

## GENDER EQUALITY PLAN 2024-2029

### 1 Context

The latest Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon Europe 2021-2027, has introduced new provisions to strengthen gender equality in European organizations at a systemic level. In particular, for all research institutions the adoption of a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) has become a necessary requirement to access the funding from the Horizon Europe research programme.

The action of the European Commission is part of the EU strategy for the equality of gender 2020-2025. Research institutions are required to adopt the Gender Equality Plan by the European Commission in order to participate in all Horizon Europe calls expiring in 2022 and beyond. Once submitted, the project proposal for funding is evaluated, and the partners of the consortium sign the Grant Agreement. The implementation of the GEP does not affect the evaluation of the project, but it is mandatory at the time of signing the Grant Agreement.

The participation of all stakeholders is recommended in the process of drafting and implementing the GEP. The participatory process for the drafting and implementation of the GEP is relevant in order to overcome obstacles and resistances. In particular, the European Commission requires the involvement of the Director of the institution, training and research staff, technical and administrative staff.

When proposing projects for Horizon Europe the European Commission requests a self-declaration submitted in the form of an online questionnaire that lists the four mandatory process-related GEP requirements as well as the 5 recommended subject areas.

The following four requirements are the minimal building blocks:

- The GEP must be a public document approved and signed by the bodies at the top of the institution and published on the institution's website in accordance with the data protection legislation;
- Specific human and financial resources must be dedicated for the design, implementation and monitoring of the GEP, including funding for job positions dedicated to the issue of equality or groups responsible for gender equality;
- The GEP must include provisions for data collection and monitoring, evenly distributed by gender and related to training and teaching staff, researchers and IT technicians, and administrative staff; an updated annual report with indicators must be prepared and available on the institution's site;
- The GEP must be supported by training and capacity building. In particular, the training of staff and decision makers on the issues of gender and equal opportunities.

The EC indicates the following five minimum priority areas of intervention to which specific measures should be dedicated:

1. Work-life balance and culture of the organization;
2. Gender balance in top positions and in decision-making bodies;
3. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression;
4. Gender studies in research; and in teaching programmes;
5. Addressing gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

## 2 Current situation

**EUTA** was registered as a non-governmental association in November 2014 by Business Registers Agency in The Republic of Serbia with the purpose of contributing to the successful implementation of EU policies and strategies and improving the harmonization of policies at the national, regional and EU levels by strengthening capacities of organizations and project leaders in Serbia and Western Balkan region to advance their performance, quality of results and impact through preparing proposals for projects and successfully realizing them.

EUTA represents a team of experts in the field of EU funds and programmes with extensive experience in EU project development, proposal writing and project management. EUTA is a project implementer and partner on EU, international and national projects in charge for various activities, such as project management, dissemination, communication and engagement, research, education and training, coaching and mentoring. EUTA personnel are engaged on projects through employment contracts and copyright contracts.

The organizational structure of EUTA consists of the General Assembly and the Authorized representative (Director) of the Association. The Assembly is the highest authority in the management of the Association and it consists of 7 members of the EUTA. Director is the executive body of the Association, who takes care of the implementation of the goals of the Association, which are determined by the Statute and the decisions of the Assembly.

Looking at the gender distribution, Table 1 shows that the EUTA is hiring 63.64% women and 36.36% men. Also, there are more women (57.14%) than men (42.86%) in management positions in the Assembly.

Table 1 - Gender distribution

	Male	Female	Total
EUTA personnel	4	7	11
General Assembly	3	4	7

EUTA Gender Equality relies on a national legal framework:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006),
- Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (2009),
- Law on Gender Equality (2021),
- Law on the Protection of Citizens (2021),
- National Gender Equality Strategy for the period of 2021-2030,
- National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 - Women, Peace and Security in the Republic of Serbia (2017-2020)

EUTA strives to fully implement the recommendations adopted by the European Commission, with special emphasis on achieving gender equality among employees at all levels, including EUTA's management (The European Charter for Researchers, 2005).

### 3 General Policy

EUTA shall be a workplace of equal opportunities, where all employees regardless of age, gender, nationality, religious or other beliefs, ethnicity, disabilities, transgender identity or sexual orientation are able to thrive and progress professionally. In planning and decision making, the EUTA shall consider effects on equality and diversity.

Gender equality is also an important part of the systematic efforts to improve the EUTA work environment. The work to promote equal rights and opportunities shall take place in cooperation with the team members. No one at the EUTA will feel discriminated and EUTA shall facilitate the employees' work-life balance. The possibility to choose work tasks shall be equal for all employees.

