

GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

OF THE HIGHER INSTITUTE OF INSURANCE AND FINANCE

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality (GE) is a core principle embraced by the European Union and contributes positively to research and innovation (R&I) endeavors. It enhances the caliber and pertinence of R&I, fosters the attraction and retention of diverse talent, and ensures the optimization of everyone's potential. A pivotal strategy for fostering GE at the organizational level involves the adoption of a Gender Equality Plan (GEP).

Our GEP constitutes a series of commitments and initiatives designed to advance gender equality within the Higher Institute of Insurance and Finance (VUZF University) by instigating both institutional and cultural shifts aligning with the five pillars outlined by the European Commission. In our GEP, we outline 19 specific measures grouped into five objectives, aiming to fortify gender equality within the organization, elevate awareness in our community, and set a precedent by leading by example.

METHODOLOGY

The development of the current GEP involved the formation of a specialized task force, comprising two members from the staff of VUZF University. Established in Spring 2023, this task force took on the responsibility of conducting a “gender analysis” to assess existing data and information sources and evaluate VUZF’s status regarding gender equality.

The TF executed the data collection process through the following methods:

- An examination of existing data, sources, legislation, and policies

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- A survey of staff employed at the VUZF university

The data collection process presented challenges, as gender-related data, while accessible in most areas, was not readily available. In some instances, data was either nonexistent or exceptionally difficult to retrieve.

The TF structured the audit and survey based on the five areas of gender equality recommended by the European Commission:

- Work-life balance and organizational culture
- Gender balance in leadership and decision-making
- Gender equality in recruitment and career progression
- Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content
- Measures against gender-based violence

The gender analysis concentrated on the following five key areas:

- Human Resources analysis: from recruitment to career progression
- Gender balance in the composition of VUZF governance bodies
- Gender balance in projects involving VUZF
- Gender balance in VUZF-led events and internal and external communications
- Gap analysis in existing policies and procedures

ACTION PLAN

Goal 1: Foster gender balance in team composition and decision-making bodies

The primary objective of the initial goal is to establish or reinforce essential human resources tools and policies to encourage gender balance in teams and decision-making bodies within VUZF. It encompasses four measures designed to enhance and professionalize VUZF's human resources approach, both internally (e.g., existing staff) and externally (e.g. job applicants).

The initial measure seeks to enhance transparency and comprehension within the organization by guaranteeing that staff has systematic access to an updated organigram that reflects current reporting lines. This organigram will be integrated into the onboarding package for new Coordination & Support (C&S) staff, ensuring that decision-making processes are transparent and accessible to all.

The three additional measures are all related to recruitment practices. Firstly, the plan involves developing a formal recruitment policy, currently absent at VUZF, with a focus on gender-

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inclusive language. Job advertisements will undergo standardization, and a template will be crafted utilizing gender-inclusive language, explicitly conveying to applicants that VUZF is an equal-opportunities employer. Lastly, attention will be given to the gender balance of recruitment panels, and mechanisms will be implemented to ensure that these panels are as gender-balanced as possible.

Goal 2: Ensure gender-equitable remuneration and career advancement opportunities

The objective of the second goal is to establish monitoring mechanisms to guarantee gender-equitable remuneration and career advancement opportunities as VUZF expands its team. This goal encompasses four measures designed to strengthen VUZF's capability to prevent gender disparities in remuneration and career development, ultimately fostering transparency within the organization.

The initial measure involves supporting the collection of gender data from applicants to explore and assess the potential under-representation of genders in specific positions. The collected data is intended for informational purposes and may serve as the foundation for future targeted actions if any.

The second and third measures are both related to remuneration. Similar to the organigram mentioned in Goal 1, the second measure aims to make an updated version of the VUZF's salary framework accessible to all staff. This framework may offer additional insights into VUZF's current remuneration policy, including salary ranges for various positions (e.g., scientific, project management, administrative coordination) and a transparent approach to considering the cost of living and the staff's country of residence in determining remuneration levels.

VUZF will proactively initiate the development of potential quantitative metrics for a monitoring mechanism of career and salary progression for Coordination & Support (C&S) staff with comparable levels of experience (Measure 3). This measure aims to anticipate and address any potential salary gaps in the future, ensuring that VUZF has an effective monitoring mechanism as the team continues to grow.

The fourth measure aims to assist VUZF in formalizing a training policy and transparent process for all C&S staff, enabling them to pursue opportunities to enhance their skillsets.

