not only a matter of equity but also essential to strengthening scientific output and innovation. This brief outlines the barriers that have been identified and proposes the targeted measures developed within TETTRIS to promote gender equality and inclusion in taxonomy in Europe.

## Introduction

**This Policy brief aims to highlight the general key Issues illustrating a gender gap in academia and research institutions and providing measures and propositions to mitigate the gender gap in taxonomy.**

This process has been implemented by TETTRIS *Ethics and Diversity Board*<sup>1</sup> which has developed guidelines for ethics rules implementation and monitoring, and has launched targeted questionnaires, surveys and activities to raise awareness on gender issues in taxonomy among the TETTRIS partners and the beneficiaries of the cascade grants.

<sup>1</sup>TETTRIS Ethics and Diversity Board composed of the Ethics Advisor, Workpackage Leader, Project Manager, the two Project Pillar Leaders, a Personal Data Officer and Gender officer.



## Policy Context: Women in Taxonomy & Gender Equality Plans in Institutions

### GENDER EQUALITY PLANS AMONG TETTRIS CONSORTIUM

The natural science institutions forming TETTRIs consortium are perfectly aware of the importance and necessity of implementing Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) among their administrations and research teams. Those GEPs aim to mitigate still existing challenges such as missing family friendly measures, low staff turn-over limiting the recruitment of women, lack of gender disaggregated data, or lack of communication on gender bias, through initiatives that include workshops, training, internal communications, promotion of role models, and a dedicated Gender, Inclusion and Diversity team, promotion of work-life balance as well as anti-harassment policies in field and lab environments.

### UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

Despite growing interest in STEM and 2-5 years of GEP implementation, women remain significantly underrepresented in taxonomy, particularly in research leadership, museum curatorships, and international collaborations.

The predominant presence of male in these high-level positions persists, as shown by the results from the survey among the TETTRIs partner institutions (81,8% by males vs 18,2% females, fig. 1). These figures are very similar at CETAF community level with 70,5% of male directors and 24,4% of female directors among 78 natural science institutions from 25 different European countries (Fig. 2).