EUTA has its organizational policy, regulations and procedures clearly outlined and explained in the 'Statute of EUTA'. The Statute is an official document that regulates internal policies, practices and procedures relating to general management, organization, operations, and other relevant aspects. The Statute is reviewed periodically and necessary changes are introduced in order to reflect important developments. This document constitutes the cornerstone of the EUTA's commitment to building a supportive and inclusive work environment.

The policy of EUTA is to provide equal employment opportunities to all employees; to prohibit discrimination in employment because of race, ethnicity, colour, religion, national origin, gender identity, gender and sexual orientation, marital status, political affiliation, age or handicap; and to enable gender equality. This policy sets the basis for the Gender Equality Plan.

There is zero tolerance toward sexual harassment, gender-based and discrimination-based violence and in case of occurrence, disciplinary actions, including termination of engagement, will be taken. If needed, legal action will also be taken according to the respective legislation in Serbia and in that case EUTA will rely on the regulations defined by the University of Belgrade, such as Act on Prevention and Protection against Sexual Harassment (July 8, 2021, "Gazette of the University of Belgrade", No. 227).

At the EUTA, compensation is determined based on the type and amount of the workload, employee's qualifications, professional experience and their demonstrated commitment to the organization.

So far, such policy, regulations and procedures have contributed to the establishment and consolidation of a healthy organizational culture, where gender equality is viewed as an asset. To maintain such standards, and progress simultaneously, the organization invested in the preparation of the Gender Equality Plan.

## 4 Planning

### Gender Equality Officer

Although the data shows that there is a gender balance at the EUTA, any discrimination that may occur in staff management practices and a gender mainstreaming approach in those policies, with special attention to the selection/recruitment, training, promotion, and termination processes, will be eliminated. To manage the human resources of the organization and analyse whether there is direct or indirect discrimination based on gender in the processes mentioned above, the EUTA will establish a position of Gender Equality (GE) Officer in 2024. GE Officer will deal with all issues related to gender equality, including monitoring the implementation of domestic laws related to gender equality and the implementation of the GEP.

The main responsibilities of the person in charge of gender equality should be: running training sessions, maintaining records and information systems, advising about the effects of discrimination on grounds of age, disability, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation, interpreting and ensuring compliance with legislation, preparing and delivering presentations and raising awareness of equality issues and promoting change. The GE Officer will be involved in all recruitment processes, including job interviews.

This Gender Equality Plan is considered as an important instrument in ensuring a gender-balanced work environment, and is structured in line with the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy considerations:

- a) Work-life balance and organizational culture;
- b) Gender balance in leadership and decision-making;
- c) Gender equality in recruitment and career progression;
- d) Integration of the gender dimension into research, training and consultancy content;
- e) Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment.

EUTA is committed to taking the necessary actions to create structural changes, and achieve and maintain a high level of gender equality at all levels and in all areas of work and research by implementing the following measures:

- building institutional capacity to identify and maintain relevant data, as well as establishing systematic procedures and information systems to improve data collection and address data gaps,
- strengthening the visibility of gender equality and raising awareness of the importance and benefits of adequate gender balance at all levels,
- promoting gender diversity within institutional structures, with a strong emphasis on greater participation of women in decision-making bodies and decision-making processes, in accordance with institutional, national and other regulatory frameworks.

## **(a) Work-Life Balance and Organizational Culture**

EUTA acknowledges the importance of work-life balance and strives to maintain it. Support of professional and personal growth is fundamental and is regulated as follows:

### **Workload Management**

Based on the workload terms for each position, detailed terms have been developed for each EUTA staff member. These terms are clearly communicated by the Director and upon confirmation and endorsement by each team member; they are included in the employment or copyright contract. The workload and work performance are monitored regularly by the Director and registered in monthly reports. Based on this practice, a balanced workload is ensured as follows:

- Director assesses and ensures that workload is distributed in a balanced way, and in line with what has been agreed with the employee.
- The employee is offered the possibility to raise any concerns to the Director. This happens on a need-basis, when the employee raises the concern to the management.

To plan the workload, team meetings are held regularly (annual and midterm meetings). The EUTA staff work on joint work plans, with clearly assigned tasks. The plans are introduced to the organisation, discussed and then endorsed. The agreed plans are monitored regularly.

