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Achieve CCS

Ambitious Careers and Holistic Innovation for

Empowering Women in CCS

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of Work Package 2 (WP2) of the ACHIEVE CCS Erasmus+ project, which investigates how emerging technologies are reshaping gender equality and diversity in the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS). Through a combination of secondary research and primary data collection—including surveys of 100 young women and 30 in-depth interviews—the report provides a comprehensive overview of the barriers women face and the opportunities technology presents.

Despite recent progress, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions across all five participating countries—France, Greece, Ireland, Türkiye, and Ukraine. Gender pay gaps persist, ranging from 15% to over 40% depending on the sector and country, and women continue to face challenges in securing public funding and financial support for creative projects.

The research shows that while emerging technologies such as AI, VR/AR, blockchain, and digital media offer new pathways for visibility, entrepreneurship, and flexible work, they also reinforce existing inequalities. Women are underrepresented in tech-driven CCS roles, face algorithmic bias, and have limited access to digital training and venture funding.

However, the report also highlights promising practices, including women-led innovation in digital heritage, immersive theatre, and online creative platforms. Women are using digital tools to bypass traditional gatekeepers, crowdfund projects, and build international audiences.

The report concludes with a set of actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and CCS stakeholders, including:

- **Increasing funding for women-led projects and startups;**
- **Expanding digital and AI training for women in CCS;**
- **Promoting inclusive leadership and gender-balanced hiring practices;**
- **Developing mentorship programs and women-led creative networks;**
- **Ensuring ethical AI use and equitable algorithmic design in CCS platforms.**

By translating these research insights into policy and practice, the ACHIEVE CCS project contributes to a more inclusive, innovative, and equitable Cultural and Creative Sector in Europe.

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Introduction

Overview of the ACHIEVE CCS Project

The ACHIEVE CCS project explores the intersection of gender equality, diversity, and technology within the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS). Despite the sector's economic and cultural significance, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, face financial and structural barriers, and have limited access to emerging technologies. This report presents findings from secondary and primary research, offering insights into these challenges and opportunities.

This study analyzes the role of emerging technologies in shaping gender inclusivity in CCS, identifying key trends, best practices, and policy recommendations to enhance equitable opportunities. It also lays the foundation for practical implementation in WP3: Academy for Women in CCS, including training, networking, and career support activities designed to equip women in CCS with the necessary digital and entrepreneurial skills and support them through industry insights and professional networks.

This report will inform a policy brief aimed at policymakers, educators, and CCS professionals, ensuring research-based strategies effectively promote gender equality and diversity in the industry.

Methodology in WP2

The research methodology for WP2 was designed collaboratively by the ACHIEVE CCS consortium to ensure a rigorous and systematic approach. It combined secondary research, reviewing academic articles, policy reports, and industry documents, with primary research consisting of surveys completed by 100 women aged 18–24 and 30 in-depth interviews with CCS professionals across five countries (Greece, France, Ireland, Türkiye, and Ukraine). Secondary research provided foundational context and identified structural inequalities, while the primary research validated and deepened these insights through lived experiences. Data analysis, led by IED and CulturePolis, involved qualitative coding and statistical analysis, with visual tools (charts, tables) used to illustrate findings. The methodology was guided by a shared template, APA referencing standards, and quality control procedures led by CBE, ensuring consistency, validity, and relevance to the project's broader objectives, including the Academy and Policy Brief developed in subsequent work packages. While the primary research exclusively targeted women aged 18–30, the secondary research drew on broader data sets covering women in CCS in general. As such, any comparisons made between the two data sets aim to contextualize the lived experiences of young women within wider sectoral patterns, rather than to establish direct statistical equivalence.

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Connection Between WP2 & WP3

The Final Research Report (WP2) serves as a foundation for WP3: Academy for Women in CCS, ensuring that the research findings directly inform the training and networking and career support activities. The connection between these two work packages ensures that insights from the research phase translate into practical interventions to support women in CCS.

- WP2: Research & Data Collection
    - Conducts secondary research on gender inequalities and technological trends in CCS.
    - Gathers primary research data through surveys and interviews with 120+ stakeholders.
    - Identifies challenges, best practices, and key opportunities for gender inclusion in CCS.
- WP3: Training, Networking & Implementation
    - Uses WP2 findings to develop a structured training program focused on digital skills, leadership, and entrepreneurship.
    - Implements networking and career support activities to connect women in CCS with experienced professionals for guidance, industry insights, and career advancement.
    - Provides real-world applications of research findings, ensuring women receive practical tools to overcome barriers in CCS.

The findings from WP2 do not remain theoretical; they actively shape the curriculum, networking framework, and networking opportunities in WP3. By bridging research with action, ACHIEVE CCS ensures that the insights gained are transformed into effective policies, training, and support systems for long-term gender equity in CCS.

Purpose & Impact of the Final Report

This Final Report is a key output of WP2, designed to inform policy, training, and strategic decision-making within the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS). By consolidating research findings, it provides a data-driven foundation for improving gender equality and diversity through technological advancements.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Analyze gender inequalities in CCS and assess how technological advancements impact women's participation in the sector.
- Identify best practices and successful initiatives that promote gender equality and inclusion.

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- Develop concrete policy recommendations to guide decision-makers, educators, and industry leaders in fostering a more inclusive CCS.
- Support the design and implementation of WP3: Academy for Women in CCS, ensuring that training and networking activities align with identified needs and opportunities.

The impact of this report extends beyond research documentation. It serves as a practical tool for action. It will contribute to:

- The development of a policy brief, ensuring research findings are translated into targeted strategies for policymakers.
- The structuring of training programs, helping educators and professionals integrate digital skills and leadership development into CCS education.
- The enhancement of industry practices, by promoting gender-inclusive funding, hiring, and innovation strategies.
- Long-term sustainability efforts, ensuring that the project's outcomes inform future initiatives and drive systemic change in CCS.

By bridging research with implementation, this report ensures that ACHIEVE CCS not only identifies barriers but actively contributes to removing them, creating a more equitable and inclusive future for women in CCS.

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Glossary of Key Terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

A branch of computer science that enables machines to simulate human intelligence, including tasks like language processing, image recognition, and creative generation (e.g., music, art). In CCS, AI tools are increasingly used in content creation, curation, and recommendation systems, but often reflect gender and cultural biases embedded in their training data.

Algorithmic Bias

Systematic errors in AI or data-driven systems that result in unfair treatment of certain groups. In CCS, this can lead to reduced visibility of women's content on streaming or recommendation platforms, reinforcing existing inequalities.

Algorithmic Visibility

The extent to which content is surfaced or promoted by algorithms on digital platforms (e.g., streaming, social media). Women's work is often deprioritized due to algorithmic bias or lack of engagement with platform-specific trends.

Augmented Reality (AR)

A technology that overlays digital content (images, sounds, information) onto the real world, typically through mobile devices or headsets. AR is used in exhibitions, fashion, and interactive storytelling within CCS.

Blockchain

A decentralized, tamper-proof digital ledger used for storing transactions. In CCS, it enables direct ownership, sales, and royalties of digital works (e.g., through NFTs), but women remain underrepresented in blockchain development and adoption.

Creative Entrepreneurship

A business approach that combines artistic expression with innovation and sustainable business models. It is an essential skill set for women in CCS to navigate freelance work, crowdfunding, e-commerce, and self-branding in digital spaces.

Creative Technologies

Tools and digital systems—such as AI, VR, blockchain, and interactive media—used to produce or enhance cultural and artistic works. These technologies are increasingly central to CCS innovation and are reshaping access, production, and visibility.

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Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS)

Encompasses industries that involve the creation, production, and distribution of cultural goods and services, including music, film, visual arts, theatre, literature, architecture, design, gaming, and more. CCS plays a vital role in cultural identity, education, and the economy.

Digital Cultural Work

Creative labor that takes place within or depends on digital environments (e.g., online content creation, digital design, social media art). It is often freelance-based and informal, making women in CCS vulnerable to exploitation.

Digital Divide

The unequal access to digital tools, skills, and infrastructure based on factors such as gender, location, socioeconomic status, or disability. WP2 findings highlight that women in CCS—especially in Türkiye, Greece, and Ukraine—often face digital exclusion.

Digital Literacy

The ability to effectively use digital tools and platforms for creative, professional, and social purposes. In CCS, digital literacy includes familiarity with software, hardware, and online distribution, and is a prerequisite for digital participation and innovation.

Digital Self-Publishing

The practice of distributing creative work—such as music, writing, or visual art—through digital platforms without traditional intermediaries. It enables visibility and income for women in CCS, particularly those excluded from mainstream institutions.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

A framework for creating fair and inclusive environments. In CCS, DEI includes equitable access to funding, leadership, and representation for women, LGBTQIA+ people, and marginalized cultural communities.

Ethical AI

Artificial intelligence systems developed with transparency, fairness, and accountability in mind. In CCS, ethical AI practices help reduce algorithmic bias and ensure diverse representation in cultural outputs.

Freelance Precarity

Unstable and irregular employment conditions experienced by freelancers, who often lack benefits, job security, and consistent income. Women in CCS are disproportionately affected, particularly in underfunded or highly competitive fields.

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Gatekeeping

The process by which certain individuals or institutions control access to opportunities, resources, or platforms, often influencing who is included or excluded in a given field.

Gender Pay Gap

The difference in average earnings between men and women in the workforce, often expressed as a percentage. In CCS, the gender pay gap is influenced by factors such as freelance work, underrepresentation in high-paying roles, and systemic undervaluation of women-led creative output.

Inclusive Design

The process of designing products, services, or experiences that are accessible and usable by as many people as possible, regardless of ability, background, or identity. In digital CCS, this includes multilingual tools, visual accessibility, and gender-responsive platforms.

Intersectionality

A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how different forms of discrimination (e.g., based on gender, race, class, sexuality) overlap and compound. In CCS, intersectionality helps highlight how marginalized women face layered barriers in access and recognition.

Mentorship

A professional relationship in which experienced individuals support the personal and career development of emerging professionals. Women in CCS often report a lack of access to mentorship, which WP3 aims to address.

Non-Fungible Token (NFT)

A unique digital certificate stored on a blockchain, representing ownership of a digital asset such as an artwork, music piece, or video. NFTs offer creators new revenue streams, but are also associated with technical barriers and speculative markets.

Platform Economy

An economic system in which digital platforms facilitate the exchange of goods, services, and creative content. In CCS, women often engage with the platform economy through freelance work, self-publishing, and online performances, but face precarity and algorithmic challenges.

STEAM Education

An educational approach integrating Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics. WP3 promotes STEAM education for women in CCS to bridge the gender gap in tech-creative fields.

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Virtual Reality (VR)

A simulated 3D environment that users can interact with through headsets or other devices. VR is used in museums, film, performance, and education. Women are underrepresented in VR content creation and technical development roles.

1.Research Findings from WP2: Secondary & Primary Research

1.1 Secondary Research Summary

The secondary research component of WP2 provides an in-depth analysis of structural gender inequalities, technological trends, and sector-specific challenges in the CCS across five participating countries: France, Greece, Ireland, Türkiye, and Ukraine. Drawing from sources including academic studies, policy documents, national statistics, and EU reports, this analysis highlights persistent disparities and emerging opportunities for women in CCS — with a particular focus on young women aged 18–30, who are the core target group of the ACHIEVE CCS project.

1.1.1 Gender Inequality in CCS

Despite progress in gender inclusivity, systemic inequalities persist across all five participating countries. Women continue to face barriers in leadership, financial access, wages, and digital upskilling, which limit their professional advancement and creative independence.

Underrepresentation in Leadership

Women in the CCS continue to face systemic barriers in accessing leadership roles across all participating countries. Despite their high levels of participation in cultural employment, they remain severely underrepresented in decision-making positions due to structural biases, unequal hiring practices, and financial limitations. The research findings confirm that gender-based leadership inequalities persist in both public and private CCS institutions, affecting women's ability to influence policies, funding allocations, and sectoral innovation.

