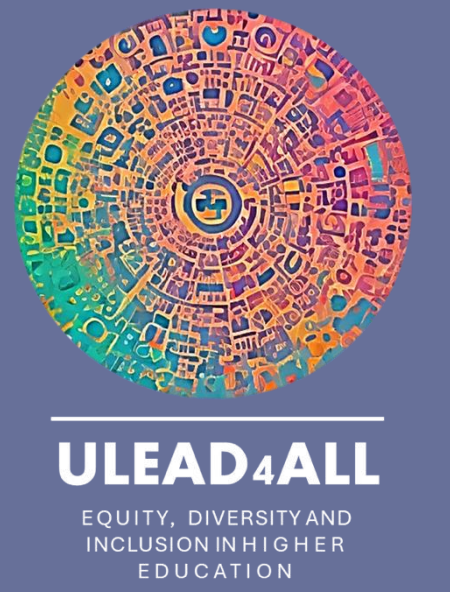


# Building the pipeline for EDI leadership in higher education institutions in Europe

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## INTRODUCTION

Equity diversity and inclusion (EDI) efforts in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe have made strides, particularly in widening access and advancing gender equality. However, leadership in HEIs remain predominantly occupied by white men<sup>1</sup>, undermining institutional EDI commitments and preventing a diverse leadership pipeline.

The Erasmus+ project ULEAD4ALL aims to foster more inclusive leadership within HEIs by empowering early- and mid-career academic and professional staff (“aspiring leaders”) from under-represented groups and training current leaders to become EDI changemakers.

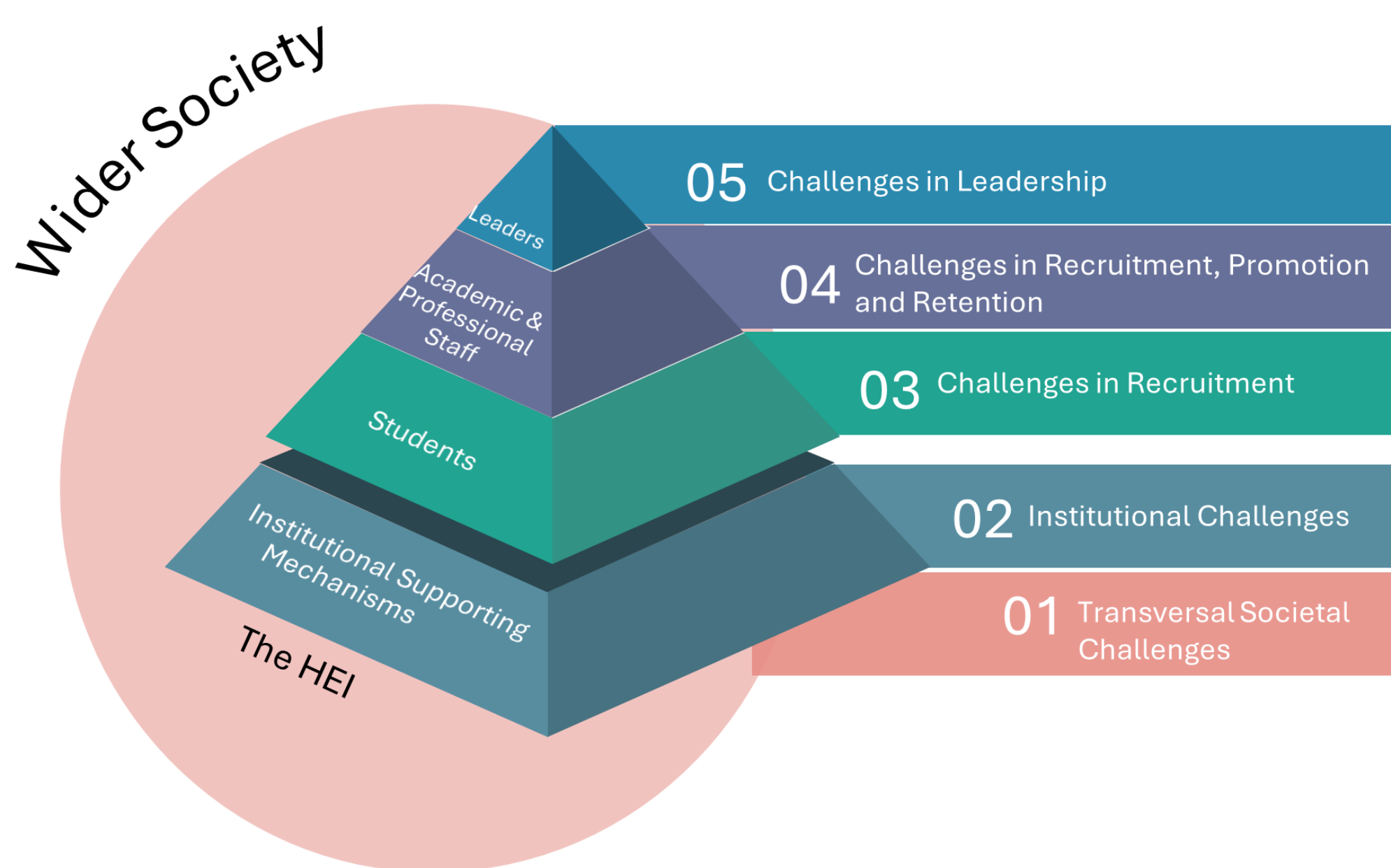
This research sought to:

- Identify the barriers to leadership for under-represented groups, and the leadership competencies required to embed EDI in HEIs
- Explore support mechanisms that enhance the progression of diverse talent into leadership.

## METHODS

We conducted **56** semi-structured qualitative interviews with current leaders of HEIs, aspiring leaders from under-represented groups, and experts in EDI and HE in:

- **18** different HEIs (private and public research universities, and UASs)
- **16** Organisations
- Across **10** countries (Austria, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, the UK, and the USA).



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## FINDINGS

Through this framework, we identified the key challenges and barriers that aspiring leaders face within HEIs across the pipeline to leadership:

### 1. Societal Challenges

Deep-rooted discrimination, coloniality and systemic biases perpetuate inequalities<sup>2</sup>. Misconceptions around EDI, where initiatives are seen as token efforts, and a lack of comprehensive EDI training exacerbate these issues.

*“Talent has nothing to do with social background, however, whether a student can materialise their talent has an awful lot to do with one’s social background”. - Vice Rector, Netherlands*

### 2. Institutional Challenges

HEIs often fail to embed EDI into their strategic goals<sup>3</sup>. This along with the lack of comprehensive data collection, and long-term funding and staff support also limits the success of EDI initiatives.

### 3. Recruitment, Retention, and Promotion:

Biases in recruitment and promotion practices, unequal distribution of care work, and unstable work contracts disproportionately affect under-represented groups.

*“The message we have been giving to women and other under-represented groups is ‘if you do not fit into the system, we will mould you to fit’. The effect is that some will become part of that [HEI] system but there are also many who will exit it because they don’t fit”. - EDI Interventionist, UK*

### 4. Leadership Commitment:

Effective EDI efforts rely heavily on leadership buy-in<sup>4</sup>. Resistance from current leaders and a lack of understanding of intersectionality hinder progress.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

By addressing these barriers holistically and focusing on the following areas, HEIs can build a leadership pipeline that reflects the diversity of the academic community:

- Embed long-term EDI **institutional strategies**
- Provide **leadership training** and mentorship opportunities
- Implement **targeted, data-informed supports** and interventions
- Adopt an **intersectional approach** to address the unique challenges faced by ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and other under-represented groups<sup>5</sup>

Read the full report here

