

Gender Equality Plan 2022-2027

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This document is compliant with the Horizon Europe framework standards. It will be updated on a yearly basis.

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1 Introduction

The socialisation of male and female roles starts at early age. Boys being called "tough big boy", girls "sweet little girl" by parents and peers. Colour schemes for boys and girls are typically blue or pink, math-based games are thought most suitable for boys, crafts and creative activities for girls. These frames of reference are internalized by children by observational learning and consolidated through positive reinforcement of imitation of this behaviour – primary socialisation. The secondary socialisation, which takes place in school and association life, and tertiary socialisation via mass media perpetuate this dynamic. They lead to stereotyped behaviours and choices of secondary and tertiary studies, and are, in turn, reflected in subsequent professional careers. Not surprisingly, previous PISA studies show, for example, that girls have less self-confidence about their abilities to solve mathematical or scientific problems, and that they have more feelings of anxiety regarding mathematics. Between boys and girls with the same levels of self-confidence and anxiety, the gender difference in scores on scientific literacy disappears. This suggests that the differences in performance may be explained not by competence but by different perceptions and attitudes towards (computer) sciences and mathematics¹. The latter are strongly determined by the socialisation patterns².

These processes result in an unequal presence of men and women in the different sectors and fields of scientific research and innovation and has an impact on the way these fields develop. In particular, an under-representation of women in a number of scientific disciplines and professions has been identified in the recent and not so recent past as a fundamental problem also related to unequal opportunities in society. Also, in relation to the content of research projects, we see increasing attention to the importance of a balanced distribution of sexes in the composition of experimental groups, samples, in the development of research hypotheses, and to the level of inherent bias in research and development for projects that do not take this distribution into account.

Sex refers to the biologically determined characteristics of males and females in terms of organs and reproductive functions, based on chromosomal complement and physiology. As such, sex is broadly understood as the classification of living beings as male or female. Gender refers to the social differences between women and men that are learned, changeable over time and vary widely both within and between cultures. Gender affects how people identify and act as men or women. It also often affects how others perceive them. It is 'socially constructed', which means that it is based on, but not determined by, sex (Horizon Europe).

Gender policy is conceived in this document as a policy that pays attention to the psychological, social and cultural factors that contribute to unequal opportunities for the different sexes. Innoviris has always recognised the importance of a well thought out gender and equal opportunities/chances policy and wants to contribute to responsible research and innovation through targeted measures. The development of a gender and diversity policy within the Research and Innovation (R&I) policy domain is one of the actions in the Regional Innovation Plan 2021-2027 (and the Smart Specialization Strategy that is part of it)³. Participatory and inclusive R&I approaches were identified as a key challenge in this regard. Not surprisingly, this thematic is an integral part of the Regional political R&I (as well as more general) priorities. In addition, the development of an internal culture of respect and diversity represents one of the four axes of Innoviris' current strategic plan 2021-2025, underscoring the importance of this theme within the organisational culture.

¹ OECD (2015), The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264229945-en>

² UNESCO (2017), Cracking the code: Girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

³ See <https://innoviris.brussels/regional-innovation-plan>

This document summarizes our past, present and future undertakings, focusing on the five fields of action, recommended by the Horizon Europe framework programme:

- 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;
- measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

Legal background

The regional gender policy has its origins in the Ordinance of 29 March 2012⁴ on the integration of the gender dimension in the policy lines of the Brussels-Capital Region and its implementing decrees. The most relevant articles of this so-called "gender mainstreaming" ordinance in this framework are the following:

- "Art. 3: Each Minister and Secretary of State shall integrate the gender dimension into all policies, measures and actions falling within his or her remit".
- "Art. 4: In addition to the measures contained in Article 3 of this Ordinance, each member of the College shall ensure that, in the areas of their competence, the statistics produced, collected and commissioned by the public services and public interest bodies in their field of action are broken down by sex and that gender indicators are drawn up where relevant." (See IBSA publication by Roger Kalenga-Mpala, 2014⁵, for analysis and recommendations).