Goal 3: Foster gender balance and diversity throughout VUZF operations

Goal 3 seeks to extend gender balance and diversity beyond the VUZF Coordination and Support (C&S) team, ensuring that our values permeate not only management practices and internal processes but also our operational activities. This goal encompasses three measures focusing on training, communications, and consortium building.

For the initial measure 3.1, the emphasis lies in establishing systematic data collection as an initial step, prioritizing insight into the composition of training attendees over setting a specific gender balance target. This data collection enables us to recognize trends, make informed decisions on potential future actions, and track and compare data over time to observe changes.

In measure 3.2, the objective is to achieve equal representation of speakers in VUZF-led events and communication materials. This measure serves as a significant outward signal to our broader community, indicating our commitment to positive change. Ensuing gender-balanced representation and raising awareness within our team about this issue helps consider the gender aspect when inviting speakers, especially keynotes featured in event communication materials. Consistent with the previous measure, attention is also given to the gender representation (both visually and in text) in our main communication channels, such as website and social media posts.

The final measure in this goal pertains to the composition of consortia in projects VUZF joins. It aims to heighten awareness of gender balance in project consortia among other project coordinators and communicate our values during the proposal stage. Consequently, gender balance in the consortium will be included in the existing internal criteria considered when joining new projects.

Goal 4: Ensure VUZF is a secure, inviting, and healthy workplace for everyone

VUZF has already instituted explicit and transparent policies to guarantee a secure, inviting, and healthy work environment, supporting a harmonious work-life balance.

Aligned with VUZF's Code of Conduct, the objective is to establish an environment where individuals feel comfortable in both their ability to work effectively and within the social context of the office. Any form of harassment or violence (verbal or physical) in the workplace is strictly prohibited, with procedures in place to address such cases.

Measures under Goal 4 aim to enhance the current internal framework, providing even higher-quality work-life balance arrangements, more user-friendly and transparent procedures, and more inclusive language. In addition to measures focused on improving the internal framework for a safe, balanced, and healthy workspace, specialized gender equality training materials will be developed as part of the staff onboarding package. These materials aim to raise awareness of gender equality concepts and inform staff about existing VUZF measures and policies. Furthermore, an independent gender equality expert will organize and conduct yearly training sessions on gender equality-related topics.

Goal 5: Enhance awareness of Gender Equality within VUZF Infrastructure

The objective of Goal 5 is to heighten awareness of gender equality within our infrastructure. This will be accomplished through key measures designed to foster gender balance in all positions within our infrastructure and promote GE practices within the university. Additionally, we will actively seek outstanding women or men for potential future positions within VUZF, aiming for gender balance among candidates for these roles. To realize this objective, three measures have been developed to prioritize the promotion of GE awareness across our infrastructure in line with best Gender Equality Plan (GEP) practices.

The first measure focuses on ensuring a gender balance in the candidate selection pool for upcoming positions within the infrastructure. This will involve sustained active outreach to potential outstanding women candidates to encourage their application. The second measure involves actively communicating information about GE to the staff of VUZF University. Lastly, the third measure aims to integrate content on the gender dimension in research into VUZF training curricula for young researchers.

These specific measures are intended to encourage more women to take on roles in leading positions in the university. To educate our infrastructure and institutions on best GEP practices, relevant publications, and materials, starting with the GEP, will be actively and regularly disseminated. This dissemination will also include training opportunities on GE-related subjects. Furthermore, basic training on the concept of the "gender dimension in research" will be incorporated into VUZF-organized training sessions going forward to ensure an ongoing increase in awareness of GE within the VUZF infrastructure.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To effectively carry out the initial phase of VUZF's Gender Equality Plan, a comprehensive strategy for monitoring, evaluation, and learning will be implemented. A key component of this strategy involves transforming the initially established ad-hoc task force, responsible for drafting the current plan, into a permanent working group (WG). The existing four GEP task force members, actively engaged in the auditing and drafting phase, will continue their involvement in the WG for the first year to provide more effective support during the initial stages of plan implementation.

The monitoring plan will involve quarterly meetings between the WG and staff members responsible for specific measures under each goal. Metrics associated with each measure will be diligently recorded, and suggestions for continuous improvement will be documented. The WG will bi-annually report progress on implementation to the Management Team, with yearly reports and updates on the GEP's progress shared at a dedicated meeting with the entire VUZF C&S Team.

The current GEP is approved by: prof. Boris Velchev
/Rector of VUZF/