In France, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles despite being the majority of the cultural sector students. According to data from the French Ministry of Culture, only 15% of CEOs or presidents of the top 100 private cultural companies were women, highlighting the glass ceiling in executive roles. While women lead 65% of national museums and three out of five public media companies, they are vastly underrepresented in performing arts leadership, with only one woman for every eight men in public theatre management. These statistics suggest that while some progress has been made in the public sector, gender inequalities remain entrenched in private CCS leadership.

In Ireland, research findings indicate that male-dominated executive boards and hiring biases continue to limit women's leadership prospects. State-funded cultural institutions and creative

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funding bodies show a particular gender imbalance, with most executive roles being held by men. Women are well-represented in mid-level management, but they rarely progress to senior decision-making positions, leading to persistent gender gaps in funding allocations and policy development.

In Greece, women represent a substantial portion of the CCS workforce, yet they remain largely absent from top-level decision-making roles. The primary research identifies structural hiring biases as a major barrier, where male-dominated professional networks dictate hiring and promotion processes, particularly in arts management, digital CCS roles, and performing arts administration. Women in leadership roles also report limited decision-making power and restricted access to financial resources, which hinders their career sustainability.

In Türkiye, entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities remain particularly challenging for women in CCS. Primary research data reveals that only 828 women were registered as self-employed in CCS in 2019, compared to a significantly higher number of male entrepreneurs. Women report greater difficulties securing business loans, industry networks, and investment opportunities, which limits their ability to establish independent creative enterprises or assume leadership roles.

In Ukraine, the gender imbalance in leadership is particularly visible in tech-driven CCS sectors. While 22% of the workforce in digital CCS roles are women, less than 30% hold managerial positions, limiting their access to high-profile projects, leadership development programs, and international collaborations. The ongoing war has further disrupted women's career trajectories, forcing many female CCS professionals to shift to freelance work or informal employment, reducing their chances of securing long-term executive roles.

The questionnaire report further reinforces these findings, highlighting that the majority of women surveyed perceive the lack of female leadership as one of the most significant gender gaps in CCS. Many respondents noted that male-dominated hiring practices, lack of access to leadership mentorship, and exclusion from decision-making processes discourage women from pursuing executive roles.

Gender Pay Gap in CCS

Across all participating countries, data from cultural institutions, government reports, and stakeholder interviews confirm that women earn between 15-41% less than their male counterparts, depending on the specific CCS sector and job category.

In France, the French Ministry of Culture reports that women earn, on average, 20% less than men in cultural fields. The wage gap is particularly severe in the live performance sector, where female professionals receive 41% less in author royalties compared to their male counterparts. The disparity also extends to architecture, where women earn 32% less than men, reflecting broader economic inequalities within CCS.

In Ireland, wage inequalities in CCS are significantly shaped by the freelance nature of the sector. The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) reports that female creatives are paid considerably less than men, particularly in film, music, and visual arts. The pay gap is exacerbated

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by the contract-based employment structure of CCS, making it difficult for women to negotiate competitive wages. Many female professionals struggle with job precarity, which further reduces their long-term earning potential.

In Greece, women in CCS earn approximately 15-20% less than men, according to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT). This gap adds to financial insecurity for women in CCS, especially given that the sector is dominated by freelance and project-based work. Wage inequalities limit women's ability to secure leadership positions and long-term economic stability, reinforcing financial dependence on short-term contracts.

In Türkiye, women in CCS earn significantly lower salaries than men, particularly in creative industries such as publishing, film, and performing arts. The primary research findings indicate that gendered expectations and limited negotiation opportunities contribute to lower earnings for women. Many women struggle to access high-paying roles, as male-dominated hiring processes favor men for senior creative and managerial positions.

In Ukraine, the gender pay gap is particularly evident in digital CCS sectors, such as video game development, creative tech, and digital arts. Women are often relegated to lower-paying administrative and marketing roles, while men occupy higher-paying technical positions, such as directors and producers. The ongoing war has exacerbated financial instability for women in CCS, with many female professionals shifting to freelance work with fewer financial protections.

The gender pay gap in the CCS is due to multiple structural and economic factors, which collectively limit women's economic opportunities and career development. One of the key factors is the prevalence of freelance and short-term contracts, which dominate the employment structures of the KPI. Reliance on contract work reduces wage transparency, making it difficult for women to negotiate wages or secure stable, long-term economic agreements. Many women professionals report that unclear wage structures and lack of formal employment protection make them vulnerable to lower wages and inconsistent income streams.

Another important factor is the under-representation of women in high-paying leadership roles. Across all CCS sectors, women are less likely to hold managerial positions, which limits their access to higher salaries and career development opportunities. Since managerial and leadership positions often come with greater financial incentives, bonuses and access to decision-making networks, the absence of women in these roles directly contributes to the widening of the pay gap. Women who succeed in entering leadership often face additional barriers, including gender bias in promotion processes and the unequal distribution of financial resources within the creative industries.

Gender biases in funding and recruitment practices further exacerbate pay inequalities. Male professionals are more likely to receive high-profile commissions, sponsorships and production funding, which in turn increases their earnings over time. Women, on the other hand, often struggle to secure the same level of financial support, which leads to a systematic disadvantage in terms of project funding and recognition. Excluding women from significant funding opportunities not only affects their immediate earnings, but also limits their long-term financial stability within the CCS.

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Furthermore, the unequal distribution of financial rewards from creative ownership models contributes to economic inequalities between men and women in CCS. Male artists, filmmakers, writers and performers tend to receive higher compensation from royalties, licensing agreements and intellectual property rights, while women face more barriers to securing fair contracts. This imbalance is particularly evident in industries such as publishing, music and film, where male creators often dominate high-revenue markets, leaving women with fewer profits and less financial control over their work.

Economic Impact of Wage Inequality on Women in CCS

The long-term economic impact of wage inequality in the CCS is significant, affecting women's economic independence and career sustainability. One of the most pressing consequences is lower lifetime earnings, which reduces financial security and limits women's ability to invest in their career development. Women in CCS often report that lower earnings during their careers force them to take on additional jobs or accept unstable work arrangements, further exacerbating economic instability.

Economic insecurity is another important consequence of wage inequalities in the CCSs, especially due to the high prevalence of free labour. Women are often forced to rely on short-term contracts, project-based employment and gigs, making it difficult to plan for long-term economic stability. Unlike salaried positions, freelance roles do not always offer benefits such as health insurance, paid leave or pension contributions, leaving women in the CCS more financially vulnerable over time.

In addition, limited access to pension benefits and financial security in later years remains a significant challenge for women in CCS. Because many women creators do not receive employer-sponsored pension plans, they are less likely to accumulate long-term savings for retirement. The absence of stable income and financial protection means that many women in CCS must continue to work into their later years, further highlighting the long-term consequences of gender-based wage inequalities.

Inequalities in public funding of CCS

Public funding plays a critical role in supporting creative professionals, yet women-led projects in the CCS continue to receive disproportionately lower financial support compared to their male counterparts. Research from multiple countries confirms that gender biases in funding allocation persist, limiting women’s ability to develop, sustain, and scale their creative initiatives.

In France, gender imbalances in public funding remain particularly visible in the performing arts and literary sectors. Reports from the French Ministry of Culture indicate that women receive 50% less financial support in theatre and 30% less in literary funding. Despite representing a significant proportion of cultural professionals, female artists and cultural entrepreneurs struggle to access large-scale grants, reinforcing financial barriers that limit their growth and visibility within CCS. The structural gender gap in grant distribution and institutional support highlights the need for more inclusive funding policies that actively promote women-led projects.

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In Ireland, a similar pattern emerges, where historically, men dominated the distribution of public arts and media funding. While recent policies by Screen Ireland and other cultural funding bodies have sought to address gender imbalances, female creatives still struggle to secure equal financial backing in film, theatre, and visual arts. The primary research suggests that many female-led CCS initiatives remain underfunded, despite evidence of their significant contributions to cultural innovation and representation. Persistent gaps in grant accessibility and evaluation criteria continue to disadvantage women, making it harder for female creatives to establish long-term, financially stable careers.

In Greece, public arts funding structures also reveal deep-rooted gender inequalities, particularly in the film and audiovisual sector. According to data from Creative Europe Greece, only 25% of publicly funded film grants go to women-led projects, highlighting a significant imbalance in cultural resource allocation. Interviews from the primary research report reinforce this finding, with many women in CCS expressing frustration over exclusion from key funding mechanisms. The limited representation of women in cultural policy-making roles further exacerbates this issue, as funding decisions often fail to consider gender equity as a critical factor in grant distribution.

In Türkiye, access to public funding for women in CCS remains one of the most challenging aspects of gender disparity in the sector. Reports indicate that many women-led CCS projects are unable to secure public grants due to bureaucratic and institutional biases that favor male-dominated creative enterprises. Stakeholder interviews suggest that many women working in CCS struggle to navigate the complex funding application process, which lacks clear guidelines on gender equality in grant allocation. As a result, female creatives often resort to self-financing or smaller-scale projects, limiting their growth potential and financial sustainability.

In Ukraine, the war and economic instability have further deepened funding inequalities for women-led CCS projects. While many women have been active in using CCS to support social cohesion, trauma recovery, and gender equity, their initiatives often receive lower financial support compared to male-led, commercially driven CCS enterprises. Despite increasing recognition of the role of CCS in post-war cultural resilience, female-led projects still face systemic barriers in securing both national and international grants. Many women in CCS report difficulties in obtaining financial assistance for rebuilding cultural institutions, sustaining creative businesses, and accessing new market opportunities, further limiting their economic stability.

Across all participating countries, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles within cultural funding bodies further reinforces biases in grant distribution. The absence of gender-sensitive evaluation criteria in many funding programs means that women-led initiatives are often overlooked or categorized as niche projects, rather than mainstream cultural contributions. This leads to a cycle where female creators receive less financial support, resulting in fewer large-scale productions, reduced cultural visibility and limited opportunities for influence across the sector.

Sector-specific insights

Women in the CCS face persistent gender inequalities across multiple sub-sectors, including film, music, visual arts, digital media, and creative entrepreneurship. Research findings confirm that

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women are underrepresented in leadership roles, experience pay gaps, and face limited access to resources and recognition within these industries.

The **film industry** remains one of the most gender-imbalanced sectors in CCS, with women underrepresented in key creative and technical roles. According to a 2023 report by the European Audiovisual Observatory, only 26% of feature film directors in Europe between 2018 and 2022 were women. The inequalities are even greater in cinematography and music composition, where women represent just 11% and 10% of professionals, respectively. While progress has been made in producing (35% women) and screenwriting (29% women), systemic barriers continue to limit women's advancement in film production and executive roles. Women tend to work more frequently in teams and occupy supporting rather than leading roles, reinforcing structural biases in the industry.

The **music** industry also exhibits severe gender inequalities, particularly in composition, production, and leadership positions. According to the Be the Change: Gender Equality in Music Report (2023), women make up less than 20% of registered composers and songwriters in Europe. The gender pay gap remains substantial, with female musicians earning approximately 30% less than their male counterparts. One of the most striking inequalities in the sector is in music production, where women constitute just 2.6% of all producers. Additionally, 34% of women and 43% of non-binary individuals working in the music industry report experiencing workplace harassment, further limiting women's access to career advancement, training, and leadership roles. Despite these barriers, gender equity initiatives like Keychange—signed by over 650 music festivals and organizations worldwide—are actively working to increase female representation. There has been some progress, with women and non-binary individuals now holding 52% of board seats across 11 UK music industry trade bodies, up from 32% in 2020.

Gender inequalities in **visual arts** are particularly visible in the representation of female artists in galleries and exhibitions. Data from the National Museum of Women in the Arts (2019) shows that artwork by female artists constitutes only 3-5% of major permanent collections across Europe and the United States. Additionally, women are less likely to be represented by galleries, with only 13.7% of living artists in European and North American galleries being women. This underrepresentation directly affects women's visibility, market value, and access to funding opportunities. The limited exhibition opportunities for female artists mean that their works are undervalued in the global art market, reinforcing economic inequalities.

