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# - Gender Equality Plan -

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## Executive Summary

The Verlab Research Institute is committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse work environment, recognizing that gender equality is essential for scientific excellence, innovation, and fairness. This Gender Equality Plan (GEP) outlines strategic actions aimed at promoting gender balance, equal opportunities, and a culture of inclusivity within the Institute. Rooted in international and national legal frameworks, including Horizon Europe gender equality requirements, Bosnia and Herzegovina gender laws, and EU directives, the Plan ensures compliance with best practices in gender mainstreaming.

Gender equality in science is not only a fundamental right but also a driver of progress. A diverse research environment leads to more comprehensive problem-solving, stronger collaboration, and higher-quality scientific advancements. However, challenges such as implicit bias, limited access to leadership roles, and work-life balance issues continue to hinder women participation in STEM fields. This Plan seeks to address these disparities through targeted policies, institutional support, and a commitment to ongoing assessment and improvement.

The Plan is structured around key objectives: achieving balanced gender representation among researchers and staff, ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources, fostering a culture of collaboration and inclusivity, supporting women in STEM through mentorship and career development programs, and creating a gender-sensitive work environment that dismantles biases and barriers. To achieve these goals, Verlab Institute will implement recruitment strategies that promote diversity, mentorship programs that support professional growth, and institutional policies that encourage flexible work arrangements. Regular training sessions on unconscious bias and gender-sensitive leadership will further embed inclusivity into the Institute's culture.

Monitoring and evaluation are integral to the success of this Plan. Verlab Institute will conduct periodic reviews, track gender-related data, and gather employee feedback to refine its strategies. Every two years, a formal reassessment will take place to update the Plan, set new objectives and key performance indicators, and evaluate the success of previous initiatives.

Through this Gender Equality Plan, Verlab Institute reaffirms its dedication to creating a workplace that values diversity, nurtures talent, and drives scientific excellence. By continuously improving policies and fostering a supportive environment, the institute aims to be a model of gender inclusivity in biomedical engineering, artificial intelligence, and medical devices.



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## Introduction

At Verlab Research Institute, we are committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse work environment. This Gender Equality Plan (GEP) outlines our strategic actions to promote gender equality in line with the SAGE Horizon 2020 project (Systemic Action for Gender Equality) and the DGACM 2021 Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Our goal is to ensure fair representation, equal opportunities, and a work culture that supports gender balance across all levels of decision-making.

Gender equality is not just a moral and social imperative but also a key driver of innovation and scientific progress. At Verlab Institute, we believe that a diverse and inclusive research environment leads to better problem-solving, more creative solutions, and a higher level of excellence in biomedical engineering, artificial intelligence, and medical devices.

Gender equality in science is crucial for fostering innovation, diverse perspectives, and excellence in research. When men and women have equal opportunities to contribute to scientific advancements, the quality and applicability of research improve, leading to more comprehensive solutions to global challenges. However, despite progress, women remain underrepresented in STEM fields, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles. Addressing gender disparities in science not only promotes fairness but also enhances the overall scientific ecosystem by integrating diverse approaches, ideas, and problem-solving strategies.

It is important to distinguish between gender equality and gender equity. Gender equality means providing the same opportunities and resources to all individuals, regardless of gender, ensuring that men and women are treated the same. However, gender equity goes a step further by recognizing that systemic barriers and historical disadvantages may prevent women from fully participating in science. To achieve true equality, institutions must implement gender-equity measures, such as mentorship programs, flexible working arrangements, and policies that support work-life balance. Women in science often face challenges like implicit bias, limited access to funding, and career interruptions due to caregiving responsibilities. Addressing these issues through tailored policies ensures that women have the support they need to thrive and advance in their scientific careers.



## Legal and Policy Framework

This Gender Equality Plan is developed in accordance with:

