EIC COMMUNITIES

INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

WOMEN'S HEALTH

PROMOTING WOMEN'S HEALTH R&I IN EUROPE'S LANDSCAPE

Despite significant progress in women's health research and policy, many areas remain underrepresented. Historical challenges continue to affect this field, including the under-representation of women in clinical trials, underinvestment by the pharmaceutical industry in conditions predominantly affecting women, and a disproportionate focus on specific cancers (such as breast cancer) to the detriment of other conditions.

This EIC Communities initiative explores why certain aspects of women's health remain deprioritised in research and innovation (R&I), bringing together stakeholders from research, industry, and start-ups to identify the main challenges and gaps.

This policy brief summarises the main outcomes of the EIC Communities Health Community of Practice, providing directions to strengthen Women's Health R&I ecosystem in Europe.

EVIDENCE AND METHODOLOGY

The brief draws on the outcomes of three co-creation workshops organised between April and June 2025 within the Health Community of Practice.

The sessions gathered 17 unique participants from 15 organisations across 8 European countries (Italy, Spain, Ireland, Sweden, France, Hungary, Switzerland and Germany). The group included representatives of seven EIC-funded projects (two Pathfinder, one Transition, four Accelerator) and additional stakeholders from academia, start-ups, and research institutions.

The process combined desk research and interactive Miro-based collaboration for ideation. These methods enabled participants to identify recommendations for strengthening Women's Health innovations in Europe.

KEYPOINTS

Main gaps identified: Awareness Gap, Data Gap, Funding Gap, Technical Gap, Regulatory Gap, Education Gap, and Societal Gap. Among these, the first three categories (Awareness, Data and Funding) were further explored.

Challenges cut across multiple dimensions, for instance, the lack of data about societal and economic impact of several women's health conditions limits their visibility among both civil society and the investment community.

One of the most critical and recurring challenges identified was the low participation of women in clinical trials. This leads to a lack of gender-specific data, which makes it much harder for startups to develop and validate effective solutions for women's health.

THE CHALLENGES



Women's Health remains underrepresented in Europe's R&I landscape due to data gaps, limited awareness, regulatory imbalances, and constrained funding pathways. Addressing these systemic barriers is vital to unlock innovation, improve clinical evidence, and support solutions that respond to long-standing health inequalities.

WHAT TO SOLVE

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN CLINICAL TRIALS

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION
Insufficient data on women, mainly due to their limited inclusion in clinical trials.	• Ensure representation of disease clinical prevalence in clinical trials through addition of appropriate requirement in the evaluation criteria / acceptance of clinical trials plan. • Launch a specific action call to close the women’s health data gap.

REGULATORY BARRIERS RELATED TO DATA

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION
Data-related regulatory constraints in Europe may create inequalities and hinder R&I. Companies in regions like the U.S. or China often face fewer limitations on data collection and processing. Meanwhile, wellness companies making health-adjacent claims are not subject to the same data-validation requirements as deeptech medtech startups	• Create a Breakthrough Device designation to speed up the regulatory and reimbursement processes.

QUANTIFYING THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF OVERLOOKED WOMEN'S HEALTH CONDITIONS

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION
Absence of studies measuring the economic burden affects multiple aspects of Women’s Health, particularly by limiting awareness among civil society, investors, and even the medical community.	• Fund projects to help understand the economic burden of these conditions, their impact in terms of productivity, and the financial benefits of women’s health, including investors.

INVESTOR'S FOCUS ON QUICK RETURN ON INVESTMENT

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION
Investors’ preference for rapid returns pressures innovators to show early traction and commercial results, which tends to favour consumer or wellness-oriented solutions over deeptech health innovations	• Review reimbursement mechanisms in women’s health. • Work with large VC firms to incentivise / create specific funds for Femtech startups progressing through clinical milestones on their way to the market.

WHAT TO SOLVE

DIFFICULTIES IN SECURING LEADING INVESTORS FOR BLENDED FINANCE

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION
Blended finance instruments that require innovators to secure a lead investor before accessing public funding are perceived as a barrier, especially in Women's Health, where investor awareness and confidence in the market remain low.	• Ensure representation of disease clinical prevalence in clinical trials through addition of appropriate requirement in the evaluation criteria / acceptance of clinical trials plan. • Launch a specific action call to close the women's health data gap.

LACK OF AWARENESS OF THE MARKET POTENTIAL

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION
Because the market potential is poorly understood, investors have limited visibility, creating an additional obstacle for founders seeking funding.	• Negotiate with Social Media Corporations to ensure that posts mentioning female anatomy/conditions are not removed. • Organise Women's Health EIC community event. This community may establish synergies with EU initiatives supporting Women Entrepreneurs / Investors. • Educate European project evaluators to be aware of Women's Health & leadership gaps.

LACK OF AWARENESS ABOUT WOMEN'S HEALTH CONDITIONS

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION
Lack of studies fuels low awareness of many women's health conditions. Issues such as fertility, menstrual health, and menopause are still not treated globally as major public health priorities, limiting visibility even among women themselves - particularly younger generations.	• Understand why some awareness campaigns are not as impactful as expected. Create actionable KPIs to monitor future new campaigns. • Attract male professionals / advocators of women's health to act as ambassadors and promote the relevance, potential and impact of Women's Health.

GAP BETWEEN EARLY-STAGE FUNDING AND ACCESS TO LATER-STAGE VENTURE CAPITAL

CHALLENGE	RECOMMENDATION
The gap between early-stage funding and venture capital - combined with differing criteria at each stage - creates a void that makes it difficult for high-potential solutions to progress towards system-level impact.	• Implement matchmaking events between projects and selected investors and sponsors. • Integrate femtech among the topics for the co-investment platform. • Design specific calls for women's health, with a specific, dedicated budget and not competing with general calls. Eligibility and selection criteria should also be refined and made more flexible.

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