

How much is it worth?



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Research Visit

Centre for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

This is part of a trilogy of studies on transgender identities. The project is now in its second phase and includes an academic mobility year (2025–2026) as a visiting researcher at three major European institutions: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in Germany, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, and Scuola Normale Superiore, both in Italy.

The first phase, titled “Where Are These People?”, examined the social construction of gender identity among trans individuals—from inner self-perception to public self-declaration—as well as their entry into educational spaces, initial contact with formal education, and eventual access to higher education. This phase included in-depth interviews with 25 trans individuals across 17 European countries, generating over 30 hours of highly relevant qualitative data for studies in this field.

The current second phase, titled “How Much Is It Worth?”, aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of transgender individuals currently enrolled in European higher education institutions, as well as the institutional biases within universities, with the goal of identifying contemporary challenges in fostering gender diversity and inclusion in higher education.

Taking into account the realities surrounding transgender identities, this project includes a methodological proposal which seeks to position trans individuals as the protagonists of this study. It aims to highlight the challenges faced by these identities within higher education, while also addressing the policies implemented by higher education institutions to foster a democratic, safe, and inclusive learning environment.

The main objective of this research is to conduct an assessment of the academic reality experienced by trans individuals in European higher education. The study will analyse their experiences within these institutions in order to identify the obstacles encountered by this segment of the population, as well as the challenges faced by European higher education in ensuring human dignity through civic education.

Given the complexity, interdisciplinary nature, and holistic approach required to address gender diversity in European higher education, a mixed-methods research design will be employed. This will allow for the systematic, rigorous, and efficient collection of data in order to understand the experiences of trans individuals in higher education. On the qualitative level, in-depth interviews will be conducted, providing a platform for trans voices to be heard. On the quantitative level, a questionnaire-based survey will be distributed to European higher education institutions. This instrument will be previously validated through a Delphi Panel

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of experts. In addition, a documentary analysis of the strategic plans of higher education institutions will be carried out to assess their commitment to gender and diversity issues. Throughout the entire research process, ethical considerations will be strictly observed. These include traditional informed consent protocols, duly signed by participants, and the safeguarding of participants' feelings of safety and trust. The research project will also be subject to approval by the university's ethics committee.

This study therefore aims to contribute to the construction of a more inclusive educational system from the perspective of sexual and gender diversity within the current European context. It adopts an integral and interdisciplinary lens to identify diverse pathways toward inclusion and integration, also taking into account the intersectionality of various social markers accompanying gender identity. Through the application of a Multiple Case Study approach—which entails a detailed, thorough, systematic, and in-depth exploration of selected cases—this research will allow for a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of trans individuals in European higher education institutions. In doing so, it will provide insight into the current challenges faced by higher education and identify strategies to safeguard the fundamental rights and freedoms of trans individuals.

The selection criteria for the group of participants who will take part in the interview-survey will be exclusively based on the following: being of legal age, residing in a European country, current enrolment in a higher education programme, and self-identification as transgender. Accordingly, strategies will be developed to identify and invite transgender individuals from each EU member state who are interested in participating in the study. This process will involve collaboration with international organisations engaged in the advocacy and protection of trans rights, ensuring that contact is made with the utmost care and sensitivity to avoid intrusive approaches or uncomfortable situations for individuals whose experiences are often already marked by adversity.

Subsequently, the study will also seek to address institutional bias—this time through a quantitative lens—by designing a checklist-style questionnaire to be administered to European higher education institutions. The aim is to assess the current institutional policies

that promote inclusion, safety, and the welcoming of trans individuals within these educational settings. This data collection instrument will first undergo validation through a Delphi Panel composed of professionals specialising in scientific research methodology and in gender and sexuality studies. This methodological strategy aims to develop an effective data collection tool capable of fostering social transformation within learning environments. In this context, the selection of higher education institutions to complete the questionnaire will initially be based on the institutions in which the participating students are currently enrolled. The objective is to obtain at least one institutional response from each EU member state.

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Finally, a documentary analysis of the strategic plans of European higher education institutions will be carried out to examine their attention and commitment to diversity and gender issues. This will involve identifying references to gender diversity and equality, trans identities, gender perspectives more broadly, and issues related to sexuality.

The ultimate aim is to shed light on the current reality of European higher education in relation to these matters, in order to identify and propose solutions that safeguard the fundamental rights and freedoms of trans individuals through a democratic, inclusive, anti-bullying, and prejudice-free education system. Such a system should promote respect for diversity, social inclusion, and equal opportunities. The study thus seeks to demonstrate the urgent need for the implementation of educational policies that support the material realisation of equality for all individuals, respect for plurality and diversity, and the promotion of inclusion and acceptance of diverse subjectivities. This would entail the defence of the right to education and to human dignity, in pursuit of an accessible and lifelong education, ultimately contributing to the development of an inclusive citizenship.

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