ARCFUND

GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY PLAN

APPLIED RESEARCH
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This Gender Equality and Diversity Plan (GEDP) has been developed for the ARC Fund Group, which includes Applied Research and Communications Fund (ARC Fund), a not-for-profit organization acting for the public benefit, and ARC Consulting EOOD, a wholly-owned consultancy company. The document follows the requirements of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.[1]

The GEDP has been prepared by a working group, set up in the spirit of gender balance and consisting of representatives of all organizational levels, under the supervision and guidance of ARC Fund's Board of Trustees.

Policy framework

„One of the key aspirations of contemporary societies is to achieve gender equality. Gender equality is one of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,[2] one of the Global Priorities of UNESCO[3] and a key priority of the European Community, as declared in the European Convention on Human Rights[4] and Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.[5] European Commission's 2021 Report on Gender Equality in the EU[6] points out that the COVID-19 "pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities between women and men in almost all areas of life, both in Europe and beyond."

Gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the field of research and innovation are among the European Commission priorities, as evident from its Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 – A Union of Equality[7] and the Position Paper on the Gender Equality Priority in the European Research Area 2020-2030.[8] The policy objectives and key actions set by the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 go beyond the notion of equality between women or men, and affirm the EU commitment to leave no one behind, regardless of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. More inclusion and more diversity is essential to bring forward new ideas and innovative approaches that better serve a dynamic and flourishing EU society.

The Commission's commitment to promote gender equality and diversity in research and innovation is supported by making gender equality a cross-cutting priority in Horizon Europe – the Framework Program for Research and Innovation 2021-2027. Gender equality in research and innovation is expected to improve the overall quality of research and to attract more talent in the field, thus maximizing the potential of all researchers in the European Research Area (ERA).

Gender equality in Horizon Europe is considered at three levels, namely:

1 *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152*

2 *https://sdgs.un.org/goals*

3 *https://en.unesco.org/genderequality*

4 *Article 14 – Prohibition of discrimination: "The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status." https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf*

5 *Part 1, Article 8: "In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women."*

6 *https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2021_en.pdf*

7 *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152*

8 *https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1204-2020-INIT/en/pdf*

- Since 2022, having a Gender Equality Plan becomes mandatory for all public bodies, higher education institutions and research organizations from Member States and associated countries, wanting to participate in Horizon Europe.

- Integration of the gender aspect into research and innovation content is also required, unless other specific provisions exist.

- A 50% target for women in program-related boards, expert groups and evaluation committees has been set, and gender balance within research teams has been made a ranking criterion for proposals having the same score.[9]

This Gender Equality and Diversity Plan was developed in compliance with the Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans, which stipulates the following minimum process-related requirements for the Gender Equality Plan (GEP):[10]

1. The GEP needs to be a formal document signed by the top management and published on the institution's website.

2. The GEP must envisage dedicated financial and human resources for work on gender equality, with sufficient expertise to implement the plan.

3. The GEP must include clear provisions regarding collection and monitoring of gender-sensitive data and annual evaluation of progress and outcomes based on indicators.

4. The GEP must foresee appropriate training and capacity-building activities to tackle unconscious gender biases of staff and decision-makers in the organization.

Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans recommends that the GEP addresses the following areas:

- gender equality in recruitment and career progression;

- gender balance in leadership and decision-making;

- integrating the gender dimension into research and teaching content;

- work-life balance and organizational culture;

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

This Gender Equality and Diversity Plan was further developed in continuation to and in compliance with the existing Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct of ARC Fund, which include the principles of gender equality, inclusiveness, diversity, non-discrimination, and fairness.

9 https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en

10 https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/876509

GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY AT ARC FUND GROUP

Fully committed to the objectives listed above, and building upon the existing organizational policies, which have always promoted and supported gender equality and non-discrimination as core values of the organization, ARC Fund Group is reaffirming its adherence to the principles of gender equality and diversity.

The GEDP uses the MoRRI definition of gender equality, which says that "gender equality is reached when: *1) women and men are equally represented in all disciplines and at all hierarchical levels; 2) gendered barriers are abolished so that women and men can develop their potential equally; and 3) when the gender dimension is considered in all research and innovation activities."*[11]

In addition to gender equality, ARC Fund Group pays particular attention to the notion of diversity, understood as a broader set of social and demographic aspects such as age and cultural, ethnical, racial and national background. Therefore, in order to be as encompassing and anti-discriminatory as possible, the current GEDP reflects not only the gender dimension in the respective organizational procedures, measures and actions, but also the other aspects that are relevant for improving the equality, diversity and inclusion policies and practices.

ARC Fund Group's Gender Equality and Diversity Plan provides the necessary framework for:

I. safeguarding the gender equality and respect for diversity among the staff, when recruiting new members of staff, and when working with stakeholders under different initiatives;

II. creating procedures to identify gender bias and identifying and implementing strategies to correct any bias;

III. ensuring a balanced representation of all relevant societal groups and/or stakeholders in Fund's activities;

IV. integration of gender equality and diversity issues in Fund's research and other activities; and

V. setting up targets and monitoring process via specific indicators.

Internal regulations

This GEDP complies with and supplements the following existing documents of ARC Fund Group:

- Code of Ethics (2008)
- Code of Conduct (2008)
- Rules and Order for Performing Publicly Beneficial Activities (2008)
- Child Protection Policy (2016)

The Code of Conduct includes the following article on gender equity:

"Art. 8. (1) The Fund shall seek to advance gender balance and equity and endeavor to ensure the equal participation of women in all its activities.