The **digital media and creative technology** sector remains highly gender-imbalanced, with women significantly underrepresented in leadership and technical roles. According to the European Commission's Women in Digital Report, women make up only 17% of the ICT sector in Europe, with even fewer women in senior executive roles. Women are particularly underrepresented in AI development, gaming, cybersecurity, and digital media production. Structural barriers, including gender bias in algorithmic content distribution, lack of mentorship, and exclusion from tech-based funding programs, further limit their participation. Studies show that women-led digital media companies receive significantly less venture capital than male-led enterprises, reinforcing economic disparities in technology-driven CCS sectors.

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Women-led **creative businesses** face greater financial barriers, fewer funding opportunities, and challenges in scaling their enterprises. Across Europe, female entrepreneurs in CCS receive less venture capital, fewer business development opportunities, and less visibility in high-profile industry events.

In France, only 28% of publicly funded film projects in 2021 were directed by women, highlighting funding biases against female-led productions. In Ireland, female-led projects in theatre, visual arts, and media struggle to obtain grants and sponsorships despite recent policy initiatives to improve gender inclusion in funding. In Greece, gender disparities in cultural entrepreneurship funding limit women's access to business growth and networking opportunities, forcing many to rely on self-funding or small-scale investments.

Women entrepreneurs in CCS also face systemic challenges in marketing their work, as male-led creative businesses tend to receive higher sponsorship and advertising investments.

1.1.2 Technological Trends in CCS

The CCS is experiencing a rapid transformation driven by emerging digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), blockchain and digital media platforms. While these developments offer new opportunities for women, they also reinforce existing gender inequalities by limiting women's access to technology-based roles, finance and digital upgrading.

AI in CCS: Automating Creativity & Reinforcing Biases

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing CCS by automating creative processes, audience analytics, and content distribution. AI-powered tools enable artists to generate music, art, and digital content, expanding creative possibilities. Platforms like RunwayML allow for AI-assisted digital artwork creation, while Amper Music uses AI to compose original music tracks.

However, AI also introduces gender-based biases that put women at a disadvantage in the CCS. Alan Turing Institute research shows that AI-based recommendation algorithms in music and video streaming platforms favour male creators, resulting in less visibility for female artists and creators. These biases extend to hiring processes, where AI-powered hiring tools often reinforce historical data that disadvantage women in creative technology roles. Moreover, women in AI-related CCS careers face substantial underrepresentation and wage disparities. According to the World Economic Forum, women hold less than 25% of technology-related roles globally, with even fewer employed in AI-driven creative industries. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) reports that women in AI and digital CCS earn 14.1% less than men on average, making it difficult for them to achieve financial stability in these fields.

VR/AR: Expanding Creative Expression & Gender Barriers

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are transforming CCS by offering immersive storytelling and interactive experiences. Museums, galleries, and theaters are increasingly adopting VR technology to create virtual exhibitions, making cultural experiences more accessible. Meanwhile, AR is revolutionizing sectors like fashion and gaming, providing users

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with interactive digital overlays. Despite these innovations, women remain severely underrepresented in VR/AR development. Female participation in VR and AR design is significantly lower than in other digital fields, limiting their ability to shape the future of immersive content. Gender biases also exist in VR/AR funding, with investors more likely to support male-led virtual reality startups and gaming companies. This funding gap results in fewer women being able to establish successful careers in VR/AR-focused CCS sectors.

Blockchain & NFTs: Financial Opportunities & Gender Exclusion

Blockchain technology and Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) have disrupted CCS by decentralizing ownership and providing new financial opportunities for artists. Female creatives now have the ability to sell their digital work directly to buyers via platforms like OpenSea and Rarible, bypassing traditional gatekeepers such as galleries and publishers. Smart contracts ensure that artists receive royalties from resale transactions, empowering them with long-term revenue streams. However, women remain underrepresented in blockchain-driven CCS markets. Studies reveal that less than 16% of blockchain participants are women, limiting their ability to capitalize on emerging financial models. Additionally, the high volatility of the NFT market and the dominance of male investors make it difficult for female artists to secure financial stability in the digital art space.

Digital Media: Democratizing Access & Reinforcing Gender Gaps

The rise of digital platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and Instagram has democratized access to global markets, allowing women to distribute creative work independently. Digital tools enable female artists, musicians, and filmmakers to engage directly with audiences, reducing reliance on traditional industry gatekeepers. However, despite increased accessibility, gender inequalities persist in digital media industries. Women receive less financial compensation from digital distribution platforms due to algorithmic biases that prioritize male-led content. Additionally, female digital entrepreneurs struggle to secure investment for digital media ventures, limiting their ability to scale creative businesses.

1.1.3 Gender Inequalities in CCS & The Need for Systemic Change

The CCS remains a space of both opportunity and inequality for women, with persistent gender gaps in leadership, funding, wages, and digital access. Despite efforts to improve inclusivity, systemic barriers continue to limit women's participation in decision-making roles and financial independence.

Across all five participating countries, the research has identified several key areas where gender disparities persist. Women remain underrepresented in CCS leadership, facing hiring biases, exclusion from decision-making bodies, and limited career progression pathways. Wage gaps are evident across multiple CCS sub-sectors, with women earning between 15-41% less than men, depending on their role and country. In public and private funding structures, female-led creative projects receive significantly less financial support, reinforcing financial inequalities in CCS.

Technology presents both opportunities and challenges for gender equity in CCS. While AI, blockchain, and digital media platforms enable women to work independently and reach global

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markets, they also reinforce existing inequalities through algorithmic biases, underrepresentation in tech-based CCS roles, and financial exclusion from blockchain-driven industries. Without targeted policies and interventions, women risk being further marginalized in emerging digital CCS fields.

These findings demonstrate the urgent need for systemic change in CCS governance, funding mechanisms, and digital inclusion strategies.

1.2 Primary Research Summary (Surveys & Interviews)

The primary research component of WP2 provides firsthand insights into the lived experiences of women in CCS, gathered through 100 survey responses and 30 in-depth interviews with CCS professionals across Greece, France, Ireland, Ukraine, and Türkiye. These findings complement the secondary research by highlighting the personal experiences, challenges, and opportunities identified directly by female professionals in CCS. These findings complement the secondary research by highlighting personal experiences, challenges, and opportunities identified directly by female professionals in CCS.

1.2.1 Survey Insights: Women in CCS

The survey responses reveal both the opportunities and persistent barriers women face in CCS, particularly in areas such as employment, digital skills, leadership, and financial access.

Current Roles in CCS

Women in CCS engage in a variety of creative and educational roles, with the majority working as artists (40%), educators (35%), and other creative professionals (25%). This diversity in roles highlights the multifaceted nature of women's contributions to CCS but also underscores barriers to career stability and financial sustainability.

Use of Emerging Technologies

The survey explored women's engagement with emerging technologies and found that:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the most widely used technology among respondents (34%), supporting automation in design, music production, and digital content creation.
- Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) (22%) are gaining popularity, particularly in interactive storytelling and digital exhibitions.
- 3D Printing & Digital Fabrication (15%) are emerging as essential tools for prototyping and product design.
- Blockchain Technologies (5%) are still in the early adoption phase but hold potential for digital ownership and intellectual property protection.

These findings suggest that while women in CCS are engaging with technology, barriers such as digital training gaps and financial constraints limit their full participation.

While technology has been widely adopted, survey responses highlight barriers, such as digital training gaps, financial constraints and lack of access to advanced tools, that limit women's full participation in CCS.

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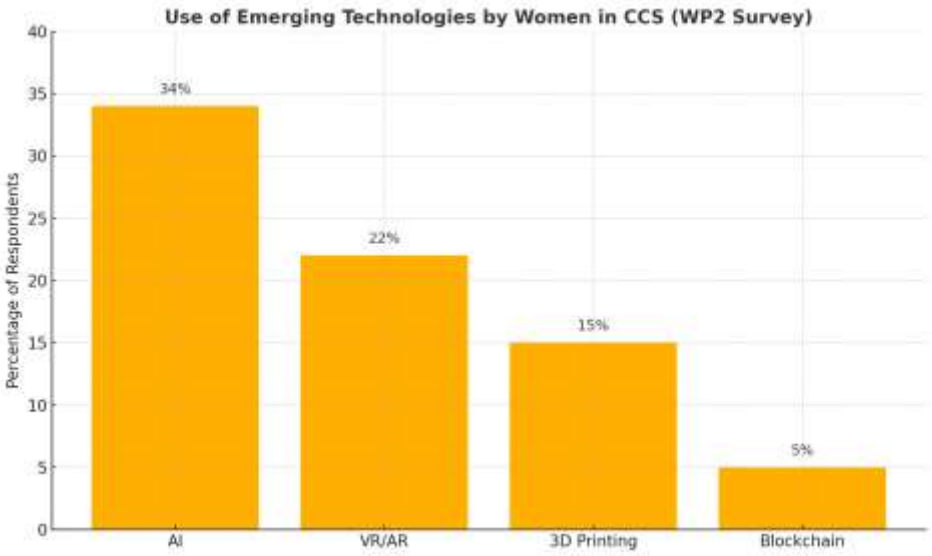

Challenges in Leadership & Career Progression

Women in the CCS face significant barriers in leadership and career progression. The survey and interviews highlight gender biases, lack of access to decision-making roles, unequal funding opportunities, and workplace discrimination.

Underrepresentation in Leadership Roles

- **France**: Despite making up a majority in cultural studies, women remain vastly underrepresented in private CCS leadership. Only 15% of CEOs in the top 100 private cultural companies are women, while men dominate performing arts leadership.
- **Ireland**: Leadership in CCS remains male-dominated, with women facing barriers in executive boards and policy-making positions. Even in mid-level management, progression to higher roles is rare.
- **Greece**: Women represent a large portion of the CCS workforce but rarely reach top leadership. Hiring biases favor male-dominated professional networks, limiting women's promotion chances.
- **Türkiye**: Women in entrepreneurship and self-employment struggle due to limited access to business loans, networks, and investment opportunities.
- **Ukraine**: Women hold only 22% of digital CCS roles, and less than 30% are in managerial positions. The war has further disrupted career stability, forcing many women into freelance and informal employment.

Exclusion from Decision-Making Processes

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- Many women in CCS feel disconnected from decision-making and lack access to leadership mentoring programs.
- Survey results indicate that over 70% of respondents perceive male-dominated hiring practices as a key barrier.
- Women report fewer opportunities to influence sector-wide policies, which affects funding distribution and professional growth.

Workplace Barriers & Gender Biases

- Persistent stereotypes about women's technical and leadership abilities prevent them from being considered for executive roles.
- In digital CCS roles, women struggle to secure high-profile projects and industry recognition.
- Women in performing arts report gender-based exclusion from major productions.

Financial and Structural Barriers in Career Progression

Gender Pay Gap in CCS

Women in the CCS continue to face significant wage disparities across different sectors and countries. Survey and interview findings confirm that women earn 15-41% less than their male counterparts, depending on the specific field and job category.

- **France**: Women earn, on average, 20% less than men in cultural fields. The pay gap is most severe in live performance, where female professionals receive 41% less in author royalties compared to men.
- **Ireland**: The freelance nature of CCS exacerbates wage inequalities. Female creatives in film, music, and visual arts struggle to negotiate competitive wages, leading to lower lifetime earnings.
- **Greece**: The 15-20% wage gap in CCS adds to financial insecurity, particularly since many women work under freelance and short-term contracts.
- **Türkiye**: Women in publishing, film, and performing arts face significant salary gaps, often due to gendered expectations and limited negotiation power.
- **Ukraine**: Women in digital CCS sectors are frequently assigned to lower-paying administrative and marketing roles, while men dominate high-paying technical positions.