- **Horizon Europe Gender Equality Requirements**, which mandate that all research institutions participating in EU-funded projects implement a formal GEP. Horizon Europe requires all public bodies, higher education institutions, and research organizations from EU Member States and Associated Countries to have a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) as an eligibility criterion for funding. The GEP must be a formal, public document with clear objectives and concrete measures to promote gender balance in research and innovation. It must include provisions for data collection and monitoring, training on gender biases, and actions to ensure work-life balance and gender-inclusive recruitment and promotion policies. Additionally, Horizon Europe promotes gender dimension integration in research content, ensuring that sex and gender differences are considered in study designs where relevant. These requirements aim to foster more inclusive and impactful scientific advancements while addressing structural barriers to gender equality.
- **National Gender Equality Laws and Regulations**, ensuring compliance with local policies promoting gender balance in employment and research. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, gender equality is regulated by the Law on Gender Equality in B&H (Zakon o ravnopravnosti spolova u BiH, Official Gazette No. 16/03, 102/09, 32/10), which ensures equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, regardless of gender. This law applies at all levels of government and mandates the elimination of discrimination in employment, education, political participation, and public life. Additionally, the Anti-Discrimination Law of B&H (Zakon o zabrani diskriminacije, Official Gazette No. 59/09, 66/16) provides legal protection against gender-based discrimination and establishes mechanisms for legal recourse. The Gender Action Plan of B&H, developed by the Agency for Gender Equality of B&H, sets strategic goals for gender mainstreaming across all sectors, including science and research. These legal frameworks align with EU standards and international conventions, reinforcing the country's commitment to gender equality.
- **EU Directives on Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination**, which provide a legal basis for fair employment and professional advancement. The EU Directives on Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination establish a legal framework to ensure equal treatment and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender. Key directives include the Equal Treatment Directive (2006/54/EC), which prohibits gender-based discrimination in employment, pay, and working conditions, and the Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158), which promotes parental leave and flexible working arrangements to support gender equality. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 further strengthens these efforts by addressing the gender pay gap, underrepresentation of women in leadership, and gender-based violence. These directives require EU Member States to implement policies that eliminate barriers to gender equality and promote inclusive workplaces, ensuring fair opportunities in all sectors, including science and research.



## Objectives

The Gender Equality Plan of Verlab Research Institute is based on the following key objectives:

1. **Achieve balanced gender representation among researchers and staff**

This objective focuses on the recruitment and retention of individuals from underrepresented genders, ensuring that hiring practices actively promote diversity in leadership, technical roles, and research teams. By diversifying the gender representation, the organization fosters a more dynamic and innovative work environment that benefits from varied perspectives and experiences.

2. **Ensure equal access to opportunities and resources for all members, irrespective of gender, age, and nationality**

This goal emphasizes the importance of creating a fair and equitable workplace where all individuals, regardless of their background or identity, have equal opportunities to excel and succeed. This includes providing access to funding, career advancement, professional development, and other essential resources without discrimination, thereby eliminating systemic barriers to participation.

3. **Foster a culture of collaboration and inclusivity, promoting work-life balance and ensuring full participation in leadership and decision-making processes**

By nurturing an environment that values teamwork, respect, and inclusive decision-making, this objective strives to ensure that everyone feels empowered to contribute, regardless of their personal circumstances. Promoting a healthy work-life balance allows individuals to thrive both professionally and personally, helping to reduce burnout and increase overall productivity and job satisfaction.

4. **Support women in STEM through targeted mentoring, training, and career development initiatives**

This objective highlights the importance of providing women in STEM fields with tailored opportunities for professional growth, from mentorship programs to specialized training in leadership and technical skills. These initiatives are designed to address gender-specific challenges faced by women in male-dominated fields and help them overcome obstacles to advance in their careers.

5. **Encourage a gender-sensitive work environment that addresses biases and barriers to equal participation**

This goal is about actively identifying and dismantling both overt and subtle biases that hinder equal participation and representation of all genders in the workplace. It involves implementing strategies



for raising awareness, offering unconscious bias training, and creating policies that ensure everyone, regardless of gender, is treated with fairness, respect, and equal opportunity.



## Strategies and Actions

### Objective 1: Achieve balanced gender representation

#### Actions:

- Implement gender-inclusive recruitment policies, ensuring diverse hiring committees and unbiased selection criteria.
- Establish clear gender balance targets for leadership, research teams, and technical positions.
- Develop outreach programs to attract underrepresented genders to STEM fields through collaboration with universities and research institutions.
- Offer competitive and flexible working conditions to improve retention rates of diverse talent.
- Monitor gender distribution in hiring, promotions, and leadership appointments.

#### Key performance indicators (KPIs):

- Percentage of underrepresented genders in research, leadership, and technical roles.
- Ratio of female to male applicants in hiring processes.
- Gender composition of recruitment panels and hiring committees.
- Retention rate of diverse staff over time.
- Improvement in gender balance over consecutive hiring cycles.