Political background

Innoviris responds to operational objective 8 of the orientation note by the minister for the period 2019-2024, in which Innoviris should commit to mainstreaming equal opportunities in the R&I policy, in accordance with article 3.1 of the ordinance of 29 March 2012. In its annual operational plans, as well as in light of the Regional Innovation Plan, Innoviris systematically puts in place measures to achieve the abovementioned objectives.

A detailed overview of the state of play, as well as future measures that will be undertaken, is listed hereafter. Each time, indicators are proposed that allow for a follow-up of the evolution. First, we provide a brief overview of the regional challenges with respect to gender equality in the domain of R&I.

⁴ See: https://etaamb.openjustice.be/nl/beschikking-van-29-maart-2012_n2012031171

⁵ Kalenga-Mpala, R. (2014) Gender en statistieken in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest. *BISA Focus*, Brussel : Brussels Instituut voor Statistiek en Analyse.

Gender equality as part of a responsible research and innovation policy

The development of a gender equality policy is part of a broader ethical reflection: what is the social responsibility of Innoviris' R&I support policy? In the Horizon Europe framework programme, Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) receives special attention. RRI focuses on creating high quality scientific research and innovation that meets the needs of the public. In concrete terms, this means involving a wide range of stakeholders in determining how best to use science and technology to address today's problems, but also to create a world that is sustainable for future generations.

The European Commission proposes six key policy themes related to RRI: (i) research ethics and integrity, (ii) open access, (iii) gender equality, (iv) public involvement, (v) governance and (vi) science education. Innoviris is currently active in all these policy areas. Furthermore, the results of the SwaFS moRRI project⁶ show that Belgium is at the forefront of RRI at the European level, together with other pioneering countries such as France, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and the UK. It is through RRI that Western European countries can make a difference when it comes to developing a competitive R&I ecosystem.

⁶ See <https://super-morri.eu>

2 Gender policy in RDI - The challenges facing the Brussels Capital Region

A number of the challenges identified in relation to the implementation of a gender policy are specific to the Brussels-Capital Region and therefore serve as a starting point.

1. Education and training - diverse choices of men and women lead to under-representation in science and technology fields

A 2018 analysis⁷ shows that, although women make up more than half of the student population in higher education in Brussels, they are generally underrepresented in STEM (scientific and technical) courses, which is also confirmed by more recent figures. Across all STEM programmes, only 20% of college students and about 35% of university students are women. This under-representation is highest in ICT (6% female undergraduates and 22% female masters), followed by civil engineering, natural sciences and industrial and technological sciences (all with less than 30% female) and the disciplines of mathematics, chemistry and geology (around 30% female). In contrast, women and men are more equally represented in biological sciences, agricultural sciences, bioengineering sciences and environmental sciences and management. In the health sciences and in the humanities and social sciences and arts, women are the dominant group.

This shows that the Brussels Region faces a number of important gender related challenges in the development of STEM talent in higher education; particularly in the specific fields mentioned above. This challenge applies more explicitly to the ICT sector, which is key in Brussels.

2. Labour market and economy

Brussels is a human capital hub for RDI. Of all people working in the Brussels-Capital Region, around 2,2% worked in R&D in 2019. With a share of 39%, women are an under-represented group. If we look at the share of researchers in R&D personnel, this share is even slightly lower, at 37%. The enterprise sector has the lowest representation of females; with 29% of the R&D personnel and 27% of the researchers being a woman⁸.

Furthermore, despite the over-representation of women among the graduate student population (Report of the Universities of the Walloon-Brussels Federation and the F.R.S.-FNRS on the state of gender equality in 2018-2019, p. 14), there is a funnel effect and an under-representation in the research professions. For example, at the ULB, 44% of the scientific staff are women doctoral students and 38% are post-doctoral students, and 39% of the academic staff are women lecturers, 31% are professors and 24% are ordinary professors. At the VUB, the situation is relatively similar: 44% female doctoral students and 38% female postdocs, 39% female lecturers, 31% female professors and 24% female full professors⁹.