Limited Access to Public and Private Funding

Across all five countries, gender biases in funding allocation persist, limiting women's ability to develop and sustain creative initiatives.

- **France**: Women receive 50% less financial support in theatre and 30% less in literary funding, despite making up a significant portion of CCS professionals.
- **Ireland**: Female-led CCS initiatives remain underfunded, despite growing evidence of their contributions to innovation and representation.
- **Greece**: Only 25% of publicly funded film grants are awarded to women-led projects, reflecting persistent gender disparities in cultural funding allocation.

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- **Türkiye**: Women in CCS struggle to secure public grants, facing bureaucratic obstacles and industry biases favoring male-led enterprises.
- **Ukraine**: The war has deepened funding inequalities, with women-led CCS projects receiving less financial assistance compared to male-led, commercially driven enterprises

Workplace Discrimination and Biases in Hiring & Promotions

- Women report exclusion from high-profile projects and key decision-making roles, aligning with findings that 70% of respondents identified hiring biases as a major career barrier.
- Male-dominated hiring committees tend to favor male applicants for leadership positions, reflecting a consistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles across all surveyed countries.
- Pregnancy and caregiving responsibilities are often cited as reasons for limiting women's career growth in CCS.
- Freelance contracts and lack of employment protections place women at higher risk of economic instability.

Technology Adoption & Its Impact on Career Development

Technology plays a dual role in women's career development in CCS—it can enable opportunities while also reinforcing existing inequalities.

Opportunities Through Technology

- AI-powered creative tools are helping women expand their artistic scope and enter new digital markets, with 34% of women in CCS using AI.
- Digital platforms democratise access to finance, training and public participation, helping women bypass the traditional gatekeepers of the industry.
- Social media and online portfolios provide visibility for female artists, musicians, and designers, increasing networking and collaboration opportunities.
- Blockchain technology and NFTs enable independent artists to monetize their work without relying on galleries or traditional institutions.

Barriers to Technology Adoption

Despite these opportunities, women remain underrepresented in tech-driven CCS fields due to:

- **Limited access to digital training:** 20% of women in CCS report a lack of access to digital training and resources, limiting their ability to fully engage with emerging technologies.
- **Algorithmic biases in content distribution:** 30% of respondents cited bias in AI-driven tools, which reinforce gender stereotypes and limit visibility for female artists.
- **Gender gap in venture capital & investment**: Female-led tech startups and creative businesses receive significantly less financial backing.
- **Societal barriers & stereotypes:** Women in CCS face skepticism about their technical skills, leading to fewer opportunities in digital media, VR, and AI-based industries.

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Barriers & Suggestions to Gender Equality in CCS

Barriers

- **Unequal leadership representation:** Women remain vastly underrepresented in top management roles across.
- **Funding discrimination:** Women-led projects receive less financial support from public and private sources.
- **Wage gap & job precarity**: The gender pay gap in CCS ranges from 15-41%, worsened by freelance work structures.
- **Bias in tech adoption:** AI-powered tools reproduce existing gender biases, limiting women's visibility and opportunities.
- **Exclusion from networking & mentorship programs**: Women lack access to mentorship and professional networks, which are critical for career advancement.

Suggestions

- **Expanding digital platforms:** Online tools, social media, and crowdfunding increase visibility and direct funding opportunities.
- **Enhancing technology & entrepreneurship training:** Women in CCS advocate for greater access to AI, VR, and blockchain training to build independent creative careers.
- **Advocacy & policy changes: Gender-focused policies are critical to ensuring fairer funding distribution, hiring, and leadership representation.**
- **Inclusive digital education:** Increasing training in AI, digital marketing, and creative entrepreneurship can help bridge gender gaps in CCS.
- **Strengthening women-led networks & mentorship initiatives**: 40% of respondents emphasize the need for mentorship programs and industry networks to support female creatives.

Cross-Country Comparison: Gender Equality & Tech Access in CCS

Country	Leadership Representation	Gender Pay Gap	Tech Access	Funding Access	Training Opportunities
France	15% of CEOs in private CCS	20-41%	Moderate AI/VR use	50% loss in theatre	Some AI/digital workshops
Greece	Low in executive roles	15–39%	Barriers in VR/blockchain	Only 25% of film grants	Limited and mismatched
Ireland	Male-dominated boards	High in freelance CCS	Widespread use in education	Improvements, but still unequal	Better access to digital literacy
Türkiye	Very low self-employment	Significant, especially in arts	Limited due to funding issues	Low grant access for women	Few programs for women
Ukraine	22% in digital CCS roles	High in tech & digital roles	High due to war-driven need	War has worsened disparities	Remote training increasing

1.2.2 Key Takeaways from Women in CCS Interviews

The interviews conducted across participating countries provide in-depth perspectives on women's experiences in CCS, highlighting success stories, persistent challenges, and emerging

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opportunities. These first-hand accounts complement the research data, offering real-world insights into how gender dynamics play out in the creative industries.

Success Stories: Women Who Overcame Barriers

Cécile Adélaïde, an author and ceramist from France, transitioned into ceramics after working in the cultural sector but struggled with funding and administrative challenges. Her experience mirrors that of many women in CCS, where administrative burdens and the lack of structured financial support often create additional barriers to success. Despite these challenges, women are increasingly turning to local networks and independent distribution channels to sustain their work. She does not fully rely on online sales but exhibits her work at local artisan stores, specifically at *Epat & Vous* in France. While she recognizes the importance of digital tools, she finds the administrative burden of managing them overwhelming.

Ciara Nolan, a music teacher from Ireland, has been teaching music since 2020, focusing on music theory, instrumental training, and music therapy for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Her use of digital tools reflects a growing trend among women in CCS who are utilizing online platforms to bypass traditional industry gatekeepers. Across different CCS fields, digital self-publishing, online education, and creative entrepreneurship are becoming crucial tools for career sustainability. She adapted to remote teaching during COVID-19, utilizing Microsoft Teams, YouTube, and educational apps to continue music education. She leveraged digital streaming platforms to promote women musicians and advocate for music education funding.

Tetiana Yatsechko-Blazhenko, a cultural heritage digitalization expert from Ukraine, specializes in digitizing and archiving Ukrainian cultural heritage. Her work demonstrates how technology is playing a crucial role in not only empowering women in CCS but also in preserving cultural identities under difficult circumstances. This reflects a broader trend of women integrating AI and digital tools into CCS, particularly in fields like historical preservation, visual arts, and creative industries affected by external crises. She uses AI to analyze historical photographs, restore images, and transcribe texts in Old Slavonic and Latin, enhancing research accessibility. After relocating to Poland due to the war, she secured international funding to continue her work, helping preserve Ukrainian cultural identity.

Challenges: Persistent Barriers for Women in CCS

Despite their successes, many women still face structural, financial, and technological challenges in CCS.

Women across all participating countries remain underrepresented in CCS leadership due to male-dominated hiring networks. Survey data confirms that women are excluded from decision-making processes, limiting their influence in funding and policy development. Freelance contracts leave women financially vulnerable, particularly in music, publishing, and digital arts, while women-led CCS startups struggle to attract venture capital, leading to reliance on self-funding.

Women-led CCS initiatives in France, Ireland, Greece, and Türkiye receive disproportionately less funding than male-led projects. Bureaucratic obstacles and industry biases make it harder

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for women to access financial resources. AI-driven content curation prioritizes male-led projects, reducing visibility for female creatives.

Savvina, a dancer and theatrical producer from Greece, highlighted that before social media and digital platforms, women faced significant barriers in promoting their creative work. Gender discrimination and limited networking opportunities meant that female performers had fewer chances to showcase their talents. While movements like *Me Too* have helped expose gender-based inequalities, Savvina also noted that social media creates new pressures, particularly regarding appearance and self-presentation, which can intensify professional challenges for women in CCS.

Cécile, a ceramist and author from France, discussed the challenges women face in balancing creative careers with caregiving roles. She noted that women in CCS often lack financial support, making it harder to sustain creative businesses.

Ciara Nolan, a music teacher from Ireland, highlighted that female musicians struggle with lower representation and pay gaps. Despite progressive trends, male musicians are still more frequently booked for high-paying gigs.

Esra, a cultural entrepreneur from Türkiye, struggled to secure business loans for her creative enterprise. She described how funding applications lack clear evaluation criteria for gender equality, making it harder for women to compete.

Tetiana, a cultural heritage digitalization expert from Ukraine, reported that women in digital CCS roles are rarely considered for leadership positions. Even though many women work in archives and digital restoration, decision-making roles remain male-dominated.

Opportunities: Emerging Pathways for Women in CCS

As digital transformation reshapes the CCS landscape, women are leveraging new tools and networks to overcome traditional barriers. Emerging technologies, online platforms, and mentorship programs are creating new opportunities for female creatives to gain visibility, access funding, and influence policy changes. Interviews with women across various CCS sectors highlight how these innovations are empowering them to build sustainable careers and expand their reach.

Leslie, a stained glass designer from France, shared that digital tools have allowed her to reach a broader audience and increase the visibility of her art. She highlighted that selling online and participating in digital marketplaces have made it easier for female artists to showcase their work without traditional gatekeepers.

Ciara Nolan, a music teacher from Ireland, emphasized that digital platforms allow female musicians to self-publish music and connect directly with audiences, bypassing gender biases in traditional music distribution.

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Anastasia Antonakaki, a writer and director in cinema and theatre from Greece, explained that social media and digital platforms have increased visibility for underrepresented creatives, helping them build audiences beyond traditional institutions.

Katerina Derdelakou, a writer and cultural event organizer from Greece, emphasized the need for workshops that empower women in CCS through digital skills training and entrepreneurship guidance.

Tetiana Yatsechko-Blazhenko, a cultural heritage digitalization expert from Ukraine, stated that AI and AR technologies have expanded opportunities for women in CCS by streamlining content creation and digitizing cultural preservation efforts.

Anna Danylchuk, Head of the Volyn Foundation in Ukraine, highlighted that digital advocacy platforms have amplified women's voices in CCS, helping them push for gender-responsive funding policies.

French director Anna Apter used MidJourney, an AI-based visual generator, to create an entire short film alone, a feat that disrupted conventional production models. Her film "Imagine" premiered at multiple festivals, receiving praise for its aesthetics and for showcasing how AI can empower individual creators. While applauded, her journey also highlighted the lack of systemic support for such bold experiments by women. Critics noted that while men receive funding for speculative tech projects, women must often self-finance or prove concepts independently.

Savvina, a performer and producer, reflects a dual-edged reality: *"Digital tools helped me promote my work, but I'm expected to look perfect online, smile, post constantly. It's exhausting."* Her case exemplifies how social media both democratizes and commodifies visibility for women. While it enables self-promotion, it also imposes performance pressure, especially in aesthetics-driven CCS domains.

Tetiana, displaced by war, continued her work in Poland using AI to digitize, analyze, and preserve rare Ukrainian manuscripts. Through grants, she managed to continue digitization work using AR and machine learning to analyze images and transcribe historical texts. *"It's not just history—it's our identity,"* she said. Her work bridges technology, cultural survival, and gendered leadership under crisis.

Findings from interviews in Greece, France, Ireland, Ireland, Ukraine and Turkey highlight a complex but evolving landscape for women in the CSR sector. While digital tools and entrepreneurship provide new opportunities for economic independence and global visibility, systemic challenges such as exclusion from leadership, funding inequalities and algorithmic bias continue to limit their full participation.

Several common trends emerge from the research:

- **Persistent Leadership Barriers**: Women in CCS remain underrepresented in decision-making roles, facing biases in hiring, promotion, and financial resource allocation.