### Objective 2: Ensure equal access to opportunities and resources

#### Actions:

- Conduct regular equity audits to assess gaps in access to funding, training, and career development.
- Establish transparent and objective criteria for promotions, salary increases, and leadership appointments.
- Provide equal access to professional development programs, conference funding, and grant applications.
- Implement policies that prevent discrimination and ensure equal pay for equal work.



- Offer targeted workshops and networking opportunities for underrepresented groups.

**KPIs:**

- Number and proportion of staff from different genders accessing training and funding opportunities.
- Gender distribution of promotions and salary increases.
- Employee satisfaction with access to professional development resources (measured via surveys).
- Percentage of funding/grants allocated to individuals of different genders.
- Reduction in reported incidents of discrimination or bias in workplace assessments.

**Objective 3: Foster a culture of collaboration and inclusivity****Actions:**

- Implement flexible work policies, including remote work and adjusted schedules, to support work-life balance.
- Organize leadership training programs for underrepresented genders to enhance participation in decision-making.
- Introduce mandatory diversity and inclusion training for all employees.
- Promote family-friendly policies, including parental leave and childcare support.
- Encourage inclusive communication by ensuring diverse representation in meetings, decision-making bodies, and institutional committees.

**KPIs:**

- Number of employees utilizing flexible work arrangements.
- Percentage of leadership and decision-making bodies that include diverse gender representation.
- Employee feedback on work-life balance and inclusivity (via surveys).
- Rate of participation in diversity and inclusion training programs.
- Improvement in gender representation in executive and management positions over time.





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## Objective 4: Support women in STEM through targeted mentoring, training, and career development initiatives

### Actions:

- Establish a structured mentorship program pairing women researchers with senior mentors.
- Provide dedicated training on leadership, negotiation, and technical skills tailored for women in STEM.
- Develop networking initiatives and partnerships with professional organizations supporting women in science.
- Offer career coaching and sponsorship programs to help women advance into leadership roles.
- Organize workshops and panel discussions on overcoming barriers faced by women in STEM.

### KPIs:

- Number of women participating in mentorship programs.
- Percentage of women attending leadership and career development training.
- Increase in women's representation in senior research and management positions.
- Success rate of women researchers in securing grants and promotions.
- Employee feedback on the effectiveness of career support initiatives.

## Objective 5: Encourage a gender-sensitive work environment that addresses biases and barriers to equal participation

### Actions:

- Conduct regular gender bias and inclusivity training sessions for all staff.
- Implement clear reporting mechanisms for gender-related discrimination and harassment.
- Review workplace policies to ensure they are gender-sensitive and inclusive.
- Encourage gender-neutral language in official documents and communication.
- Foster an open and transparent culture where employees feel safe discussing gender-related concerns.



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KPIs:

- Number of employees trained in gender bias awareness.
- Frequency of reported incidents related to gender bias or discrimination and resolution time.
- Employee perception of inclusivity and safety in the workplace (measured through anonymous surveys).
- Changes in workplace policies reflecting gender inclusivity.
- Number of workshops and awareness campaigns conducted annually.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure the effectiveness of our Gender Equality Plan, we will:

- Conduct annual reviews of gender statistics.
- Gather feedback from employees through surveys and interviews.
- Adjust policies and programs based on observed trends and collected feedback.
- Publish the Gender Equality Report every other year to track progress and challenges and update the existing Gender Equality Plan as necessary.

## Training and Awareness Measures

Verlab Institute will implement the following initiatives to foster gender equality awareness and professional growth:

- Diversity and inclusion training for all employees.
- Workshops on unconscious bias and gender-sensitive leadership.
- Support programs for returning parents to facilitate their reintegration into the workforce.
- Networking and mentorship events for women in STEM fields.



## Commitment to Continuous Improvement

This Gender Equality Plan reflects our dedication to creating an equitable and diverse research environment. We will actively monitor progress and continue refining our strategies to enhance gender inclusivity in biomedical engineering, artificial intelligence, and medical devices. To ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness, we will conduct a reassessment of the Plan every two years, during which we will update the Plan, set new objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs), and evaluate the success of previous versions. This continuous improvement process will enable us to adjust our approach based on evolving needs and challenges, ensuring that our efforts remain impactful. We encourage all employees to take an active role in supporting gender equality efforts. By working together, we can create a workplace that is not only fair but also one that drives innovation, creativity, and scientific excellence.