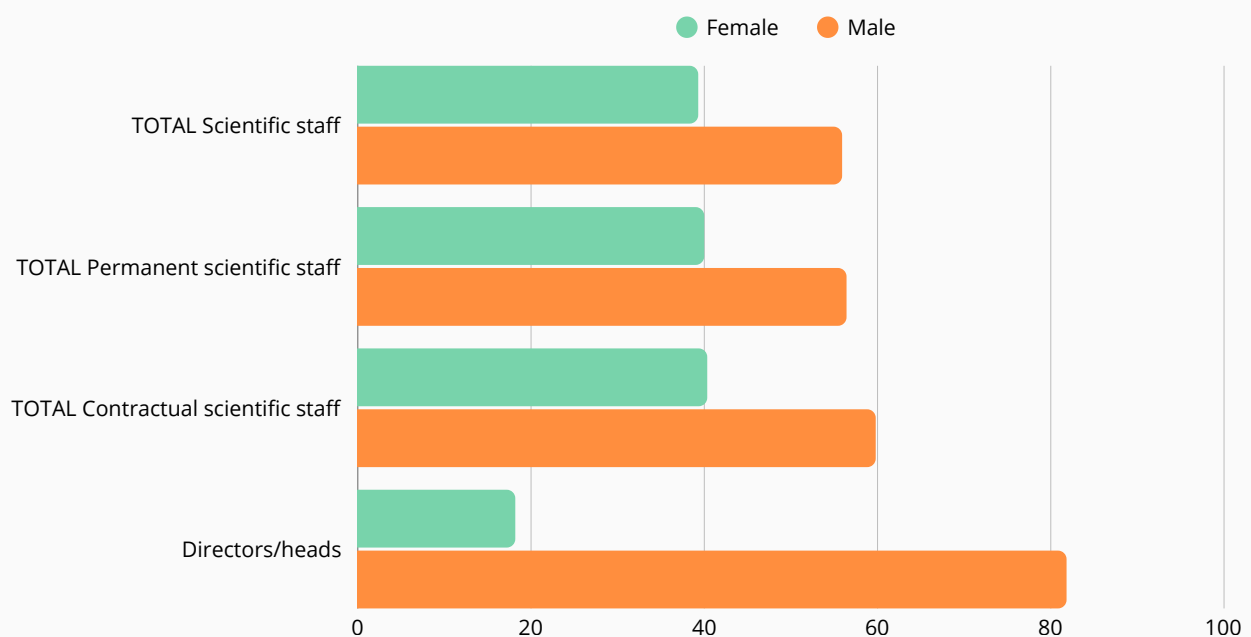


Figure 1. Visual representation of the gender survey conducted on institutions part of the TETTRIs consortium, with 18 female directors for 81 male directors.

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During TETTRIs, the evolution of gender awareness among the working teams and cascade grants beneficiaries show that promoting gender and diversity equality influenced the activities and outcomes of their project and that they adjusted their criteria and methods to reduce a gender gap initially present among the project consortium and participants.

## LESS VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION

Women taxonomists often receive less recognition for their work, face citation bias, and are underrepresented in naming rights for newly discovered species.

True equity in taxonomy begins when recognition and visibility become part of its everyday culture. For that, recognizing the achievements of women in taxonomy through dedicated awards and public recognition can help to make their contributions visible and valued.

TETTRIs has promoted International Women's days in science and International women's rights day (11th Feb and 8th March) with portraits of past and present female taxonomists on its project website and social media to raise awareness towards the general public, the scientific community and policy makers on the central role of women in taxonomic research (Fig. 4).

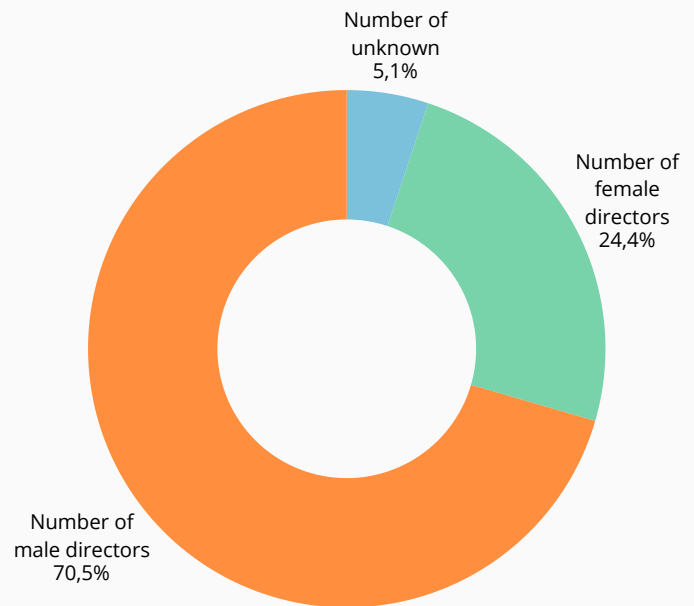


Figure 2. Sex of directors/heads of institutions members of CETAF, these were 78 institutions from 25 different countries.



Figure 4. TETTRIs Celebrates International Women's day 8th March 2026, a portrait of taxonomist Amelie Höcherl, from Naturkunde Museum Stuttgart. Source: @TETTRIs Social Media (Instagram).



## Case Study

### Female taxonomists and Nomenclature



Figure 5. The legacy of Alicia Lourteig. Argentinian botanist Alicia Lourteig (left) and the plant genus *Lourteigia* (right), which honors her contributions to science. Source: Wikipedia.

Scientific naming is more than taxonomy; it reflects who is recognised and remembered in science. Yet women remain largely invisible in nomenclatural history. Fewer than three per cent of land plant species have been named by women (Lindon et al. 2015), and only six per cent of plant genera named after people commemorate women, mostly from recent decades (von Mering et al. 2025). Traditional naming conventions, rooted in eighteenth-century norms that celebrated kings and male botanists, have excluded women and other marginalised groups.

