

NOVEMBER 2025

ecraid

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Gender Equality Plan

2025 - 2028

Inclusion and Diversity

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This Gender Equality Plan represents the current state of our collective efforts and route we have taken to accomplish this plan. This document will be regularly updated – next due in 2028.

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Version History

Version	Version date	Summary of update
1.0	8-5-2023	Starting version
2.0	09-10-2025	Enhanced introduction to include a review of progress made since initial GEP was implemented. Update to disaggregated equality data. Significant updates to section 4 Update to future plans

1 Introduction

Established in 2022, Ecraid is committed to being a positive force for diversity and inclusion, not only within our organisation, but also across the wider infectious diseases field in Europe. Our inaugural Gender Equality Plan (GEP), published on the International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2023, was our first concrete step on this journey. It outlined our initial vision and the foundations we aimed to establish between 2023 and 2025, focusing on the essential steps of GEP implementation as recommended by Horizon Europe Guidance.

This document represents a significant milestone in our ongoing commitment. Since the launch of our initial GEP, we've made tangible progress in embedding gender equality principles into our operations. We completed the publication and official endorsement of our GEP, ensuring its visibility and integration into our daily activities. We've also initiated quarterly sex-disaggregated and gender-disaggregated data collection, providing us with crucial insights into our workforce composition and progress in key areas, such as leadership and departmental representation. The allocation of resources through our Head of People and Culture, along with ongoing plans to implement a dedicated workgroup for GEP implementation, underscores our serious approach to this work.

However, we recognise that the journey toward true gender equality is dynamic and requires continuous refinement. This second version of our GEP is not simply an update; it's an evolution. It reflects our deepened understanding, gleaned from the initial audit and implementation phases. It addresses the ongoing need to consider gender and diversity in research and to increase the visibility of broader diversity issues. This plan leverages our initial learnings and data to introduce more refined objectives and targeted actions.

Our overarching vision remains consistent: to build a permanent, not-for-profit, pan-European clinical research network where every individual, regardless of gender, background, or identity, feels safe, valued, and empowered to contribute their unique perspective and experience. This GEP is a roadmap to achieving that vision, focusing on enhancing gender balance in leadership, promoting work-life integration, and fostering an inclusive culture.

We firmly believe that embracing a wide range of backgrounds is essential for fostering better collaborations with our diverse stakeholders and ultimately achieving our mission to reduce the impact of infectious diseases in Europe with greater speed and efficiency.

This updated GEP outlines our strategic priorities for the coming years, building on the five essential factors for gender equality identified:

- work-life balance and organisational 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, and
- robust measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

We will continue to expand our approaches to inclusion, encompassing broader diversity issues such as ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, neurodiversity, person-first language, self-identification, and disability, as laid out in our future plans.

Achieving the goals within this GEP requires the continued dedication and active participation of everyone at Ecraid, from our Executive Board to every team member. This document serves as our shared roadmap, outlining concrete actions, responsibilities, and timelines. We are committed to fostering an environment where equality is not just a policy but an embedded in our culture, driving innovation, enhancing collaboration, and ultimately strengthening Ecraid's impact on public health.

We invite every member of the Ecraid network to engage with this plan and champion its principles as we work together to build a truly equitable and inclusive future.

2 Gender Equality Commitment

Ecraid was founded in 2022 and began hiring personnel in October that same year. We have always been fully committed to equality and inclusion. In 2023 and 2024, we focused on the following building blocks:

1. Publication and official endorsement of the GEP
2. Dedicated resources
3. Data collection and monitoring
4. Training

As recommended by the Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans, we followed the four principal steps in the lifecycle of a GEP:

- **The audit phase:** elements of this phase included the collection of sex-disaggregated and/or gender-disaggregated data and a review of practices to identify gender inequalities and their causes. The audit stage also included a review of relevant national and regional laws, regulations, or funding requirements.
- **The planning phase:** during this phase, we set the objectives and targets for the GEP alongside a roadmap of actions and measures. This phase also included allocating resources and responsibilities for the delivery of the GEP and agreeing timelines for implementation.
- **The implementation phase:** in which the roadmap of activities was implemented, included, for example, setting up working groups to develop and implement new policies and procedures. This phase included awareness raising and training efforts to achieve buy-in and build capacity and support for the GEP across the organisation, as well as give visibility internally and externally to the GEP.
- **The monitoring and evaluation phase,** in which we delivered the plan and progress against its aims and objectives were regularly assessed. Ongoing review of findings and progress also provided space for learning and feedback that enabled adjustments and improvements to interventions.