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- **Funding Gaps & Economic Challenges**: Women-led CCS projects receive significantly less public and private funding than male-led initiatives, often due to bureaucratic obstacles and gendered assumptions about financial risk.
- **Technology as Both an Opportunity and a Barrier**: While digital platforms and AI-driven tools have enabled greater artistic and entrepreneurial opportunities, algorithmic biases still favor male-led content, reducing visibility for female creatives.
- **Flexible Work & Digital Entrepreneurship as Growth Areas**: Many women in CCS are adopting hybrid work models, using digital platforms to reach wider audiences, and leveraging e-commerce and blockchain tools to establish financial independence.
- **Mentorship & Advocacy as Essential for Progress:** Stronger women-led networks, mentorship programs, and advocacy initiatives are needed to ensure equitable opportunities in CCS.

These takeaways emphasize the importance of targeted policy interventions, inclusive funding mechanisms, and digital upskilling programs to foster a more equitable and innovative CCS sector.

The next section will delve deeper into the Analysis of Key Themes, providing a broader evaluation of how these challenges and opportunities align with technological advancements, financial structures, and sector-wide transformations.

The findings from interviews across Greece, France, Ireland, Ukraine, and Türkiye highlight a complex landscape for women in CCS. While digital tools and entrepreneurship provide unprecedented opportunities for financial independence and global visibility, systemic challenges such as leadership exclusion, funding disparities, and algorithmic bias continue to hinder progress. The persistence of gender-based barriers underscores the need for targeted policy interventions, inclusive funding mechanisms, and robust mentorship programs to ensure that women can fully participate in and shape the future of CCS.

1.2.3 Digital Adoption & Gendered Access Across Countries

Across the five participating countries, the adoption of emerging technologies in the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS) varies significantly shaped by national infrastructure, funding schemes, conflict situations, and digital literacy rates. While tools like AI, VR/AR, and digital collaboration platforms offer clear potential for inclusion and innovation, women's access to them remains uneven.

In Greece, technology integration into CCS has grown due to national digitization policies and cultural tourism incentives. However, interviewees noted persistent barriers in accessing tools like VR or blockchain. Savvina, a dancer and producer, explained: *"Before social media and digital platforms, we were invisible. Now we're visible—but still not funded."*

In France, where VR in museums and AI in digital art are increasingly prominent, some women creators are pioneering new modes of expression. Artist Albertine Meunier, for instance,

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combines art and AI to explore digital identity and societal surveillance. Yet, the gender tech divide is evident in underfunding and lack of decision-making roles for women in digital CCS institutions.

In Ireland, interviewees noted that technology has helped democratize access and visibility, especially in education. As music teacher Ciara Nolan stated: *"Digital tools helped me keep teaching during COVID, but funding for female-led initiatives still lags behind."* Ireland's animation and gaming industries show promise but remain male-dominated at technical levels.

In Türkiye, technological access is hindered by bureaucratic obstacles and funding mechanisms that do not prioritize gender equity. Female entrepreneurs face significant challenges launching digital CCS projects. Esra, a cultural entrepreneur, shared that *"loan applications don't ask about gender—but they don't understand what it means for a woman to walk into a bank alone asking for funding."*

In Ukraine, the war has dramatically accelerated tech adoption as a means of survival and preservation. Interviewee Tetiana Yatsechko-Blazhenko, a cultural digitization expert, emphasized: *"AI has helped me archive what could be lost forever. It's not just a tool—it's resistance."* Yet, most women in tech-driven CCS roles remain in non-executive positions, facing unstable working conditions and limited recognition.

These insights point to the importance of context-sensitive strategies for improving women's access to digital tools. National investments in creative technologies must be matched with targeted gender inclusion efforts to ensure equity in CCS transformation.

1.2.4 Analysis of Key Themes

The analysis of key themes in the research highlights the impact of technology on gender equality in CCS, the structural and financial barriers women face, and the emerging opportunities through digital tools and entrepreneurship. This section explores the ways in which AI, digital platforms, and policy shifts influence women's roles in CCS, while also addressing persistent challenges such as algorithmic bias, exclusion from leadership, and funding discrimination. The findings from primary research emphasize the need for structural reforms to improve gender equality in CCS, particularly in funding distribution, digital training access, and leadership pathways.

1.2.4.1 Impact of Technology on Gender Equality in CCS

How AI & digital tools amplify women's voices in CCS

Technology plays a crucial role in shaping gender equality in CCS, offering women new ways to promote their work, engage with global audiences, and secure funding. AI-powered tools have helped female artists, writers, and designers enhance their creative processes while reducing production costs. Social media and digital platforms have become essential in increasing the visibility of underrepresented women in CCS, allowing them to directly connect with audiences and bypass traditional industry gatekeepers. Streaming and crowdfunding platforms have given women greater financial independence, allowing them to self-publish music, films, and other creative projects without industry bias. However, despite these advancements, access to digital tools remains unequal, as training gaps and algorithmic biases limit women's full participation.

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AI-driven algorithms often prioritize male-led content, making it harder for women to gain visibility in CCS. Women in digital CCS roles also report that venture capital funding and financial backing disproportionately favor male-led projects, limiting opportunities for female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, even as digital transformation reshapes the CCS sector, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions, reducing their influence on policy, funding, and sector-wide initiatives. AI-driven recommendation systems in music, literature, and film industries frequently promote male creators more often, reducing exposure for female-led projects. Women-led digital CCS startups struggle to secure funding, with only a small percentage of venture capital investments allocated to female entrepreneurs. Leadership exclusion persists, as women in CCS report limited access to mentorship, funding networks, and institutional support.

Emerging technologies are playing a transformative yet uneven role in shaping gender equality across the CCS. From AI-assisted content creation to digital self-publishing and crowdfunding, women are using these tools to bypass traditional gatekeepers. However, their ability to access and benefit from such tools varies significantly across national contexts. As Ciara Nolan from Ireland shared: *"During the pandemic, I switched to remote music teaching. It kept me working, but the tools I used were never designed with female educators in mind."* The contrast between potential and reality is striking: while 75% of survey respondents believe technology can promote greater inclusion, only 20% felt it had actually impacted gender equality in their careers. Interviewees repeatedly raised concerns about algorithmic bias, lack of visibility in male-dominated platforms, and exclusion from decision-making in tech development. As one Greek filmmaker noted, *"We use AI tools, but we don't shape them—we're just users, not creators of the system."*

Women from Türkiye and Greece expressed higher levels of frustration about limited technical training and access to advanced tools, while interviewees from France and Ireland were more likely to have participated in digital literacy or AI workshops. This divergence highlights the importance of national infrastructure and policy support in enabling women to engage meaningfully with technological innovation in CCS.

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1.2.4.2 Barriers for Women in CCS

Women in CCS face significant financial and structural barriers that limit their career progression. Women-led CCS projects receive substantially less funding compared to male-led projects, particularly in film, performing arts, and digital media. Grant selection processes often lack gender-inclusive criteria, making it harder for female creatives to secure public funding. Women entrepreneurs in CCS also struggle to access venture capital and business loans, further restricting economic growth in female-led initiatives. Even in state-supported CCS funding, male-led institutions and projects receive a larger share of public resources, reflecting systemic biases in funding allocation.

Beyond financial challenges, women are also underrepresented in executive roles in CCS organizations, limiting their ability to influence policy and funding distribution. Even when women reach leadership positions, they often experience a lack of access to key financial resources and professional networks. Gendered biases in hiring and promotions continue to prevent women from advancing into top decision-making roles in CCS companies and institutions. Furthermore, women's contributions to policy discussions and industry conferences remain underrepresented, limiting their ability to drive sector-wide change.

Women in CCS have fewer opportunities for digital literacy training, making it harder to compete in an industry increasingly shaped by AI and emerging technologies. STEM-related CCS fields, such as game design and digital arts, continue to be male-dominated, further excluding women from high-growth job opportunities. Women's access to AI and coding education in CCS sectors remains limited, creating a gender gap in the adoption of advanced creative technologies.

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Barriers persist across all stages of women's careers in CCS, including access to leadership, funding, training, and equitable representation. These barriers are structural rather than incidental deeply embedded in cultural norms, institutional practices, and digital environments. Across all five countries, women are underrepresented in executive roles. According to the Secondary Research, only 15% of CEOs in France's top private CCS companies are women, and in Türkiye, fewer than 1,000 women are registered as self-employed in CCS. Leadership roles are often dominated by male professional networks and appointment committees. *"Even when we lead projects, we're often not the ones in the press or on the panels,"* said Anastasia Antonakaki, a Greek director.

The lack of gender-sensitive funding criteria remains one of the most cited barriers:

- In Greece, only 25% of film grants go to women-led projects.
- In France, women receive 50% less theatre funding than men.
- In Türkiye, women often fund projects out-of-pocket due to the difficulty of securing public support

As Esra from Türkiye put it: *"I had to explain blockchain to the funders—they had never heard of it. Then they said: maybe come back next year."*

Survey and interview data confirm that women in CCS earn between 15–41% less than male counterparts, with the largest gaps observed in freelance and self-employed roles. Women are often locked into lower-paid administrative or educational positions while men dominate production, direction, and executive roles.

A recurring theme across the research is the lack of accessible and relevant digital upskilling opportunities for women in CCS. While 20% of survey respondents reported limited access to tech training, interviewees from Greece, Türkiye, and Ukraine stressed that existing programs are often poorly adapted to their needs—either too technical, time-intensive, or scheduled without consideration for caregiving or work responsibilities. This gap limits women's ability to engage fully with emerging technologies and advance in digital CCS roles.

1.2.4.3 Opportunities Through Technology

Despite barriers, digital platforms and AI-driven tools have created new opportunities for women in CCS, allowing them to bypass traditional industry structures and create financial independence. Digital platforms allow female creatives to monetize their work independently, reducing reliance on industry-controlled funding. E-commerce and crowdfunding tools provide women in CCS with alternative revenue streams, while blockchain and NFTs offer new financial models, enabling them to track ownership and sales of their digital content. Women are increasingly leveraging digital platforms for financial growth, but barriers to scaling remain due to investment disparities and technical training gaps.

Flexible work models have also supported work-life balance in CCS, allowing women to combine creative careers with caregiving responsibilities. Remote work options and digital collaboration tools have helped reduce barriers related to location and accessibility, enabling online teaching,

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coaching, and virtual performance spaces. However, while the rise of digital CCS entrepreneurship has provided flexibility, challenges remain in income stability and long-term career sustainability. *"AI saved me hours. I no longer have to choose between teaching and creating,"* said Leslie, a stained-glass artist from France.

AI and VR have also introduced new levels of accessibility and inclusivity in CCS. AI-powered translation and accessibility tools make CCS content more inclusive, providing opportunities for underrepresented communities. Virtual reality (VR) is expanding performance and exhibition spaces, allowing female creatives to reach global audiences without traditional venue limitations. Women-led CCS initiatives are using digital innovations to make cultural spaces more inclusive and accessible for diverse groups. However, while VR and AI hold promise for women in CCS, accessibility challenges remain in affordability, skill training, and gendered biases in tech-driven arts.

Digital platforms have become essential for women in CCS to achieve financial independence and sustain their creative careers. Many interviewees reported using crowdfunding tools like *Kickstarter* and *Patreon*, as well as blockchain-based platforms for selling NFTs, allowing them to bypass traditional gatekeepers such as galleries or public funders.

In Ukraine, where war has disrupted institutional support, women increasingly rely on international digital platforms to secure funding and maintain global visibility.

Digital tools also offer critical flexibility, particularly for women balancing caregiving responsibilities or facing displacement. Platforms like Zoom, Canva, Adobe Creative Cloud, and online marketplaces enable remote work, online teaching, and creative entrepreneurship. *Without digital platforms, I would've disappeared during maternity leave,"* shared a multimedia artist from Greece, highlighting how tech access is tied not only to creativity, but to career survival.