⁷ Van Laethem, M. & Verstraete, C. (2018). STEM opleidingen, een mannenzaak? *BISA Focus*, Brussel : Brussels Instituut voor Statistiek en Analyse.

⁸ Brussels Instituut voor Statistiek en Analyse, 2022, see <https://bisa.brussels/themas/onderzoek-en-technologie/onderzoek-en-ontwikkeling>

⁹ Vrije Universiteit Brussel (2017). Eindrapport Genderactieplan 2014-2016, Brussel.

Even though female entrepreneurship is on the rise in the Brussels-Capital Region, in the business world, women are still in the minority. Figures from the European Commission's Start-up Monitoring for 2018¹⁰ show that only 9,9% of Belgian start-ups were led by women. Analysis by Women in Business indicates that this figure may be even lower in Brussels. Furthermore, the digi-tech business world is almost exclusively composed of men. Women's access to venture capital is a more general problem. For these reasons, a specific objective 3.2 has been defined in the Small Business Act (2016-2025)¹¹: 'supporting women entrepreneurs'. This has led to campaigns such as "invest for her" (hub.brussels and Be Angels) and several other actions are underway, with a horizon of 2025.

In addition, analyses of bottleneck occupations in the Brussels-Capital Region¹² show a persistent labour shortage in STEM-related technical-scientific occupations: engineers, IT specialists in the broad sense (software engineers, system analysts, etc.), architects and technicians in natural and applied sciences. These occupations are characterized by a strong underrepresentation of women, which is logical given years of under-representation of women in STEM disciplines. This is particularly true in the ICT and engineering sector. It is essential to strengthen the supply side and provide equal labour market opportunities for men and women. Working towards a better representation of men and women in science and technology disciplines is, in this view, a meaningful ambition, as is developing the skills of women in male-dominated sectors (and vice versa).

3 Work–life balance and organisational culture

One of the four strategic ambitions of Innoviris for the coming years is the development of an internal culture of respect and diversity; in order to make Innoviris a "best place to work" (a key aspect of Innoviris' strategic vision). The objective is to lead by example, especially in terms of inclusion and diversity.

With a culture of respect and diversity is meant: an open culture, a culture of communication about what worked well and what didn't, an innovative organisation that constantly learns from its successes and failures, requires respect for each person and a clear distinction between the actions and the person. Management will always seek to act in this way and will demand the same respect for others from every Innoviris employee. Management attaches great importance to diversity. Diversity in experience, backgrounds, ideas and opinions will lead to better innovative solutions and optimal decisions. Representation of Brussels' diversity within Innoviris is necessary to create tools and policies that are ethical and adapted to the diversity of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR). Innoviris also stands for equality and avoids any form of discrimination, whether it be on the grounds of skin colour, national or ethnic origin, philosophical or religious beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Staff members at Innoviris work flexible schedules with flexible hours, which allows them to combine work and family life. Structural teleworking is also generally accepted and applied by staff members. This allows them to work permanently from home up to three days a week. This also contributes to the work-life balance, as well as to, potentially, a more equal role in the household for men and women. The subsequent indicators are proposed for follow-up:

¹⁰ Steigertahl, L., Mauer, R. & Say, J.B. (2018). EU Startup Monitor. Brussels : European Commission.

