

FEMLEAD VIRTUAL LEARNING LAB

Advancing Inclusive Gender Methodologies in Open Science and STEM



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1 ABOUT FEMLEAD

The FEMLEAD project (Fostering FEMale participation and LEADership in open science initiatives) is a three-year Erasmus+ cooperation partnership (KA220-HED) aimed at transforming how higher education institutions (HEIs) **address gender inequality and open science (OS)** integration in research and innovation systems. FEMLEAD responds to long-standing disparities in STEM fields by foregrounding **women's participation, leadership, and visibility within the evolving landscape of open science.**

2 PROJECT AIM

The initiative builds on the recognition that persistent gender gaps continue to limit diversity in research leadership, innovation pipelines, and OS participation across the European Research Area (ERA). In accordance with relevant EU policy frameworks, initiative underscores the importance of structural, institutional, and cultural transformations that **support gender-balanced** research environments, emphasizing the democratization of science, transparency, and inclusiveness as essential conditions for systemic change.

3 FEMLEAD VLL

At the heart of FEMLEAD lies the **Virtual Learning Lab (VLL)**, a digital, co-creative learning environment designed to embed **inclusive gender methodologies** within open science practices and STEM-related higher education.

The VLL serves as both a **training infrastructure and a strategic change mechanism** for HEIs.

It operationalizes four key OS dimensions – open knowledge, open infrastructure, engagement with societal actors, and dialogue with other knowledge systems – into **actionable training modules and participatory policy tools.**

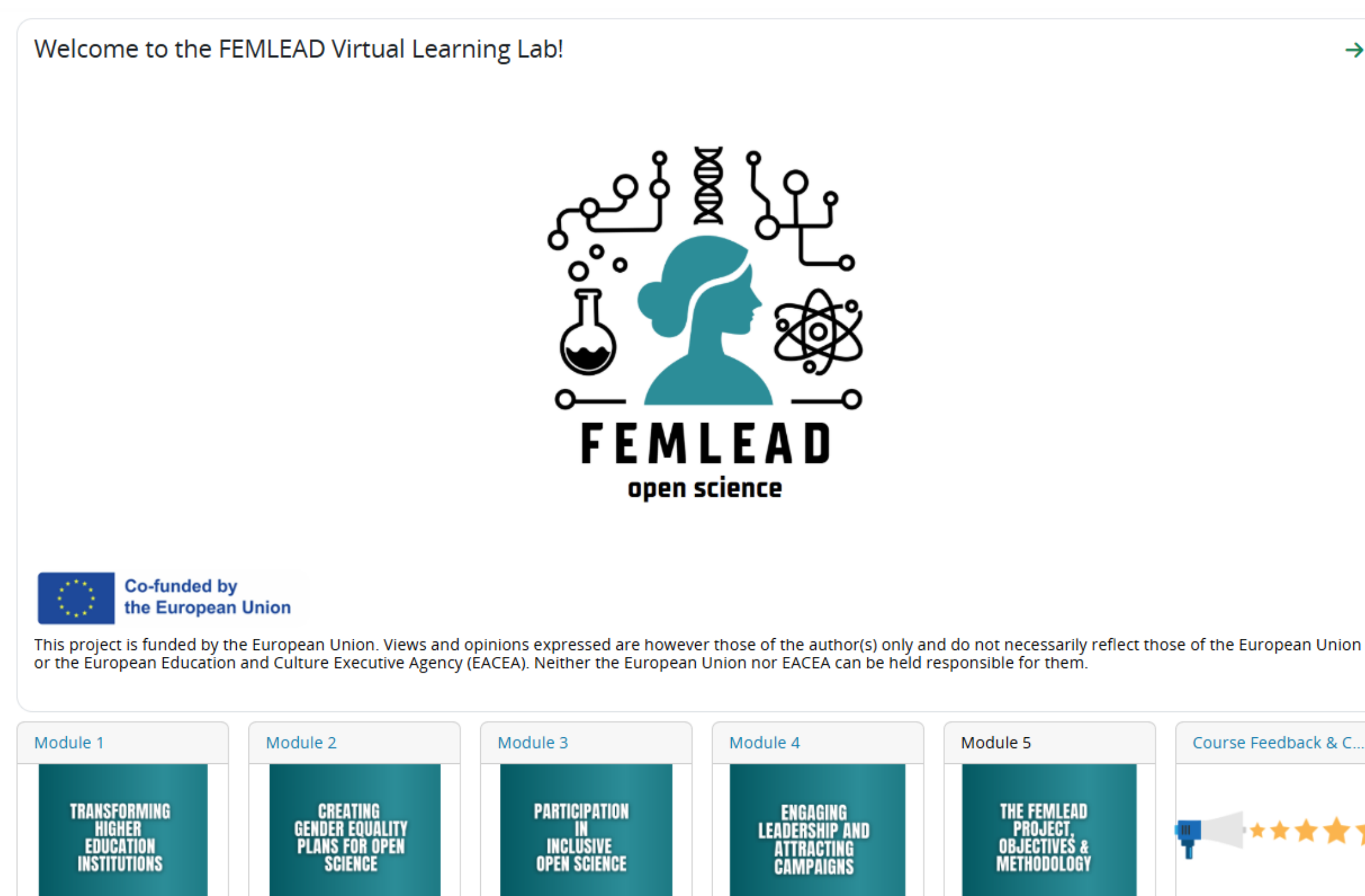


Figure 1. FEMLEAD Virtual Learning Lab start page

4 VLL DESIGN

The VLL's design is grounded in **participatory methodologies** informed by intersectionality and systems thinking. During the project's first phase, comprehensive institutional mapping was conducted to analyse current gender equality and OS policies across partner institutions. In parallel, **qualitative consultations** were carried out with more than 200 stakeholders – female researchers, students, HEI staff, policy actors, and grassroots organisations across partner countries. These voices now shape the pedagogical content and structural design of the VLL.