Barriers vs. Opportunities for Women in CCS (WP2 Findings)

	Barriers	Opportunities
Leadership Representation	Underrepresentation in decision-making roles	Flexible work models and online platforms
Access to Funding	Funding bias toward male-led projects	Crowdfunding, NFT markets, and peer support
Digital Training & Skills	Limited, mismatched training access	Growing demand for digital skills in CCS
Technology Use	Low use of blockchain, VR, AI in some regions	AI tools to reduce workload and increase output
Career Progression	Wage gaps and job precarity	Hybrid careers through teaching, content, and sales
Visibility & Recognition	Algorithmic bias and low content visibility	Global audiences through social media and streaming

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2. Opportunities & Challenges for the Sector

2.1 Future Trends in CCS

2.1.1 Expansion of Digital-First Business Models

As CCS increasingly embraces digital-first business models, technological advancements are redefining traditional creative industries. The shift toward digital-first platforms has transformed how art, music, literature, and performance are created, distributed, and monetized. Women in CCS have leveraged these transformations to bypass traditional barriers, but structural inequalities persist, particularly in algorithm-driven content visibility, AI-powered automation, and access to creative funding.

The adoption of digital-first models has allowed women in CCS to reduce production costs, automate repetitive tasks, and expand their audience reach. However, the lack of institutional support for digital entrepreneurship continues to pose challenges, particularly for women transitioning from traditional CCS roles to tech-integrated creative careers.

2.1.2 The Role of AI in Creative Workflows

The impact of AI-powered creative tools is particularly significant. These tools have streamlined creative workflows, enabling women in CCS to enhance their creative output, generate new artistic concepts, and improve productivity. AI applications in CCS include automated video editing, AI-assisted music composition, predictive text generation for authors, and AI-driven visual design. However, the risk of algorithmic bias remains high, as AI-driven recommendation engines in music streaming, film distribution, and digital marketplaces often favor male-led projects.

As digital-first models expand, there is a growing need to ensure AI systems are trained on diverse and gender-inclusive datasets to provide equal visibility for women's creative work. While AI can reduce time-consuming creative tasks, women in CCS report concerns about job displacement, lack of training in AI-powered tools, and limited representation of female perspectives in AI-generated content.

2.1.3 Regional Differences in AI & Digital Adoption

Across different countries, the rate of AI adoption in CCS varies. In France and Ireland, AI-driven tools are increasingly used in digital marketing, gaming, and music production, while in Greece and Türkiye, access to AI-powered creative tools remains limited due to financial and infrastructure constraints. In Ukraine, the war has accelerated the need for digital-first approaches, making AI and virtual platforms more crucial for cultural preservation and creative collaboration. The ability to integrate AI into creative careers is increasingly seen as an essential skill, yet gender disparities in digital upskilling and AI training programs continue to limit women's access to these opportunities.

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2.1.4 Future Challenges & Ethical Considerations

As AI and digital-first models continue to reshape CCS, women face both opportunities and risks. While AI enhances access to creative resources, increases automation, and fosters new business models, it also raises ethical concerns about data privacy, intellectual property rights, and gender bias in AI-generated content. Additionally, many women in CCS struggle with monetization challenges on digital platforms, where algorithm-driven income structures often benefit male creators disproportionately.

The future of women in CCS will depend on equitable access to digital resources, inclusion in AI policy-making, and proactive efforts to remove algorithmic biases in content promotion and funding distribution. Strengthening AI ethics regulations and gender-sensitive digital policies will be essential in ensuring that women in CCS can fully participate in and benefit from the expanding digital-first economy.

As CCS increasingly embraces digital-first business models, technological advancements are redefining traditional creative industries. The shift toward digital-first platforms has transformed how art, music, literature, and performance are created, distributed, and monetized. Women in CCS have leveraged these transformations to bypass traditional barriers, but structural inequalities persist, particularly in algorithm-driven content visibility, AI-powered automation, and access to creative funding.

The impact of AI-powered creative tools is particularly significant. These tools have streamlined creative workflows, enabling women in CCS to automate repetitive tasks, enhance creative output, and personalize audience engagement. However, the risk of algorithmic bias remains high, as AI-driven recommendation engines in music streaming, film distribution, and digital marketplaces often favor male-led projects. As digital-first models expand, there is a growing need to ensure AI systems are trained on diverse and gender-inclusive datasets to provide equal visibility for women's creative work.

Moreover, across different countries, the rate of AI adoption in CCS varies. In countries like France and Ireland, AI-driven tools are increasingly used in digital marketing, gaming, and music production, while in Greece and Türkiye, access to AI-powered creative tools remains limited due to financial and infrastructure constraints. In Ukraine, the war has accelerated the need for digital-first approaches, making AI and virtual platforms more crucial for cultural preservation and creative collaboration.

2.2 New Business Models & Employment Opportunities

The shift toward freelance and tech-driven creative entrepreneurship has redefined employment opportunities for women in CCS. More women are becoming independent content creators, leveraging social media, digital marketplaces, and AI-powered platforms to launch and sustain careers outside traditional institutions. However, economic sustainability remains a pressing concern, particularly as freelancers lack employment protections, stable income, and access to benefits.

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Women in CCS continue to face challenges in securing long-term financial stability, particularly in fields that have transitioned from institutional employment to gig-based digital work. While digital platforms allow women to expand their audience and revenue streams, they also create new vulnerabilities, such as inconsistent pay, reliance on algorithmic visibility, and limited access to professional networks. Furthermore, as NFTs and blockchain-based creative economies emerge, women's participation remains significantly lower, raising concerns about who controls access to these new economic models.

In Greece and Türkiye, freelance work has become a dominant form of employment for women in CCS, but due to limited legal protections, many women struggle with job precarity and inconsistent earnings. In both Ireland and France, women-led CCS projects continue to face significant funding disparities, with reports highlighting lower access to public funding and limited visibility in competitive grant allocation processes. While national funding bodies have introduced gender equality strategies, evidence of systematic access to alternative mechanisms such as crowdfunding or EU grants by women-led businesses remains limited. However, the gender gap in access to venture capital and business investments remains an issue. In Ukraine, the war has accelerated the transition toward remote work and digital entrepreneurship, as women in CCS are increasingly seeking international collaborations and online business opportunities to maintain financial stability.

Despite these challenges, women in CCS are leading innovative business models, particularly in hybrid career structures that combine digital sales, content creation, and educational services. Many women have established online academies, digital consulting firms, and multimedia platforms to create sustainable income streams. However, greater financial support is needed to ensure these business models remain viable.

2.3 Ethical & Policy Considerations

As digital-first technologies become embedded in the CCS, ethical and policy concerns are becoming increasingly urgent. These issues are particularly relevant to women, who face systemic disadvantages not only in funding and visibility but also in how digital systems are designed, deployed, and governed.

Bias in AI and Algorithmic Decision-Making

AI-powered tools used in CCS, from recommendation engines to generative art platforms, are typically trained on gender-biased datasets, which reflect historical inequalities. As a result, women's content often receives lower visibility, fewer funding or sponsorship opportunities, and limited engagement. This bias can unintentionally amplify male-dominated narratives, marginalizing diverse voices. *"We use AI tools, but we don't shape them—we're just users,"* a Greek filmmaker explained, highlighting the exclusion of women from AI design and development processes. To ensure fairness, algorithmic transparency must become standard practice, with gender impact assessments embedded into AI development and deployment in CCS.

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Data Privacy and Digital Exploitation Risks

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Women in CCS increasingly use digital platforms to distribute content, teach online, and connect with audiences. However, these platforms often lack adequate data privacy protections, leaving creators vulnerable to content theft, exploitation, or surveillance.

For young women in particular, the “reputation economy” — where visibility, popularity, and online presence directly affect career opportunities — can blur the lines between personal and professional identity. Maintaining a strong digital presence is often expected, but this comes with pressure to share personal information or self-brand in ways that may expose women to harassment or reputational risk. The lack of boundaries between “the artist” and “the persona” can lead to emotional fatigue, performance anxiety, and challenges in maintaining privacy or creative autonomy.

Platforms must adopt gender-responsive privacy policies and ensure creators maintain control over how their content, personal data, and performance analytics are used and monetized.

Intellectual Property and Fair Compensation

The rapid evolution of digital content creation—driven by AI tools and blockchain platforms—has disrupted traditional models of intellectual property (IP) ownership in the CCS. While these innovations offer new opportunities for monetization and visibility, they also raise significant ethical and legal questions, particularly for women creators.

AI-generated content blurs the lines of authorship. As more artists use generative tools to compose music, design visuals, or write scripts, questions arise over who owns the final product—the creator, the tool developer, or the platform? In the absence of clear regulation, women often lack the legal protection and contractual clarity needed to safeguard their work.

Blockchain technologies, including NFTs and smart contracts, offer traceable ownership and automatic royalty payments. However, access to these technologies remains limited for many women in CCS. Interviewees from Türkiye and Greece reported struggling to navigate copyright and licensing systems for digitally distributed work, citing a lack of tailored guidance, legal training, and inclusive infrastructure.

Ethical digital governance must address this emerging gap by:

- Establishing royalty frameworks for AI-assisted and collaborative creative content;
- Promoting fair and transparent licensing models that recognize all contributors, including those using assistive technologies;
- Providing accessible IP education and legal support tools, especially tailored for women-led creative projects, freelancers, and micro-enterprises.

Without equitable access to IP protection and compensation mechanisms, women risk being excluded from the economic value chain of digital creativity. Ensuring they can protect, monetize, and scale their innovations is essential for building a fair and sustainable digital CCS ecosystem.

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Gender-Responsive Digital Policy

Despite growing investment in digital innovation across Europe, current policy frameworks in the CCS often overlook gender as a cross-cutting priority. This gap is particularly evident in national and EU-level funding schemes, where most calls for proposals and grant programs fail to integrate gender-sensitive criteria or reporting obligations.

For instance, tech-based CCS projects and AI research initiatives are rarely evaluated for their inclusivity in design or their impact on gender equity. Funding bodies seldom require applicants to provide gender-disaggregated data, demonstrate how their digital tools address the needs of diverse users, or ensure balanced participation of women in project teams and leadership roles.

Additionally, women-led creative tech startups continue to face challenges in accessing digital entrepreneurship funding. Interviewees noted that existing grant mechanisms often favor larger, male-led enterprises with prior success in tech or commercial projects, reinforcing structural imbalances in innovation ecosystems.

To address these issues, a gender-responsive approach to digital policy is urgently needed. This includes:

- Requiring inclusive design principles in the development of digital CCS tools, platforms, and applications.
- Mandating gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation in publicly funded tech projects.
- Ensuring equitable access to innovation grants, venture funding, and accelerator programs for women-led CCS initiatives.
- Encouraging co-creation processes that include women and marginalized groups as decision-makers, not just end-users.

Mainstreaming gender into digital funding mechanisms and CCS innovation policy is not only a matter of fairness—it is essential for unlocking the full potential of creative digital transformation and fostering more diverse, ethical, and inclusive cultural futures.

2.3.5 Ethical Technology Education and Leadership

To achieve lasting gender equality in the CCS, women must be supported not only as users of technology but also as leaders, innovators, and ethical decision-makers in the digital space. The integration of emerging technologies like AI, blockchain, and immersive media into CCS requires a parallel investment in inclusive and ethically grounded education and leadership development.

Currently, women are underrepresented in technology leadership roles, both within CCS institutions and across digital start-up ecosystems. Many female creators reported feeling excluded from key decision-making processes in digital transformation projects, despite being early adopters or expert users of these tools.

Moreover, most existing digital training initiatives focus on technical skills but neglect the broader ethical and societal implications of technology design and application. As a result, women—

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especially those from underrepresented or marginalized backgrounds—are often left out of critical conversations around algorithmic bias, platform regulation, data governance, and AI ethics.

To close this gap, ethical technology education must be embedded into both formal CCS training programs and non-formal capacity-building opportunities, with a particular focus on:

Digital leadership development for women in CCS sectors;

- Ethical design principles, including fairness, transparency, and inclusion in AI and digital content platforms.
- Mentorship and peer learning between experienced female tech creators and emerging professionals.
- Cross-sector collaboration between CCS institutions, digital rights advocates, and gender equality organizations.