¹¹ See: <https://go4.brussels/nl/projecten/de-small-business-act-sba-77-concrete-maatregelen-om-kmos-en-zelfstandigen-te-ondersteunen/>

¹² See : https://www.actiris.brussels/media/zlgagdmk/2022_01_view_brussels_analyse-van-de-knelpuntberoepen-in-het-bhg-2020_compressed-h-6F859CB2.pdf

	2019	2020	2021
% of men in a parental leave career break scheme	12	7	10
% of women in a parental leave career break scheme	17	7	3
% of men teleworking structurally (2 to 3 days a week)	9	25*	40
% of women teleworking structurally (2 to 3 days a week)	14	17*	55

**The remote work figures from 2020 onwards do not take into account the compulsory remote work resulting from the measures against COVID-19. The figures are those of employees who have regularized their administrative status in anticipation of future structural remote working should it no longer be mandatory.*

In addition, Innoviris has a well-being plan that is evaluated on an annual basis in function of monitoring well-being at work. The actions undertaken via this plan are the result of a psychosocial risk analysis, carried out in the past.

Furthermore, attention is paid to inclusive communication to staff. Campaigns such as "all genders welcome", driven by the central regional services, have been disseminated.

Lastly, multiple human resources have been dedicated to the implementation of gender equality: a diversity officer, a gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting coordinator were appointed as well as a correspondent for equal chances.

Future actions

In preparation for a new well-being plan, a new analysis of psychosocial risks will be conducted in the near future that will lead to targeted measures to reassure the conservation and perpetuation of the internal culture of diversity and inclusion. An internal charter for gender and diversity is foreseen as well, to be diffused internally.

4 Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

Since 1 February 2021, Innoviris has a new board of directors with equal (50/50) gender representation (two women and two men). The middle management (team leaders) is also composed in a balanced way, with five women and four men (56% women).

	2019	2020	2021
% of females in the direction	66	75	50
% of females in the middle management (team-leaders)	67	71	56

Also, with regard to decision-making, an important focus is on gender aspects in project evaluation in the context of expert juries that evaluate and select the submitted proposals. No specific quota is imposed on the composition of juries. Experts are mainly selected on the basis of their content expertise and availability. Potential under-representation at this level is often due to a shortage of experts of a specific gender in the sector concerned or in a specific field. The example of the ICT sector mentioned above is revealing in this respect. Practice shows, for example, that the available pool of female IT experts is very limited. The evolution of the number of available experts by gender will be systematically measured when an expert pool is operationalised via a digital platform. As a pilot

project, the 2019-2020 juries have been subjected to a gender analysis in order to gain insight into the extent to which the current selection procedure leads to gender parity.

For the period 2019-2020, for which it has been possible to carry out partial monitoring of the number of female experts on juries, it can be seen that female experts are under-represented, but also less likely than male experts to accept invitations to sit on juries. This is particularly true for the industrial research unit juries, probably partly due to the specific context of gender imbalances in STEM and industrial science and technology sectors mentioned in the foreword. Some projects and programmes come close to balanced juries or even have an over-representation of women. Nevertheless, these configurations are in the minority.

	2019	2020	2021
% of women - jury invitations industrial research dpt.	25	15	tbc
% of women - jury invitations strategic research dpt.	33	36	tbc
% of women - jury participants industrial research dpt.	26	17	tbc
% of women - jury participants strategic research dpt.	30	33	tbc

A specific training has been organised in the past years with the objective of awareness raising/training on gender equality and unconscious gender bias for staff and managers. It was organised by the competent regional administration Equal.brussels. At the same time, since years, our internal scientific advisors fill in an equal opportunity test for all projects with budgets surpassing 30,000 EUR, in which they have to reflect upon diversity sensitive aspects in projects.

Future actions

By next year, an analysis of gender/diversity disturbing aspects in evaluation will be performed and should lead to recommendations for targeted measures, and to a more gender sensitive project evaluation procedure to be put in place subsequently. Further consideration will be given to how to ensure that more women would accept the invitations for the juries.

5 Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

Innoviris is actively committed to gender-neutral job offers, which are developed in close collaboration with our competent regional administration talent.brussels. To overcome gender biases in the recruitment of new personnel, a diversity training is foreseen for the chairpersons of selection boards for staff recruitment. Furthermore, general attention is paid to the composition of staff for gender balance in middle management and general personnel management. Within the overall staff of Innoviris, 58% is female. Over the last three years, this has fluctuated between 55% and 58%, reflecting a balanced staff composition (more statistics on the gender balance in management, see point 4).

