

Introduction

Gender equality is a core value of the European Union. Most of the countries at the top on gender equality worldwide are EU members. However, there is still room to further progress in closing the gender gap. The European Commission has pledged to tackle this challenge by setting out the Gender Equality Strategy for the 2020-2025 period. One of the objectives under the renewed framework is to strengthen gender equality in research and innovation.

To enhance gender equality in the research field, the Commission will introduce new measures, such as the possibility to require a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) from applicants of Horizon Europe. The purpose of the Gender Equality Plan is to promote female participation in the Programme, at both the level of recruitment and decision-making.

As an organisation participating in the Horizon 2020 Programme, I2ART has chosen to support the Commission's effort to strengthen gender equality within research and innovation fields. The firm strongly believes that diversity is the key to succeed in the green and digital transitions and build the Europe of tomorrow. Consequently, I2ART is willing to adopt the Gender Equality Plan, anticipating the measures announced by the Commission. This document aims to present the company's gender strategy for the next two years.

The Gender Equality Plan (GEP)

The GEP is a flexible tool developed to take into account the characteristics and needs of each organisation. As the organisation evolves, so does its gender equality plan. This process encompasses three steps:

1. **Diagnosis:** In this phase, the organisation assesses the gender challenges to address. The analysis looks at the disaggregated gender data on the personnel. These data are collected annually and integrated using additional information, like the results of the focus groups with the employees.
 2. **Action planning:** The next step is to define how to address the gender inequalities previously identified. The company should therefore adopt a set of actions to tackle these inequalities. It is essential to focus on policies that deliver measurable results. Reliable indicators are needed to monitor the implementation progress.
 3. **Evaluation:** This is the final stage of the process. The company has to evaluate if the action plan has been effective. Outputs from the evaluation process are the building blocks to further develop the company's gender strategy.
- This three-step process ensures the overall quality of the plan and its sustainability in the long term. Starting from 2021, **I2ART** will go through the process every two years to review and update its Gender Equality Plan.

I2ART's GEP 2021-2025

I2ART formally starts to roll out its gender equality strategy in 2021. The plan formalises the efforts that the firm has carried on since its foundation in April 6th, 2015, **I2ART** has always championed gender equality, both within the firm and among its partners. The Gender Equality plan represents a step- up of this commitment in a better-structured strategy that can be measured and monitored over time.

That said, the overall goal for the 2021-2025 GEP is to move from an active engagement to a strategic approach. The firm turns its commitment toward gender equality into actions. These actions respond to specific objectives and have dedicated resources.

Where we are:

I2ART is a Research Institute that operates relying on independent consultants. Most of these professionals are specialised in managing European funded projects. Students, fresh graduates and early-stage researchers join **I2ART** to support the firm's operations working with experienced consultants. Some of them decided to continue their professional experience in the research field after their involvement in EU R&I projects.

Where we are heading:

The firm is not new to gender equality. However, it aims to scale up its commitment by introducing a better-structured gender strategy. This strategy has three main objectives:

1. Promoting a gender equality culture among the firm's partners, incoming trainees and clients;
2. Promoting a gender-sensitive approach in the recruitment and career development of the firm's partners and trainees;
3. Promoting integration of work with family and personal life

How we are getting there:

I2ART has planned to implement a set of actions to accomplish the goals mentioned above. The implementation of these actions starts in 2021 and last until 2025. Then, the firm will review its plan and eventually adopt a new set of measures.

The following paragraph presents the planned initiatives for the coming two years, highlighting:

- Which objectives they address;
- How the firm will implement them;
- How the firm will measure the results and monitor the implementation process.

Action 1: Website page about gender equality

- **Objective:** Promoting a gender equality culture among the firm's partners, incoming trainees and clients.

- **Description:** I2ART will add a page to its website dedicated to the gender equality issue. This page will illustrate the firm's gender strategy. Visitors will be able to download the Gender Equality Plan and the letter of commitment signed by the company director.
- **Indicator:** the annual number of visitors that access the dedicated page. The goal is to redirect at least half of the yearly website visitors to the dedicated page.

Action 2: Gender-sensitive communication approach

- **Objective:** Promoting a gender equality culture among the firm's partners, incoming trainees and clients.
- **Description:** I2ART will adopt a communication approach free from gender biases. This approach aims to balance the representation of men and women in both internal and external communications campaigns.
- **Indicator:** Yearly number of reclaims from end-users and clients about gender issues in the firm's communications materials. The target is to keep the reclaim rate low.

Action 3: Gender awareness campaign

- **Objective:** Promoting a gender equality culture among the firm's partners, incoming trainees and clients.
- **Description:** I2ART will promote its gender equality strategy among trainees and business partners. To raise awareness about the issue, independent consultants and trainees will receive a fact-sheet about the firm's commitment toward gender equality. This procedure will ensure that professionals who collaborate with I2ART share its values and efforts.
- **Indicator:** Yearly number of new trainees and independent consultants who join the firm. The goal is to inform all the incoming professionals about the firm's gender equality plan.

Action 4: Ensure gender balance within the firm's working groups

- **Objective:** Promoting a gender-sensitive approach in the recruitment and career development of the firm's partners and trainees;
- **Description:** I2ART will work to improve gender balance among its consultants and trainees. The goal is to achieve an equal representation of both sexes in the firm's working groups. Consequently, the selection process of independent consultants and trainees will guarantee equal opportunities for men and women.

- **Indicator:** Yearly disaggregated gender data on independent consultants and trainees who collaborate with the firm. The ultimate goal is to achieve a balanced gender mix (50-50) in each working group.

Action 5: Mentorship for women trainees

- **Objective:** Promoting a gender-sensitive approach in the recruitment and career development of the firm's partners and trainees;
- **Description:** **I2ART** will support the career development of its trainees. In particular, women trainees will benefit from specific mentoring sessions with the senior consultants working for the firm. Starting a career as a project manager could be challenging, especially for women. The firm will ensure that trainees receive adequate mentorship and support to set their professional path as project managers.
- **Indicator:** Yearly number of mentoring session offered to women trainees. The goal is to provide at least one session for each trainee that joins the company.

Action 6: Mainstreaming flexible working

- **Objective:** Promoting integration of work with family and personal life
- **Description:** Flexible work enables individual employees to balance the needs of work and home. **I2ART** will ensure that all its consultants and trainees can access remote working when needed. The firm will plan its operations adopting a flexible methodology. This approach should allow trainees and consultants to join the firm's activities both from the office and remote.
- **Indicator:** This action has no specific indicator. The firm will evaluate annually if the flexible approach is working for everyone. The goal is to make this option accessible to all trainees and consultants.

Sources:

- Gender equality plan of the University of Bologna
- Gender equality plan of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam
- Gender equality plan of project IBERUSTALENT
- Research paper "A Positive Perspective to Implementation of a Gender Equality Plan: a question of design, time and participation" from the University of Minho
- Gender equality diagnostic tool from the Australian Government
- A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, from the European Commission
- Gender Equality in Academia and Research - GEAR tool