Even today, women contribute to only about two per cent of generic authorships, as shown by recent analyses of the Rubiaceae family (Verstraete et al. 2025).

Institutions and journals should therefore adopt gender-sensitive and ethically aware naming guidelines, and promote the recognition of women's contributions, and encourage naming practices that prioritise clarity, inclusivity and scientific value. By rethinking how we name life, taxonomy can both honour diversity and improve the usefulness of its language.

### CAREER BARRIERS

#### **Limited access to fieldwork, training opportunities and mentorship disproportionately affects women's progression in taxonomy.**

The TETTRIs landscape analysis on taxonomic expertise's needs clearly showed that employers are looking for highly skilled taxonomists with strong translational and interdisciplinary skillsets. This need can only be met if these skills are also valued within the academic sector and by providing equal opportunities and fostering diversity in the new generations of taxonomists.

The promotion and development of TETTRIs courses took into consideration the gender equality and inclusion concepts. The asynchronous learning allowed everyone to attend at their own pace and time availability. The synchronous part of the courses were scheduled according to everyone's availability, taking into account family obligations, which become a more important barrier in the face to face part. To overcome this difficulty babies should be allowed to stay with their mothers or via an accompanying supporting person either in the field or the lab.

### CHALLENGING WORKPLACE CULTURE

#### **Structural gender bias, lack of supportive networks, and harassment continue to impede the retention of women in scientific careers.**

TETTRIs has acted as a supportive and inclusive network for women encouraging collaborations that give visibility to their leadership and expertise. It is promoting mentorship to help strengthen women's roles and confidence within the global taxonomy community. Female scientists are encouraged to turn to their national women in research network, or to the more recent International Network of Women in Natural History Museums and Collections, which most of the time is grouped under the umbrella of the European Platform of Women Scientists as the European voice for women in science. These networks provide guidelines, best practices and tailored events.

Source: Image from Getty Images



## Recommendations:

The TETTRIs Ethics & Gender Board and the partners recommend the following actions according to different levels from European to individual, several are already put in practice among the TETTRIs partner institutions:

### AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

- Introduce targeted scholarships, fellowships, and research grants for women in taxonomy.
- Encourage mentorship and internship programs through museums, botanical gardens, and research institutions, and in applied fields.
- Highlight the diversity of career perspectives in the field and provide diverse role models. Improve employability of graduates by including applied skills in academic taxonomic training.
- Provide and recognize training equipping women with additional strategic and leadership skills.
- Support women-led taxonomic societies and international collaborations.
- Fund travel and participation for women in conferences, workshops, and global biodiversity assessments.

### AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

- Training on assertiveness and on gender and unconscious biases at all hierarchical levels of the research institution.
- Implement measures to strengthen work/life balance.
- Promote gender disaggregated data to pinpoint areas where action should be taken.
- Open a position dedicated to gender equality implementation.
- Ensuring gender balance on editorial boards and in practices related to nomenclature can gradually shift long-standing biases in the field.
- Highlighting women's work in journals, exhibitions, and media tells a more complete story of taxonomy's history and future.

## Final Statement

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“Women are particularly underrepresented among heads of institutions, making up just 26%, while they represent 39% among the total number of board members at the EU level”<sup>2</sup>. The TETTRIs consortium has identified similar gender gaps at the highest positions of its institutions and has developed actions to address them, replicable to the whole taxonomic community.

TETTRIs gender and inclusion campaign has raised awareness among cascade grants beneficiaries from TETTRIs who implemented adjustments within the teams and participants to address gender gaps when identified at the beginning of the project. The TETTRIs project has enabled the creation of an Ethics and Gender Board dedicated to the communication and monitoring of the concepts of gender and inclusion placing them at the highest level of concern among the community.

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<sup>2</sup>Chapter 7, She Figures 2024

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Source: Image from Getty Images



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Catalogue of Life

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