### **Flexibility in working time and place arrangements**

EUTA will show flexibility to suit personal circumstances of individual employees, or overall circumstances that apply to all staff. More specifically, EUTA has shown flexibility and commits to continuing to do so in the following situations:

- Work for temporary, jointly agreed and defined periods of time; in case of an authorized training course that is related directly to the EUTA (in Serbia or abroad); a leave may be granted, the salary will be paid in accordance with the established procedure. In case of part time courses in Serbia, time-off is given during regular working hours, if applicable. In case of training courses related to an employee's personal needs, the employee shall use their free time to attend such courses. In special cases it is possible to move these within the official working hours for reasons of attending classes or courses, but the employee will have to work extra time to compensate for the lost time.
- Serious health issues of the employees or of depending family members: a sick leave may be used for medical reasons only when a staff member, their spouse, minor child and immediate dependant is affected. The number of days/hours off due to illness will be registered by the Director. All leaves due to illness should be reported to the Director not later than 9:00 AM of the first day of absence. A certified medical document must be submitted to the Director. Payment of salary applicable during a sick leave is according to the Serbian law. Days of paid sick leave for full-time staff must be certified by a medical document. Staff on sick leave shall continue to accrue annual leave and still be subject to maximum annual leave limits.
- Outbreaks of pandemics, or similar situations, affecting the health, and safety of employees; in case of pandemics, or similar situations, affecting the health and safety of employees, EUTA shall implement the respective laws and regulations set by the Serbian government or the respective local government. In absence of such regulations, or as a supplement to them, EUTA Director will consider the issuance of

specific regulations for the employees, in accordance with the risk of the situation and respecting the work-life balance.

- And any other situations with serious implications

### **Professional Development**

Training is considered as very important for the professional development of the EUTA staff members, and we distinguish the following two types of training: 1) Training that is directly related to the EUTA needs and activities and 2) Training that primarily benefits the staff member as an individual.

Training that is directly related to organizational activities is encouraged and funded by the EUTA through investing in research and training. For courses that are paid for by the EUTA, a certificate of completion of the course is requested. In cases when the certificate is not provided, the employee has the obligation to return the money allocated for the course to the EUTA. Special cases are discussed with the Director.

### **Parental Leave Policy**

EUTA shall facilitate all employees to combine work and family life and encourage all parents to make use of their right to parental leave. There shall be no doubt that EUTA has a positive attitude towards all employees going on a parental leave.

The EUTA grants maternity leave to all employees who request it for up to a maximum of one year, according to the Serbian Labour Law. The employee is requested to give a sufficient advance notice of the impending delivery date to the supervisor, so that appropriate replacement may be arranged. During a maternity leave, the payment to the employee will be provided by Secretariat for Social Protection of the City of Belgrade.

### **(b) Gender balance in leadership, management and decision-making**

As mentioned above, the organizational structure of EUTA is simple – General Assembly and Director are the management and decision-making structures, with clearly regulated functions and competences defined by the Statute of EUTA. Gender representation ratio indicators at General Assembly as per March 2024 are 57.14% woman and 42.86% men. The mid-term target is to maintain a ratio of no lower than 50% of women in management and decision-making positions, as well as in the project teams.

### **(c) Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression**

The recruitment policy and process are clearly outlined in the 'Statute of the EUTA'. Assessments based on skills and experience shall form the basis for recruitment and promotion. A gender balance is to be pursued with the aim of both genders being represented with at least 40%.

In the event of vacant position announcements, the Director will prepare a job description and announce these vacancies on the EUTA's official website, social networks and with National Employment Service. All staff recruitment is discrimination-free and any advertising is gender-neutral. All vacancies are advertised in accordance with the national laws guaranteeing:

1. The EUTA is an equal rights and opportunities employer.
2. All applications will be treated with strict confidentiality in compliance with the Law on Personal Data Protection (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 87/2018)'.

The evaluation of a candidate's skills and qualifications is a process led either by the Director or by the Assembly, depending on the employees' position within the institution.

The first pre-selection is made on an application basis (CV + supportive documentation), by the Assembly of at least three persons. If no qualified candidates apply, the job will be re-advertised for an additional period. In the case of a vacancy for a job position, following the pre-selection of a suitable application in line with the announcement, the recruitment process proceeds with the oral interviewing procedure.

The gender ratio of the applications is conditioned by the market offers. However, EUTA is at all times aware and responsible for ensuring:

- A fair, non-discriminatory and balanced process;
- Recruitment in line with the overall gender equality plan provisions.