	2019	2020	2021
% of females in personnel	55	56	58

Future actions

The actions mentioned above will be continued, as well as the perpetuation of a culture of diversity and tolerance towards it.

6 Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content

6.1 Structural change around the over/under representation of women in R&I fields and sectors

The underrepresentation of female researchers and research staff and a shortage of (female) labour profiles and entrepreneurs in a number of specific R&I sectors are logically manifested in an unequal male-female ratio among the participants of the Innoviris programs.

The importance of a structural change around the over/underrepresentation of women in R&I domains and sectors is difficult to overestimate. Innoviris already documented this situation several times through various publications in collaboration with the Brussels Institute of Statistics¹³. Strengthening the supply side through targeted sensitization and empowerment actions is considered by Innoviris as the core of its gender policy. To this end, Innoviris has taken and is taking a broad spectrum of actions, largely framed within the Regional Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Budgeting Action Plan and the institutional Strategic Plan for Science Promotion. In a broad sense, Innoviris undertakes various actions to make women in science visible - of which WATS (Woman Award in Science and Technology) is the most prominent - and to make public the state of affairs regarding the unequal distribution of men and women in sciences. The idea is one of role models who give legitimacy to women in scientific disciplines in which they are underrepresented with the aim of breaking taboos. In 2022, the WATS is awarded again. This contest has opened many doors (also on an international level) for the previous winners. For example, Lieve Lambrechts, award winner in 2018, has been listed as a role model in "The most inspiring women in tech in Belgium".

One of the focuses is on promoting women in tech and IT professions and entrepreneurship. In the past, in the framework of the NextTech plan, through the "Women in Tech" actions with hub.brussels, forces were joined to promote women in IT and to create an awareness portal, and provide guidance and training. Girls should be encouraged for undertaking complex IT tasks - IT as a scientific competence. Innovation requires a strong focus on IT as a science in addition to IT as a skill. Empowering girls in (general) secondary education in this area is necessary. A main goal of numerous science promotion actions supported by Innoviris is therefore to demonstrate that girls can also handle more complex IT tasks; this is to boost girls' self-confidence in their competencies within this domain and to motivate them to undertake it. Coding workshops, where complex cognitive tasks are taught in a "hands-on" way and with a gender-neutral educational discourse are an example of this.

Since more than three years, attention to gender in science promotion actions funded by Innoviris has been integrated in the demand forms, and projects that may have a negative impact on gender balance are no longer funded.

Future actions

The focus on gender in science promotion will be continued in all actions in line with the strategies mentioned above. Furthermore, the feasibility of a reward system for projects responding to our science promotion call (STEM-call) is currently being evaluated; projects that propose a specific and original gender perspective would receive a more favourable evaluation. Furthermore, this year, for

¹³ see [Focus n°23](#) by Kalenga-Mpala, & Wautelet, 2018; [Focus n°26](#) by Van Laethem & Verstraete, 2018; and [Brussels Innovation Insights](#) by Bogaerts, 2019

the first time, gender experts will be involved in the evaluation of the science promotion projects for projects that have been flagged as gender & diversity focused.

The future Cité des Sciences (a Science do and experience centre) that will be developed during the upcoming years, also has an important role to play in this regard, actively integrating a gender mainstreamed offer of science education and communication.

6.2 Recruitment strategies for R&I project teams

Certain RDI programs and topics seem to attract more men, others more women. In this respect, funding arrangements and working arrangements, which may be unfavourable to a certain gender, could also play an important. This aspect will be discussed later.

As a starting point for a gender policy around project teams, it is useful to develop a monitoring of the representation of men and women in project teams and funded R&I activities. Where possible and where data is available, a first internal monitoring has recently been launched. An initial analysis, carried out in the past, of the strategic research programs (universities and colleges) showed that between 2012 and 2018, the representation of women has increased overall. As expected based on the analysis, this increase is mainly seen in socially oriented programs such as Prospective Research (formerly Anticipate). This is illustrated in Table 1. Whereas in 2012, women were underrepresented at the researcher, co-promotor, and promotor levels, in 2018 we see an almost equal distribution of men and women among researchers and co-supervisors. Yearly variations may be due to the nature of the research topics selected each year.