In 2025, we conducted a review of progress made and work to still to be completed. Looking back over 2022-2024, gender equality (GE) awareness was a key focus of Ecraid's strategy and significant effort has been made to fully integrate it into our daily operations.

- The GEP has been approved, published, and made accessible to everyone in the organisation. On a quarterly basis, an update was made on the gender ratio, both within the organisation as a whole, and at managerial level.
- Ecraid works with the OGSM methodology to monitor its annual plans, goals, and deliverables. Progress is discussed monthly in the Management Team meetings. Within the Ecraid core pillar "great people and great work-environment", the OGSM objective of monitoring the gender ratio is a frequently reviewed topic.
- Our HR system is set up and optimised, so we have up-to-date key and control figures available around GE.
- We created a more detailed chapter in our Employee Handbook about unwanted behaviour on the work floor. We adjusted the definition of unwanted behaviour and explicitly mentioned unwanted sexual harassment and discrimination as not tolerated. We also made a process for employees and managers detailing how to handle this if it occurs, including filing a formal complaint.
- Through the department of People & Culture (P&C), GE is managed for new hires and equality within management roles. Also, the awareness of GE in internal selection or promotion procedures is actively promoted and looked after through the presence of a P&C representative.
- P&C also coordinates an interdisciplinary project group that has a monitoring but also initiating role around this theme. This workgroup consists of representatives of the departments Grant management, Communication, and Operations.
- In the field of work-life balance, training has been offered in recent years on work pressure and work stress, which has now become an integral part of our training curriculum.
- The first steps are being taken to make the GE principles part of policies and policy implementation in several ways within Ecraid. For example, by introducing the role of a confidential advisor (confidant) in the organisation so that any gender-related incidents can also be reported and supervised in confidence with an independent person.

3 Data on Gender Equality

The figures in the tables below show Ecraids current employee data.

Gender ratio	01 2023	01 2024	01 2025	07 2025
Male	11%	13%	17%	18%
Female	89%	87%	83%	82%

*Number and percentage of gender per department ***

Department	Female	Male	Total
OPS 1	6	0	6
OPS 2	5	1	6
OPS 3	8	1	9
OPS 4	5	0	5
OPS 5	8	1	9
OPS 6	9	0	9
Site Management	7	0	7
Business Development	0	2	2
IT	0	1	1
Grant Management	3	1	4
Scientists	3	1	4
CLIN-Net	8	1	9
Comms & Marketing	5	0	5
CEO	0	1	1
Quality	1	0	1
Holding - Ecraids	0	1	1
Office Management	2	0	2
Finance	0	3	3
People & Culture	2	0	2
Total Employees	75	11	86
Total Percentage	87%	13%	100%

*Number and percentage of gender in leadership ***

Number of Employees	Female	Male	Total
Executive Board	1	2	3
Management Team	5	6	11

% of Employees	Female	Male	Total
Executive Board	33%	67%	100%
Management Team	45%	55%	100%

*Average age per department **

Age	# Employees	% Employees
<30	19	21%
30-39	42	47%
40-49	15	17%
50-59	6	7%
>60	8	9%

*% Employees with Dutch nationality ***

Nationality	# Employees	% Employees
Dutch	59	68.6%
Other	27	31.4%
Total	86	100%

Note:

* Employees with Employee contract on 1-7-2025

** Employees with Employee contract on 1-9-2025

4 Essential Factors for Gender Equality

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Ecraid's commitment to gender equality is a core principle, extending beyond simple compliance with the European Commission's mandatory requirements. Our GEP is designed not just to meet the five essential criteria but to foster a truly inclusive and equitable culture.

By strategically addressing additional recommended areas, we aim to create a work environment where every individual, regardless of gender, feels valued and can thrive. This proactive approach strengthens our organisational integrity and enhances the quality and relevance of our networks.

Work-life balance and organisational culture

Ecraid's long-term strategy is to curate a healthy, sustainable work environment. We believe this is essential for maintaining the high standards required in clinical research. A supportive and gender-sensitive organisational culture that actively promotes work-life balance is not only crucial for the well-being and retention of staff, but also directly impacts the quality, reliability, and innovation of our network.

This section details how Ecraid will continue to foster an inclusive culture that enables all staff (both internal and external) to effectively combine their professional and private lives, ensuring a resilient and dedicated team for the long-term.