(2) The Fund shall fully integrate gender sensiti-

11 *"The Evolution of Responsible Research and Innovation in Europe: The MoRRI Indicators Report. Monitoring report". Pre-publication version (February 2018), https://www.technopolis-group.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-evolution-of-Responsible-Research-and-Innovation-in-Europe-The-MoRRI-indicators-report-D4.3.pdf*

zation into its human resource development and promote non-discriminatory working practices and relationships.

(3) The policies and procedures of the Fund shall be designed to promote gender equity in recruitment, hiring, training, professional development and advancement."

The goal of involving *"all men, women, and young people to the greatest possible extent in the conception, implementation and evaluation"* of ARC Fund's activities and projects is an undeniable manifestation of organization's commitment to non-discrimination. Respect for the diversity and equality is further asserted by the statement that *"the Fund shall respect the dignity and identity of individuals and their culture, faith and values."*

The Code of Ethics deals with Inclusiveness and Diversity in Art. 5: *"The ARC Fund shall promote inclusiveness and its Board of Trustees and staff members reflect diversity in order to enrich its programmatic effectiveness. The Fund takes meaningful steps to promote inclusiveness in its hiring, retention, promotion, board recruitment and constituencies served."*

The *Rules and Order for Performing Publicly Beneficial Activities* lists the main guiding principles organization follows. One of these principles is non-discriminatory treatment, which encompasses equal participation of all men, women and young people in the development, implementation and evaluation of all ARC Fund's activities and projects, and respect of the dignity, culture, religion and values of each individual.

Two of the core principles listed in the Child Protection Policy address the gender and diversity aspects:

- "Children should be treated with respect regardless of their gender, ethnicity, language, religion, beliefs, abilities, limitations, sexual orientation or social status"
- "Every child has strengths and potential for development."

The current Gender Equality and Diversity Plan builds on and expands the provisions contained in these documents.

Organization and resources

ARC Fund shall introduce a position of Responsible Research and Innovation Officer (RRI Officer). The position of the RRI Officer shall be taken by a staff member with sufficient knowledge of RRI concept and rich experience with RRI-related issues.

The RRI Officer shall be nominated by at least three ARC Fund employees and approved by the Board of Trustees. The duration of the term shall be two (2) years, with a possibility of re-appointment for another term (two consecutive terms in total).

The RRI Officer acts as the main contact point within the organization for all issues concerning the implementation and promotion of the RRI principles – research ethics and integrity, gender equality and diversity, open access and public engagement.

More specifically, the RRI Officer at ARC Fund shall promote the GEDP and shall act as its guardian. S/he shall ensure the observance and shall monitor compliance with the GEDP. The RRI Officer shall consider any complaints related to non-observance of the GEDP.

The RRI Officer shall provide advice and support to the research staff about gender and diversity issues in relation to their research activities; organize annual trainings on non-discrimination, gender equality and diversity; follow and promote the new tendencies and developments regarding the anti-harassment and work-life balance policies.

Awareness

The entire team of ARC Fund Group shall be made aware of the current document on a dedicated training and will sign a statement that they have read the document.

In addition to raising awareness and promoting the mainstreaming of gender and diversity policies, researchers at ARC Fund Group shall be also trained to include the gender dimension in all of their research activities.

Monitoring and update

As the GEDP is a living document, the RRI Officer shall monitor the process of implementation of the measures within the Plan and may introduce adjustments, if such necessity exists. Amendments shall be proposed after the annual assessment of the progress. The update of the GEDP shall be made after the approval of the proposed adjustments by the Executive Director and the Board of Trustees.

Data provision

Data from ARC Fund's Annual Reports show that gender balance in the organization has been satisfactory practically since the establishment of ARC Fund, with a favorable ratio of male and female experts, and good presence of women in the senior management and senior research positions. Data about gender and diversity in the organization will be collected and reported regularly in ARC Fund's Annual Report, enabling the evaluation of progress and outcomes of gender and diversity related actions, and ensuring the continuous gender balance in the organization.

Procedures to identify bias

Timely and accurate identification of existing unconscious gender and diversity biases is a necessary precondition for supporting junior staff, senior experts and management at ARC Fund Group to examine their own beliefs, standpoints and behaviors. Such reflections are essential in order to comprehend how processes at the organization may cause disadvantage to women and/or people from minorities/disadvantaged groups in leadership and decision-making as well as in career development.

Members of staff, who wish to report cases, related to gender or diversity bias, shall file a complaint and submit it to the RRI Officer. The complaints shall be anonymous, unless the person filing a complaint specifically expresses the desire to have her/his identity disclosed.