#### **(d) Integration of the Gender Dimension into Research and Teaching Content**

Research is part of specific grant-funded projects and the gender dimension is integrated in the following ways:

- In the case of the EUTA's own organizational projects, in addition to the fact that teams are gender balanced, depending on the typology of (research) projects, gender considerations are integrated including in: research design, data collection, research analysis, etc.
- In the case of donor-funded projects, gender considerations are (a) either already integrated in design or (b) integrated by the implementing team, following a simple assessment. When already part of the project, the teams are qualified to implement and monitor the required assignment in full compliance with the scope of work.
- In the event that the gender considerations are vague or absent, the team conducts a simple assessment. Some sample questions used as part of the assessment are:
  - Are the consultations organised with the stakeholders conducted in a participatory way?
  - Are the gender statistics available for the work at hand?
  - Are the gender aspects included in the monitoring and reporting?
  - Does the external communication strategy/approach challenge the gender perceptions?

#### **(e) Sexual harassment**

According to 'Regulation Act on prevention and protection against sexual harassment at the University of Belgrade' as a relevant example, harassment is defined as unwanted behaviour or sexual nature that violates the employee's integrity. Examples of harassment are degrading comments or jokes, groping or other unwanted touching, unwanted sexual insinuations; glances and gestures, making a person invisible, not taking the person seriously, withholding of information etc.

An employer is obligated to prevent sexual harassment regardless of whether it occurs at the workplace or not. This means that the employer shall have both a policy against sexual harassment and an action/contingency plan for how the occurrence of sexual harassment shall be handled and how an eventual report shall be investigated. There is a policy and contingency plan regarding this at EUTA: there is zero tolerance against any forms of sexual harassment or harassment based on gender, ethnicity or religion.

Action and contingency plan: Gender Equality Officer responsibility will be to act in case a staff member is experiencing harassment at the workplace (sexual harassment, harassment related to gender, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs). Currently, these are the responsibilities of the Director. If a report is made it shall be investigated internally before further measures are taken. If the employee wants procedure to be continued, the Gender Equality Officer shall act accordingly to 'Regulation Act on prevention and protection against sexual harassment at the University of Belgrade'.

A possible measure could imply a conversation between the person who feels harassed and the harasser under the direction of the Gender Equality Officer, or with the harasser directly, with the aim of stopping the harassment immediately. If the harassment does not stop, the next step is a formal report. No measures can be taken without consulting the person who feels harassed. Harassment of any kind, including gender-based violence, sexual harassment and any such behaviour, is strongly objected to, and prohibited at the EUTA. In case of occurrence, whether observed or reported, it will result in disciplinary actions, including termination of the contract and legal actions if relevant. EUTA prohibits accessing pornographic, sexually explicit, racist, or otherwise abusive web sites, newsgroups, or chat rooms or sending e-mail with such content.

### **Salaries and fees**

Salaries and fees are based on general criteria such as levels of qualifications, functions/roles and responsibilities within the EUTA and knowledge and experience relevant to the EUTA. The salary revision process shall be equal for all employees.

It is stated in 'Regulation Act on elements for determining salaries and/or fees on the projects', method of determining and paying salaries and other incomes to employees at the EUTA, that the salaries are calculated individually based on the complexity and scope of work, as well as the ability of the employee to help the EUTA to achieve its goals. Each staff category will be evaluated on its own criteria and on the expectations for each category.

Salaries and fees are based on general criteria such as roles and responsibilities within the EUTA and knowledge and experience relevant to the EUTA. The salaries and fees are evaluated each year and the evaluation is based on quantitative and qualitative evaluation criteria described in a document, which is revised and presented to the staff before each year's salary revision.

### **Implementation of the GEP Actions to maintain and improve gender equality at EUTA**

There is an annual work environment survey at EUTA that is followed up with actions to improve the work environment. In addition to those actions, the Director will continuously work with the GE Officer at EUTA to help secure equal opportunities for all staff at the EUTA.

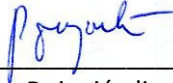
The following steps are taken for the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan:

1. The approval of the GEP by the Director and the Assembly.
2. The appointment of the Gender Equality Officer. The Gender Equality Officer will monitor the achievement of the above policies and tasks and will report to the EUTA as follows: (1) pre-set based on a template: twice a year and (2) on a need basis: any time a related problem or concern arises
3. The publication of the GEP: GEP is easily accessible online, on the EUTA webpage [www.euta.info](http://www.euta.info) in the English language.



4. Whenever a document, guidelines, policies and plans and other similar administrative supporting documents are updated, they will also be assessed from a gender equality and equal treatment perspective and changed accordingly if necessary, before any decisions are made.

Belgrade, 15 March 2024



Ratko Bojović, director at EUTA