Main Actions:

1. Active communication by People & Culture about the availability of in- and external support, which offers support for stress, uncertainty, and other personal or work-related problems.
2. Review and improve flexible working policies found in the employee handbook (e.g., remote work, flexible hours) and actively promote their equitable uptake by all genders.
3. Provide information and support for staff with caring responsibilities and encourage men to take up their full parental leave entitlements to challenge traditional gender roles.
4. As part of the 2026 budget, we will offer training for Ecraid's governance boards, leadership, and team members to recognise the early signs of mental health issues in their colleagues and provide appropriate support.
5. Review, promote, and execute the policy to support the reintegration of staff after illness or career breaks, ensuring a smooth return to their roles.
6. Recruit (as necessary) external counsellors or trainers for employees who need specialised support in (re)gaining work-life balance.

To ensure the actions taken are successful, **we will monitor:**

- Uptake rates of flexible work arrangements and parental leave, disaggregated by gender.
- Satisfaction levels with work-life balance (via regular surveys), disaggregated by gender.
- Number of staff trained on mental health awareness and stress management.

Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

Effective leadership in a clinical research organisation demands diverse perspectives to address complex challenges and drive innovation. An effective cultural and organisational change towards gender equality requires well thought-out policies and the structural integration of gender equality throughout the organisation, from internal teams to decision-making bodies. A lack of gender balance in leadership can lead to key ethical considerations being overlooked and a failure to represent the diverse populations involved in our trials. Therefore, we strive to ensure an equal representation of all genders in our boards and committees. This focus on achieving equitable representation, particularly in positions of strategic governance, ensures that Ecraid's direction is informed by a broad range of experiences and insights, ultimately strengthening our scientific integrity and societal impact.

2025 Gender analysis of Ecraid's staff and leadership

Ecraid is committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment. As part of this commitment, we have analysed the gender distribution across all levels of our organisation. The following data, which included options for staff to identify as gender diverse or prefer not to say, highlights the current landscape:

Group	Female %	Male %
Management Board	33.3	66.6
Extended Management Team	45	55
Scientific Advisory Board	22	78
Supervisory Board	50	50
Coordinating Committee	35	65
All Ecraid Staff	79	21

This analysis reveals a disparity between the overall staff composition and the representation in leadership positions. While the majority of our organisation's staff identifies as female, there is an imbalance between staff holding and leadership roles.

This finding underscores the need for targeted strategies to address this imbalance and promote equitable representation at every level of the organisation, from our general staff to our top leadership bodies.

Main Actions:

1. Analyse the possibilities of regulating the equal representation of male, female, and gender-diverse people in governing boards and set clear, ambitious, yet realistic targets for gender representation.
2. As part of the 2026 budget, conduct mandatory training for the EB, MT, and all leadership on gender equality and unconscious bias to promote awareness and understanding.
3. Continue gender-neutral recruitment and selection processes for leadership roles, including diverse selection panels.
4. Foster a culture where diverse voices are heard and valued in the decision-making process.

To ensure the actions taken are successful, we will monitor:

- Percentage of women, men, and gender-diverse individuals at different hierarchical levels.
- Percentage of women, men, and gender-diverse individuals in committees, boards, and management positions.
- Number of leadership training or mentorship programmes implemented.

Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

In clinical research, a diverse and talented workforce is our greatest asset. However, the so-called "glass ceiling" and other systemic biases can prevent talented individuals from reaching their full potential, leading to a loss of valuable expertise and perpetuating inequalities.

Ecraid's approach:

We address the entire talent lifecycle from recruitment to career advancement, to ensure fair and equitable opportunities for all staff. By eliminating gender bias and promoting professional growth for everyone, we attract and retain the best talent, enhancing Ecraid's capacity for scientific excellence and innovation.

Main Actions:

1. Refresh our gender equality component in the recruitment process, using gender-neutral language in job advertisements and ensuring diverse representation on interview and promotion panels.
2. Strengthen the professional skills and leadership of female-identifying employees by providing them with gender-sensitive career support and coaching/training opportunities if needed.
3. The EB will establish clear guidelines to ensure gender parity within research project teams, in alignment with the Horizon Europe framework and broader EU gender equality objectives.
4. Commit to OGSM yearly goal of hiring more staff who identify as male or gender-diverse where possible.
5. Promote our policy that equitable access to training, professional development, and networking opportunities are there for all staff.

To ensure the actions taken are successful, **we will monitor:**

- Gender breakdown of successful hires every year for the different roles.
- Number of staff participating in career development programmes, disaggregated by gender.

Integration of gender dissemination into data management and the formation and management of research

Integrating a gender dimension into research is a core requirement of Horizon Europe and a broader priority across EU research policy, reflecting its fundamental role in producing high-quality, relevant, and impactful science.