Empowering women to shape the values and norms of digital innovation—not just adopt its tools, will ensure that future CCS ecosystems are ethically grounded, socially inclusive, and creatively diverse.

Ethical and Policy Considerations in the Digital CCS

Ethical Consideration	Key Recommendations
Bias in AI and Algorithmic Decision-Making	Ensure algorithmic transparency and inclusive datasets in AI tools used in CCS.
Data Privacy and Digital Exploitation Risks	Implement gender-sensitive data privacy protections and empower creators with control over their content.
Intellectual Property and Fair Compensation	Provide IP education, fair licensing, and royalty mechanisms tailored to women in CCS.
Gender-Responsive Digital Policy	Mainstream gender equity into digital funding mechanisms, including AI and innovation grants.
Ethical Technology Education and Leadership	Develop ethical tech training, digital leadership programs, and mentorship opportunities for women.

3. Policy & Programmatic Recommendations

Building on the evidence gathered in WP2, this section outlines actionable recommendations to promote gender equity and inclusive digital innovation in the CCS. These recommendations are targeted toward key stakeholder groups: policymakers, cultural institutions, educators, and cross-sector collaborators. They are also closely aligned with the objectives of WP3, ensuring continuity between research findings and practical implementation.

3.1 For Policymakers & Governments

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Policymakers play a critical role in shaping the financial and regulatory environment of the CCS. To address long-standing gender disparities, national and European institutions must prioritize gender-responsive public investment in cultural innovation. This includes creating or expanding dedicated funding lines for women-led creative enterprises, especially those that integrate emerging technologies such as AI, VR, and blockchain.

Beyond financial support, governments must ensure algorithmic transparency and fairness in digital tools developed or subsidized through public funding. AI systems that influence cultural visibility (e.g., recommendation engines, funding evaluation tools) should undergo gender impact assessments, and their data sets should be inclusive and publicly auditable.

Another critical area is digital literacy and STEAM (Science, Tech, Engineering, Arts & Math) education. Governments should integrate creative technology skills—such as digital storytelling, media production, and ethical AI—into formal education curricula and non-formal adult training, ensuring girls and women are equally prepared to engage in and lead CCS innovation.

Incentives can also be created to encourage public-private collaboration that centers diversity, including gender requirements in public tenders, balanced evaluation committees, and targeted outreach to underrepresented groups during grant calls.

3.2 For Cultural Institutions & CCS Businesses

Cultural institutions, foundations, production houses, and creative startups must take the lead in transforming internal structures and industry practices. One of the clearest findings from WP2 is the underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles, despite their strong presence in the sector. Institutions should set internal targets for gender parity in executive leadership, curatorial boards, and jury panels.

Transparent hiring and promotion practices, such as anonymized recruitment processes and equity audits, can reduce bias and open doors to a more diverse talent pool. This should be complemented by robust mentorship and sponsorship programs, with a focus on digital and entrepreneurial pathways. Women, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, should have access to role models and structured support in navigating funding, tech adoption, and creative leadership.

In parallel, cultural institutions should review and revise their funding and commissioning policies to promote gender equity. This means rethinking how grant applications are evaluated—introducing gender-sensitive criteria, including outreach to women-led projects, and encouraging joint projects that foster inclusive innovation. Diversity should also be reflected in artistic programming, exhibitions, and digital content creation, ensuring equitable representation both behind and in front of the camera.

3.3 For Educators & CCS Training Programs

As WP3 launches the Academy for Women in CCS, there is a clear opportunity to deliver transformative training that directly addresses the needs and ambitions identified in WP2. Education and training programs must go beyond technical skills, integrating entrepreneurship, digital ethics, creative leadership, and funding strategy into their curricula.

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Programs should be designed to be flexible and accessible, especially for women balancing caregiving responsibilities, freelance work, or displacement. This includes offering hybrid formats (online and in-person), modular content, and materials in multiple languages and formats (e.g., text, video, easy-to-read). Particular attention should be paid to barrier-free learning, incorporating inclusive design and accessibility standards for women with disabilities, migrants, and women from marginalized communities.

Educators should also foster digital confidence and critical digital literacy by demystifying AI, blockchain, and digital publishing tools. Participants should leave with practical skills to launch or scale their projects, as well as a critical understanding of how to use digital tools ethically and inclusively.

Most importantly, training must celebrate and amplify women-led digital content and platforms, encouraging participants to develop their own narratives, showcase their work, and become leaders in shaping future cultural and digital landscapes.

3.4 For Cross-Sector Collaboration & Future Projects

Creating lasting change in the CCS requires the removal of silos between sectors and disciplines. Collaboration between cultural organisations, technology developers, universities, civil society and policy makers is essential to create ecosystems that are not only innovative but also inclusive and equitable.

Future projects should adopt co-creation methodologies, involving women in all stages, from ideation and tool development to evaluation and scaling. This approach ensures that the tools and platforms emerging from CCS innovation are grounded in the lived realities and needs of diverse users.

At the European level, there is also a need to foster transnational networks and knowledge exchange platforms that focus on gender, culture, and tech. These spaces can facilitate the sharing of best practices, support cross-border collaborations, and amplify the voices of underrepresented women in CCS.

Finally, cross-sector projects should be encouraged to collect and publish gender-disaggregated data, measure inclusion outcomes, and test scalable models for ethical and equitable innovation. Funders—both public and private—can support this shift by including diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) criteria in evaluation frameworks and prioritizing initiatives that actively address gender gaps in digital culture.

3.5 Summary of Policy Recommendations

Based on the evidence and analysis conducted in WP2, the following policy recommendations are proposed to promote gender equality and inclusive digital innovation in the CCS:

1. **Establish dedicated funding schemes** for women-led CCS startups, especially those integrating emerging technologies such as AI, XR, and blockchain.

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2. **Mandate algorithmic transparency and gender impact assessments** for AI tools and digital platforms developed or funded by public institutions.
3. **Integrate digital literacy, creative tech, and ethical AI education** into formal and non-formal education systems to close the digital gender gap.
4. **Set internal targets for gender parity** in leadership roles within cultural institutions and creative enterprises.
5. **Introduce anonymized recruitment processes and equity audits** to reduce gender bias in hiring and promotion.
6. **Develop mentorship and sponsorship programs** that support women in navigating digital entrepreneurship and leadership in CCS.
7. **Apply gender-sensitive evaluation criteria** in cultural funding programs, including requirements for balanced project teams and inclusive outcomes.
8. **Design accessible and modular training programs** within the Academy for Women in CCS (WP3), tailored to women with diverse needs and backgrounds.
9. **Promote women-led digital platforms and content**, ensuring visibility and support for underrepresented narratives in the cultural and digital landscape.
10. **Foster cross-sectoral partnerships** among cultural organizations, tech developers, academic institutions, and civil society to co-create inclusive CCS innovations.
11. **Support transnational knowledge-sharing platforms** and communities of practice to scale gender-equity approaches across Europe.
12. **Require gender-disaggregated data collection and DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) evaluation frameworks** in all publicly funded CCS innovation projects.

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ACHIEVE CCS – Visual Summary of Key Messages

Key Barriers	Opportunities from Tech	Priority Actions
Underrepresentation in leadership roles	Flexible work and remote collaboration tools	Create funding schemes for women-led CCS project
Limited access to tech training and resources	Crowdfunding and alternative financing models	Promote digital training with a gender focus
Gender pay gaps and funding inequality	AI-assisted creative production and content visibilit	Enforce inclusive AI and platform design standards
Algorithmic bias in digital platforms	Immersive tools (VR/AR) for new artistic expressior	Establish mentorship and leadership pipelines
Lack of mentorship and networking opportunities	Global audience reach via digital platforms	Integrate gender equity into CCS innovation policies

4. Pathway to WP3: From Research to Practice

Work Package 2 (WP2) has uncovered critical insights into the structural and technological barriers faced by women in the CCS. It has also highlighted a growing potential for change through inclusive digital innovation. These findings now serve as the cornerstone for Work Package 3 (WP3): The Academy for Women in CCS, a core component of the ACHIEVE CCS project.

The Academy is not merely a follow-up activity—it is a direct translation of research into action. It is designed to respond to the concrete needs identified in WP2 by developing and delivering accessible, relevant, and empowering training and networking opportunities for young women in CCS across Europe.

4.1 Using Research to Shape Training

Each element of WP3 is grounded in evidence collected through WP2's surveys, interviews, and secondary research:

- Digital skills gaps, particularly in areas such as AI, blockchain, digital publishing, and online branding, were identified across all partner countries. WP3 will address this through thematic training modules focused on emerging technologies and creative entrepreneurship.

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- WP2 confirmed that women often lack access to mentorship and professional networks, especially in digital innovation spaces. WP3 will integrate mentorship matching and peer-learning initiatives to support career advancement, confidence building, and knowledge exchange.
- The report also revealed a need for flexible and inclusive learning models that respond to the diverse realities and lived experien**ces** of women in CCS, particularly when it comes to access barriers.
    - Many women, especially those navigating caregiving responsibilities, require learning environments that are modular, hybrid, and free of charge. WP3 addresses this need through flexible, online and in-person formats. More broadly, funders and institutions should support time-adaptable programmes and consider offering financial assistance or childcare support to facilitate equitable participation.
    - For others, the barrier lies in limited access to formal education, often linked to socioeconomic or geographic exclusion. WP3 responds to this by providing entry-level content in multiple languages and formats that accommodate different learning styles and literacy levels. At a structural level, education and employment systems must foster inclusive pathways into the digital creative economy by recognising non-formal learning and offering accessible alternatives to traditional qualifications.
    - In addition, many women face financial constraints that limit their ability to invest in upskilling, especially when training involves hidden costs such as transportation, materials, or time away from paid work. WP3 addresses this by offering fully subsidized learning opportunities. At a systemic level, public and private stakeholders should expand scholarships, micro-grants, and paid training placements to ensure that economic barriers do not exclude women from digital innovation and participation in CCS.
- Respondents expressed a desire not only for upskilling but for leadership and influence in shaping digital transformation in CCS. The Academy will therefore emphasize creative leadership, advocacy, and ethical digital design as core competencies.

4.2 Responding to Different Country Contexts

WP2 highlighted both common challenges and country-specific dynamics. WP3 will build on this by allowing for localized adaptation of training where appropriate:

- In Türkiye and Greece, where access to digital training and funding remains particularly limited, special focus will be placed on entry-level digital upskilling and navigating national funding landscapes.
- In Ukraine, where conflict has driven CCS professionals into remote and freelance work, WP3 will provide tools for digital self-employment, international collaboration, and cultural preservation using technology.

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- In France and Ireland, where AI and immersive tech are more widespread, WP3 will target advanced digital tools, platform design, and content monetization.

4.3 From Skills to Systems Change

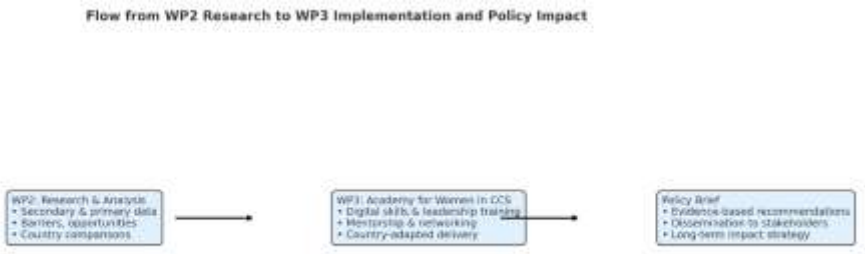
The Academy will also be designed to serve as a testing ground for scalable policy and programmatic solutions**.** Feedback gathered during WP3 will be used to refine recommendations, validate good practices, and identify emerging needs that could shape future EU-level interventions.

Furthermore, WP3 will support the development of a digital space to host the Academy's resources and training materials. This platform will provide continued access to key outputs, allowing the project's results to remain available and useful beyond its official duration.