Table 1. Prospective Research project team composition

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Researchers	36 %	22 %	13 %	22 %	35 %	44 %	47 %
Co-promotor	25 %	0 %	12 %	10 %	14 %	25 %	50 %
Promotor	9 %	22 %	9 %	8 %	18 %	41 %	21 %

In technology- and industry-focused research programs, such as research platforms, we have observed 25-30% representation of women among sponsors and co-promoters (profiles for which Innoviris has data) for the period until 2018.

Detailed figures for industrial programs are not currently available. Accurate analysis in industrial projects is not always easy, as teams often move during the course of a project, as there is often only a 10-20% buy-in of certain profiles to a project, with changes in people during the course of the project. And because not all profiles are always determined at the time of project submission. Nevertheless, the qualitative data also indicates an under-representation - not absence - of women, very clearly in the technological (digital) fields. However, since 2019, Innoviris has been analysing the representation of men and women through the ex-post survey of past industrial projects. Based on the first results, we can conclude that after 3 years, in the companies that benefit from Innoviris funding, 30% of sustainable jobs within the companies are occupied by a woman. The ex-post evaluation is an important tool for future monitoring.

Future actions

If ex-ante monitoring of project teams and programs with respect to gender is to be carried out, the integration of a "gender" field in all online submission forms is a necessity, as well as the creation of a linked field in the database. A feasibility analysis on the integration of M/F/X fields in the forms - in

particular taking into account the GDPR framework - will be conducted and the follow-up of regional consultations on the collection of private data is ensured.

6.3 Facilitative Funding Arrangements

The gender dimension in funding arrangements is an essential policy theme that can be integrated from the conceptualization of programs and calls for projects. It is a theme that cuts across all other aspects and can be a bottleneck for entry into and participation in R&I programs. The deployment of an internal policy can be inspired by that of other funding agencies. As a first step, in 2022 the guidelines around the extension of projects will be harmonized, taking into account equal opportunities.

Future actions

Subsequent to the harmonization of guidelines for the extension of projects, further measures inspired by practices in other funding agencies will be considered.

6.4 Gender as a theme in R&I project proposals

Currently, Innoviris does not have a development policy in this area for R&I projects. Nevertheless, gender is often included in socially oriented programs.

In submitting the projects, the project bearers are however asked if the theme and/or the results of the project may contribute to discrimination of persons (directly or indirectly impacted) according to gender and gender identity and expression (in addition to ethical and cultural origin, sexual orientation and social origin and situation). If this is the case, they are asked to justify this. A short-term goal is to challenge project proposals with potential gender sensitivities during the evaluation to reflect on (undesirable) effects in the research process and outcomes.

In this light, in 2021, a general training in ethics in the field of R&I was organised which was compulsory for internal project evaluators, open to other interested parties.

Future actions

In order to integrate the gender dimension in research proposals and R&I processes, the launch of a dedicated action is envisioned, targeting challenges on gender imbalances in experimental designs for the (or participation in the) development of technological (medical, data manipulation...) and non-technological innovations.

7 Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

Innoviris ensures a continuous focus and monitoring by the internal diversity manager in the light of the institutional well-being plan, in line with the strategic vision to make Innoviris the best place to work, as mentioned earlier in this document.

Innoviris also contributes to the regional plan LGBTQIA+, and in this context is committed to better involve representatives of these groups in the Innoviris calls, through targeted communication campaigns to the local community.

As mentioned earlier, in the submission forms for the project, the bearers of the project have to reflect upon discriminatory aspects present in the theme or results, with a request for justification.

Future actions

To be elaborated, based on the institutional well-being plan.