Corrective measures

If corrective measures are needed to address an identified gender and/or diversity bias, they shall be proposed and implemented on a case-by-case basis by the Research Ethics Board of ARC Fund. If a pattern emerges over time, specific rules and procedures shall be devised and described herein based on the recommendation from the Research Ethics Board.

ACTION PLAN

The most important objective of this Plan is to promote the dialogue about gender equality and diversity issues at ARC Fund Group by involving all members of staff – from junior experts to senior management. Improving the dialogue on gender equality and diversity issues includes sensitizing senior management about this topic, informing members of staff about the provisions, presented herein, and organizing annual meetings and/or surveys, thus providing a platform to members of staff to openly share their constraints and/or their ideas on how to ensure equal opportunities and genuine equality of women and men.

Objective 1: Improving gender balance and diversity in the organization

Selection and recruitment procedures at ARC Fund Group are unbiased and non-discriminatory and ensure equal chances to both men and women to be hired. Since ARC Fund and ARC Fund Consulting are relatively small organizations, such procedures are based on the excellence of the candidates, regardless of their age, gender, race, culture, social status, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

Actions	Timeframe	Progress Indicator	Performance Indicator
Strive for gender balance in the research teams.	Annual	Changes in the ratio of male and female researchers.	Balanced representation of male and female researchers.
Include annual reporting on progress in gender equality and diversity dimensions as part of ARC Fund's Annual Reports.	As of December 2022 onwards	Transparency and accountability regarding gender and diversity issues.	

Objective 2: Enhancing work-life balance

Enhancing work-life balance eventually leads to increased health and wellbeing, which results in increased productivity at work and increased overall satisfaction. Specific measures that could contribute to enhancing the work-life balance include:

Actions	Timeframe	Progress Indicator	Performance Indicator
Study the quality of working life of employees with a short online survey.	Annual – each December	Identification of measures to increase satisfaction.	Number of participants in the survey.
Organize work-life balance and time management training for employees.	Annual	Training methodology and program.	Number of participants in training.

Objective 3: Integrating the gender and diversity dimension into research content

While acknowledging that all research priorities of ARC Fund are predetermined by the contractual obligations pertaining to the projects ARC Fund is involved in, the organization shall consider the gender and diversity aspects and shall integrate these dimensions where relevant. Researchers at the Fund shall be supported in increasing their capacity to develop methodologies that incorporate gender and diversity dimension in research projects, where this dimension is relevant to the research focus.

Actions	Timeframe	Progress Indicator	Performance Indicator
Enhance the understanding of researchers about the need to include gender and diversity dimensions into research.	December 2022	Increased understanding of researchers about gender and diversity issues.	Increased number of research methodologies considering gender and diversity issues.
Include gender and diversity aspects in research content, design and output where relevant.			Number of ARC Fund's projects, initiatives and outputs with a gender and/or diversity focus.

Objective 4: Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

At ARC Fund Group, there is zero tolerance towards any form of sexual harassment or violence. The policies that establish the expected behavior of employees include the Code of Conduct and the Code of Ethics. All members of staff are well aware of the provisions of these documents and shall behave in accordance with the principles, embedded in them. In the unlikely event of an instance of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, a complaint shall be filed before the Research Ethics Board, which shall investigate the situation and prepare a decision in close cooperation with the Board of Trustees of ARC Fund.

Actions	Timeframe	Progress Indicator	Performance Indicator
Raising awareness about gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.	Annual		Number of employees, sensitized about sexual harassment and violence.
Training about the Gender Equality and Diversity Plan, including the procedure to be followed if an instance of violence or sexual harassment occurs.	July 2022	Training conducted.	Number of training participants.

MONITORING OF IMPLEMENTATION AND PROGRESS

ARC Fund Group will employ several data gathering tools to monitor, evaluate and – when necessary – revise its gender equality and diversity performance. These monitoring activities will enable the organization to verify whether the planned actions are being performed according to the Plan and the defined objectives have been achieved. Monitoring will also identify unforeseen obstacles to implementation and assist the planning and implementation of corrective actions.

- Data concerning the actions and indicators listed above will be collected continuously, after each event or activity, and aggregated and analyzed at the end of the calendar year to be included in the ARC Fund's Annual Report.

- Specific data about perceptions, practices and challenges related to gender equality and diversity among ARC Fund Group's staff will be obtained through an annual survey, organized prior to annual training on gender equality and diversity. The survey will be implemented in a way that will guarantee the full anonymity of participants.

- When necessary, additional information might be obtained through interviews with the staff.

All results and findings from the monitoring process will be reported in the ARC Fund's Annual Report.

The periodic review of the GEDP will ensure that the Plan will continue to perform its main aim – to ensure that the gender equality and diversity are well established in all practices of the ARC Fund Group and that the gender equality and diversity principles are fully respected by all members of staff.

This Gender Equality and Diversity Plan was endorsed by the Board of Trustees of ARC Fund on 15 September 2022, and applies to both organizations – ARC Fund and ARC Consulting EOOD. The Gender Equality and Diversity Plan enters into force on the same day. The GEDP is published on the website of ARC Fund.

September 2022, Sofia