This section outlines our commitment to systematically embedding the gender perspective into research best practices, as well as into our training and educational programmes. By doing so, we ensure that our research is more accurate, ethically robust, and better aligned with the health needs of all individuals. Ecraid's approach extends beyond individual projects and extends across our entire wider research and clinical network. We will actively promote this principle in our EU grant proposals and consortium-building efforts, seeking partners who share this commitment.

Key Actions:

1. Mandate compliance with EU gender integration guidelines: Ensure all grant writers and researchers adhere to EU checklists and guidance, embedding sex/gender analysis in project proposals and research methodologies.
2. Promote sex-disaggregated data use: Encourage the use of sex-disaggregated data in all relevant research fields and promote reporting findings disaggregated by sex and/or gender.
3. Integrating gender considerations: Actively promote the integration of the gender dimension during the formation and management of research consortia, ensuring alignment with this priority among our partners.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure the effectiveness of these actions, we will track the following indicators:

- Use of sex-disaggregated data in relevant research outputs (e.g., publications, presentations).
- Number of new consortium partnerships that include a commitment to gender dimension integration.

Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

A safe and respectful work environment is non-negotiable for any organisation, especially one involved in the sensitive and collaborative field of infectious diseases clinical research. Gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual harassment create a hostile atmosphere that erodes trust, compromises well-being, and undermines the professional relationships essential for effective teamwork and ethical conduct.

This section outlines our commitment to a zero-tolerance policy against all forms of GBV. By establishing clear policies, confidential reporting mechanisms, and proactive awareness campaigns, we ensure that every member of the Ecraid network can work without fear, fostering a culture of mutual respect and psychological safety.

Main Actions:

1. Arrange for an external confidant, who employees can confidentially report sexual harassment to and seek advice from. The confidant will report anonymously to the Executive Board and the Head of People and Culture and Works Council.
2. Make the commitment to a work environment free of sexual and gender-based harassment explicit in Ecraid's code of conduct.
3. Organise regular awareness-raising sessions on sexual and gender-based harassment for all staff.
4. Conduct a yearly staff wellbeing survey to establish a perception baseline on this issue, which will help inform future actions.
5. Provide comprehensive support services for victims where needed.

To ensure the actions taken are successful, **we will monitor:**

- Number of reported incidents of GBV and their resolution.
- Number of staff trained in GBV prevention and awareness.
- Awareness levels of reporting mechanisms (via surveys).

5 Future Plans

Ecraid recognises that diversity and inclusion is an ongoing topic that requires constant attention and improvement to ensure we not only provide a safe and welcoming environment to all our current employees but open our doors to new employees of all backgrounds. Thus, the current Gender Equality Plan is intended to be a living document, which will grow with our ambitions to focus on gender equality, inclusion of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups, neurodiversity, and people who identify as disabled. In doing so, we hope to not only meet the standards we have set in our own behavioural code but also improve the quality of our work by including a wider range of views and experiences.

The publication of this updated Gender Equality Plan marks a critical milestone in Ecraid's commitment to fostering a truly equitable and inclusive environment. Over the past three years, we have successfully moved beyond compliance to lay structural foundations for gender equality. This was achieved through the systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data, formal policy integration (such as embedding monitoring into our OGSM methodology), and the establishment of clear reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence, including the introduction of a confidential advisor.

While these achievements confirm our institutional commitment, our data analysis highlights specific areas for continued focus, particularly the need to actively promote gender parity within our strategic leadership and governance bodies. This plan serves as our renewed commitment to addressing these imbalances, strengthening our organisational integrity, and ensuring that diverse experiences inform our scientific direction.

Ecraid understands that the effectiveness of our pan-European clinical research network relies on embracing a diversity that extends beyond gender alone. The aim is to create an environment where every individual feels safe, valued, and empowered to contribute their unique perspective.

Our future plans reflect a strategic evolution from an initial Gender Equality Plan (GEP) to a comprehensive plan encompassing broader diversity dimensions.

Through a thorough audit, using our upcoming staff survey (October 2025), we will gather the necessary data to inform our next steps. These insights will allow us to move from a basic gender-specific roadmap to a more holistic D&I framework, ensuring that equity is systematically integrated across all policies, from recruitment and talent development to the adoption of principles like person-first language.

By prioritising this comprehensive agenda, Ecraid is strengthening the scientific rigor of its research and accelerating our overall mission to reduce the impact of infectious diseases in Europe.

The successful realisation of this vision is a shared responsibility. This document outlines Ecraid's commitment to investing resources and leadership focus but achieving genuine and sustainable equality requires the active engagement of every member of the Ecraid network. We invite all staff and stakeholders to champion these principles as we work together to build a truly equitable, inclusive, and scientifically strong future.