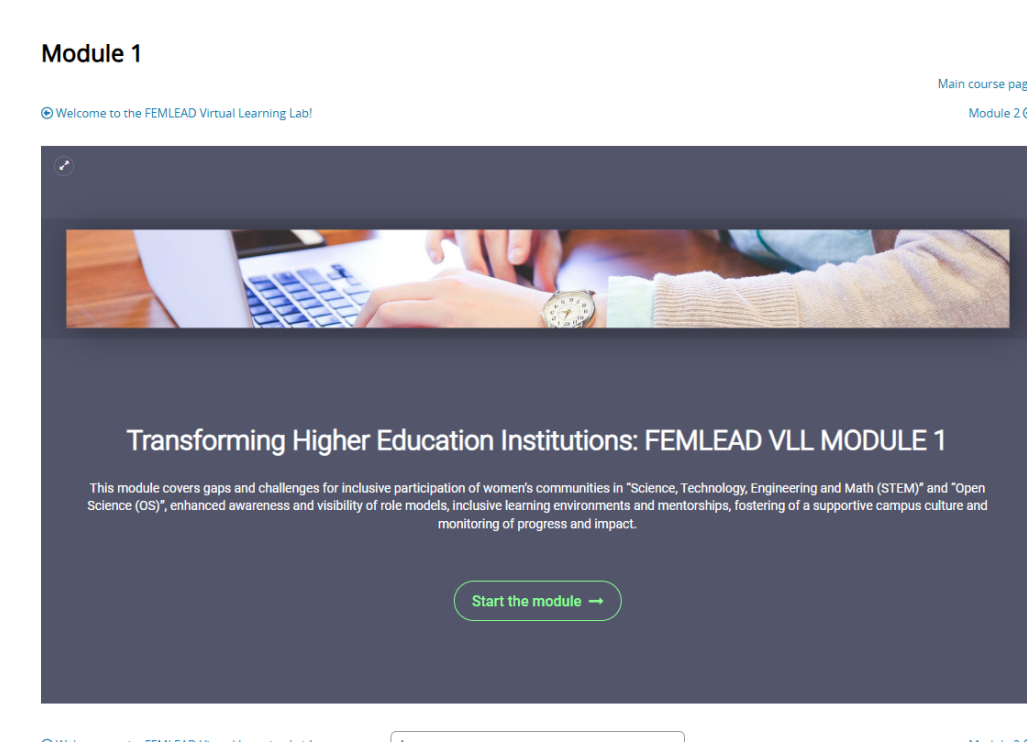


Figure 2. Start page for Module 1 - Transforming Higher Education Institutions

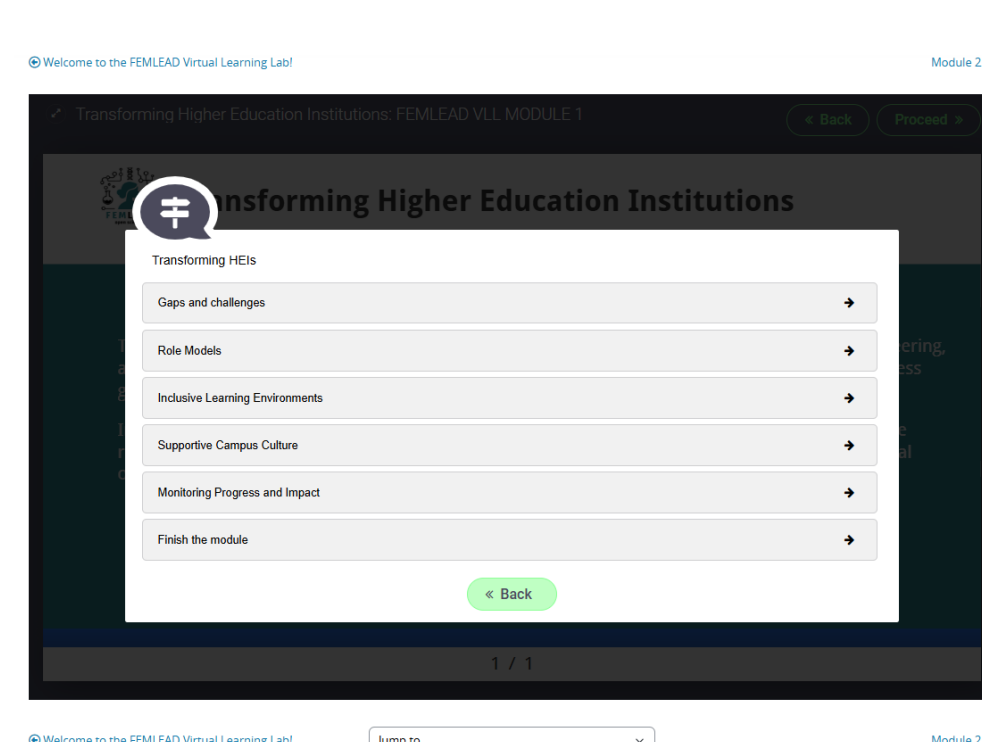


Figure 3. Selecting subtopics for Module 1

5 CONCLUSION

By the project's end in 2027, FEMLEAD envisions a **sustainable digital infrastructure** that will remain in use and further developed by partner HEIs and beyond. It aims to contribute to long-term transformations in how universities understand and implement gender equality in research and education. The VLL will be **accessible in multiple languages** and integrated into institutional learning management systems, ensuring broad reach and adaptability.



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