4.4 Supporting the Policy Brief and Project Legacy

Insights from WP2 and outcomes from WP3 will jointly inform the ACHIEVE CCS Policy Brief, which will be shared with national and European decision-makers, educators, and sector leaders. This brief will not only outline key findings but also propose replicable models for promoting gender equity through training, digital inclusion, and ethical innovation in CCS.

Together, WP2 and WP3 represent a holistic, evidence-based approach to addressing gender inequality in one of Europe's most dynamic and rapidly evolving sectors.



5. Stakeholder Reflections & Testimonials

Beyond statistics and structural analysis, the ACHIEVE CCS project is grounded in the lived experiences and reflections of women in the CCS, as well as the insights of partners, educators, and professionals working to advance gender equity in the field. The following reflections underscore the importance of WP2's findings and highlight the urgent need for action.

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6.1 Voices from Women in CCS

"Before digital tools, we were invisible. Now we're visible—but still not funded."

— **Savvina**, performer and theatrical producer, Greece

"I had to explain blockchain to the funders—they had never heard of it. Then they said: maybe come back next year."

— **Esra**, cultural entrepreneur, Türkiye

"Without digital platforms, I would've disappeared during maternity leave."

— **Multimedia artist**, Greece

"We use AI tools, but we don't shape them—we're just users, not creators of the system."

— **Filmmaker**, Greece

"It's not just history—it's our identity."
— **Tetiana**, cultural heritage digitization expert, Ukraine

"There is so much innovation coming from women. But without access, it stays invisible."
— **Visual artist**, France

6.2 Partner Reflections on the Research

"The findings from WP2 confirmed what we've seen in practice for years: that access to digital tools doesn't mean inclusion. There must be policy behind it."
— **EUROSPEAK**, WP2 primary research lead

"The stories and data shared in this report are a wake-up call. Talent is not the problem—access is."

— **CulturePolis**, analysis and report contributor

"We've worked with women from rural, migrant, and post-conflict backgrounds. This report proves their needs are shared—and that our solutions must be scalable and intersectional."
— **CBE**, quality assurance and inclusion partner

"This research doesn't sit on a shelf—it's already shaping the Academy for Women in CCS. That's the real value of WP2."
— **iED**, lead partner

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Conclusion

Key Takeaways from the Research

This report has illuminated both the persistent inequalities and the emerging possibilities for women in the CCS. While digital technologies such as AI, VR, and blockchain are redefining how culture is created, shared, and monetized, access to these innovations remains uneven, particularly along gender lines.

Across all five participating countries—France, Greece, Ireland, Türkiye, and Ukraine—women in CCS continue to face structural barriers including underrepresentation in leadership, wage gaps, exclusion from funding, and lack of access to tailored digital training. Algorithmic bias, male-dominated funding ecosystems, and gender-blind policy frameworks further reinforce these disparities.

At the same time, the research highlights promising trends. Women are increasingly leveraging digital platforms, remote collaboration tools, and creative entrepreneurship to bypass traditional gatekeepers, gain visibility, and build more flexible and inclusive career paths. The potential of technology to support gender equality is real—but it must be matched with structural change, inclusive policy, and targeted investment.

The Need for Structured Policy and Funding Interventions

Findings from WP2 underscore the need for a coordinated, gender-responsive approach to digital and cultural innovation. Gender equity cannot be an afterthought—it must be integrated into the design of public funding programs, digital tool development, training schemes, and CCS governance models.

Among the most urgent policy needs identified are:

- **Gender-sensitive criteria in grant evaluations**
- **Increased investment in women-led creative startups**
- **Ethical guidelines for AI and algorithmic content curation**
- **Inclusive education policies that promote STEAM learning for girls and young women**
- **Mentorship and leadership development programs for women in digital CCS**

These interventions are not only necessary for equity, they are essential for the sustainability and creative vitality of the sector as a whole.

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Future Outlook for CCS & Women's Participation

The ACHIEVE CCS project moves beyond analysis. With the launch of WP3: The Academy for Women in CCS, research will be transformed into practice. The Academy will offer accessible, modular training tailored to the real-world needs of young women in the creative industries, providing skills in digital tools, leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

It will also serve as a platform for mentorship, peer learning, and cross-sector networking, connecting emerging talent with experienced professionals, funders, and institutions.

Finally, the ACHIEVE CCS Policy Brief will ensure that insights and recommendations are shared with national and European policymakers, cultural institutions, and educators. It will offer evidence-based, actionable guidance for building a more inclusive and digitally empowered cultural sector.

By integrating research, training, and advocacy, ACHIEVE CCS is contributing to a future where women are not only represented in CCS,but are leading its transformation.

Final Reflections: Shaping the Future of CCS Through Inclusion

The ACHIEVE CCS project stands at the intersection of creativity, gender equality, and digital transformation. As this report has shown, women in the CCS are not just navigating the future—they are actively shaping it. From immersive performance art and blockchain-based entrepreneurship to the preservation of cultural heritage through AI, women are pioneering new ways to create, connect, and lead.

And yet, their full participation is not guaranteed. Systemic inequalities remain deeply embedded in how we fund, value, and govern cultural innovation. Digital technologies have opened doors, but they have also revealed new forms of exclusion—algorithmic bias, inaccessible training, and invisible labor. If left unaddressed, these digital divides threaten to reinforce the very inequities we seek to dismantle.

But there is hope and it is embedded in action. The insights from WP2 are not only a call for change; they are a roadmap. They show us where to act, how to design inclusive interventions, and who needs to be at the table. The upcoming Academy for Women in CCS (WP3) is more than a training program—it is a prototype for what an equitable, future-facing CCS ecosystem could look like.

Our task now is to ensure that this momentum does not end when the project concludes. The findings, stories, and voices in this report must continue to circulate—through policy briefs, educational platforms, funding frameworks, and cultural institutions. They must inspire new alliances between technologists and artists, between funders and activists, between educators and emerging leaders.

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Above all, the future of CCS must be co-created by and for women from all backgrounds, geographies, and disciplines. Equity is not a niche issue. It is the engine of innovation. And in a world that is increasingly mediated by technology and culture, ensuring women's full participation in both is not just a matter of justice it is a prerequisite for progress.

ACHIEVE CCS has taken a bold step toward this vision. Let us now ensure that others follow.

Annexes

ANNEX I: Sample Structured Interview Guide

Introduction

Interviewer: Hello [Participant's Name], thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. My name is [Your Name], and I am conducting research on the impact of emerging technologies on the CCS, with a focus on gender equality and diversity. This interview will take about 15 minutes, and I will be asking you a series of pre-determined questions. Your responses will be kept confidential. Do you consent to this interview being recorded for research purposes?

Participant: [Wait for response]

Interviewer: Great, let's get started.

Phase 1: Background and Experience

- Can you tell me about your current role in the CCS?
    - What specific area (arts, business, or education) do you work in?
- How long have you been working in the CCS?

Phase 2: Current Trends and Technological Advancements

- What emerging technologies are you currently using or observing in your field?
- How have these technologies impacted your daily work?

Phase 3: Impact of Technology on Gender Equality and Diversity

- In your experience, how have emerging technologies impacted gender equality in your field?
- Have you encountered any specific challenges related to gender or diversity due to technological changes?

Phase 4: Reflections and Recommendations

- What do you see as the biggest opportunities for young women in the CCS moving forward?

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- Do you have any suggestions for improving gender equality and diversity in the CCS through the use of technology?

Conclusion

Interviewer: Thank you so much for sharing your insights with me today. Your input is incredibly valuable for our research. If you have any additional thoughts or questions later, please feel free to reach out to me. Have a great day!

ANNEX II: Sample Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introduction

Interviewer: Hello [Participant's Name], thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. My name is [Your Name], and I am conducting research on the impact of emerging technologies on the CCS, with a focus on gender equality and diversity. This interview will take about 15 minutes. Your responses will be kept confidential. Do you consent to this interview being recorded for research purposes?

Participant: [Wait for response]

Interviewer: Great, let's get started.

Phase 1: Background and Experience

- Can you tell me about your current role in the CCS?
    - What specific area (arts, business, or education) do you work in?
    - What motivated you to pursue a career in this sector?
- How long have you been working in the CCS?

Phase 2: Current Trends and Technological Advancements

- What emerging technologies are you currently using or observing in your field?
    - Can you give a specific example?
- How have these technologies impacted your daily work?
    - Can you describe any recent projects where technology played a significant role?

Phase 3: Impact of Technology on Gender Equality and Diversity

- In your experience, how have emerging technologies impacted gender equality in your field?
    - Can you provide an example?
- Have you encountered any challenges related to gender or diversity due to technological changes?

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- How did you address these challenges?

Phase 4: Reflections and Recommendations

- What do you see as the biggest opportunities for young women in the CCS moving forward?
- Do you have any suggestions for improving gender equality and diversity in the CCS through technology?

Conclusion

Interviewer: Thank you so much for sharing your insights with me today. Your input is incredibly valuable for our research. If you have any additional thoughts or questions later, please feel free to reach out to me. Have a great day!

ANNEX III: Sample Unstructured Interview Guide

Introduction

Interviewer: Hello [Participant's Name], thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. My name is [Your Name], and I am conducting research on the impact of emerging technologies on the CCS, with a focus on gender equality and diversity. This interview will take about 15 minutes. Your responses will be kept confidential. Do you consent to this interview being recorded for research purposes?

Participant: [Wait for response]

Interviewer: Great, let's get started.

Opening Topic: Background and Experience

- Can you start by telling me a bit about your background and your current role in the CCS?

Broad Topic: Emerging Technologies

- I'd love to hear about your experiences with emerging technologies in your field. What technologies have you been using or observing lately?

Broad Topic: Impact on Gender Equality and Diversity

- How do you feel these technological advancements have impacted gender equality and diversity within your sector?

Broad Topic: Future Opportunities and Challenges

- Looking ahead, what do you see as the biggest opportunities and challenges for young women in the CCS?

Closing Topic: Reflections and Suggestions

- Do you have any thoughts or suggestions on how to improve gender equality and diversity in the CCS through technology?

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Conclusion

Interviewer: Thank you so much for sharing your insights with me today. Your input is incredibly valuable for our research. If you have any additional thoughts or questions later, please feel free to reach out to me. Have a great day!

ANNEX IV: Survey Questionnaire

Introduction Thank you for participating in this survey. We are researching the impact of emerging technologies on the CCS, with a focus on gender equality and diversity. Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. This survey should take about 10 minutes to complete.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. What is your age?

- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55+

2. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary/third gender
- Prefer not to say

3. Which country do you currently work in?
4. What is your current role in the CCS?

- Artist
- Business professional
- Educator
- Other (please specify)

Section 2: Current Use of Technology 5. Which of the following emerging technologies do you currently use or observe in your field? (Select all that apply)

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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- Virtual Reality (VR)/Augmented Reality (AR)
- Blockchain
- Internet of Things (IoT)
- Big Data Analytics
- 3D Printing
- Other (please specify)

6. How frequently do you use these technologies in your work?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely
- Never

Section 3: Impact of Technology 7. To what extent have these technologies impacted your work?

- Significantly improved
- Somewhat improved
- No impact
- Somewhat worsened
- Significantly worsened

8. Can you provide an example of how technology has impacted a recent project or initiative?
9. In your opinion, what technological advancements will be most influential in the CCS in the next 5 years?

Section 4: Gender Equality and Diversity 10. Do you think emerging technologies have impacted gender equality in your field?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

11. If yes, can you describe how?
12. Have you faced any challenges related to gender or diversity due to technological changes?

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- Yes
- No

13. If yes, please describe these challenges:
14. Do you think technology can be used to promote greater diversity and inclusion in the CCS?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

15. If yes, how do you think this can be achieved?

Section 5: Future Outlook 16. What do you see as the biggest opportunities for young women in the CCS moving forward?

17. Do you have any suggestions for improving gender equality and diversity in the CCS through the use of technology?
18. Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up interview or focus group discussion?

- Yes
- No

19. If yes, please provide your email address.

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