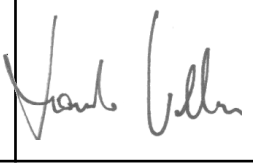
GENDER EQUALITY PLAN 2026–2029

Rev.	Description of change	Date	Date	Date
		Prepared	Reviewed	Approved
0	First issue	01/02/2026	01/02/2026	23/02/2026
				

EXO – Organismo di Ricerca
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Research Organisation
(ECC 2006/C323/01)

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1. Introduction

EXO – Research Organisation recognises gender equality, equal opportunities, inclusion and respect for human dignity as fundamental principles of its organisational culture and of the quality of its research, innovation and cooperation activities.

Through this **Gender Equality Plan – GEP 2026–2029**, EXO formalises its commitment to promoting organisational conditions that enable all individuals to access professional opportunities on the basis of competence, experience and merit, while preventing all forms of gender-based discrimination.

The Plan also represents a tool through which EXO progressively integrates a gender perspective into:

- human resources management;

- the allocation of responsibilities;
- organisational culture;
- research and innovation activities;
- training and awareness-raising processes;
- the prevention of discrimination and harassment.

The GEP has been developed according to the principles of **proportionality, practicality, verifiability and continuous improvement**, taking into account the size and characteristics of the organisation.

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2. Management Commitment

EXO Management assumes overall responsibility for the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan.

By approving this document, Management commits to:

- promoting gender equality and equal opportunities;
- ensuring the implementation of the Plan;
- assigning specific responsibilities for its coordination;
- making adequate organisational and professional resources available;
- supporting training and awareness-raising activities;
- periodically monitoring results;
- reviewing the system;
- adopting improvement actions where necessary.

The Plan is published on EXO's institutional website and made available to staff, collaborators and interested stakeholders.

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3. Governance of the Gender Equality Plan

Implementation of the GEP is based on a simple organisational structure proportionate to the size of EXO.

Management:

- approves the Plan and any subsequent revisions;
- ensures that the necessary resources are available;
- periodically evaluates results;
- approves any improvement actions.

A **GEP Coordinator** is appointed with responsibility for:

- coordinating the implementation of actions;
- collecting and updating data;
- supporting monitoring activities;
- promoting training initiatives;
- supporting internal functions in implementing the Plan;
- preparing periodic monitoring activities;
- reporting any critical issues and opportunities for improvement to Management.

Function managers and project managers contribute to the implementation of the Plan within their respective areas of responsibility.

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4. Dedicated Resources

EXO ensures that the Gender Equality Plan is supported by resources appropriate to its effective implementation.

These resources include, in particular:

- working time dedicated to coordination;
- involvement of Management and responsible staff;
- data collection and analysis activities;
- training and awareness-raising;
- methodological support for research and innovation activities;
- communication and monitoring tools;
- possible access to external specialist expertise.

The adequacy of the resources is periodically assessed as part of the management review process.

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5. Organisational Baseline

EXO established its organisational baseline as of **1 February 2026**.

On that date, the organisation consisted of **12 people**, as follows:

Gender	Number	Percentage
Women	4	33.3%
Men	8	66.7%
Total	**12**	**100%**

The main positions of responsibility were also mapped.

The aggregate distribution is as follows:

Positions of responsibility	Number	Percentage
Assigned to women	3	33.3%
Assigned to men	6	66.7%
Total	**9**	**100%**

The figure relating to positions of responsibility does not necessarily correspond to the number of individuals holding such positions, as the same person may hold more than one responsibility.

The baseline serves as the reference point for monitoring organisational developments over time.

EXO does not use these percentages as automatic quotas in future decisions. The objective is to monitor over time whether systemic barriers or unjustified disadvantages emerge in access to opportunities.

6. Plan Objectives

For the 2026–2029 period, EXO has identified the following objectives.

O1 – Strengthen GEP governance

Ensure clear responsibilities, coordination, resources and monitoring of the Plan.

O2 – Monitor the composition of the organisation

Periodically collect aggregated data on staff composition and the distribution of responsibilities.

O3 – Prevent imbalances and systemic barriers

Analyse any significant differences in access to responsibilities, opportunities and professional activities.

O4 – Ensure equal opportunities in recruitment

Ensure selection processes based on professional, transparent and non-discriminatory criteria.

O5 – Promote equal access to professional development

Promote equitable access to training, responsibilities, projects and career development opportunities.

O6 – Promote an inclusive organisational culture

Encourage working arrangements compatible with respect, participation and, where possible, work-life balance needs.

O7 – Integrate the gender dimension into research

Systematically assess the relevance of sex and gender in the content of research and innovation activities.

O8 – Prevent discrimination and harassment

Ensure appropriate principles, tools and arrangements to prevent and manage potentially problematic situations.

O9 – Promote training and awareness

Strengthen knowledge of gender equality, equal opportunities and unconscious bias.

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7. Area 1 – Work-life Balance and Organisational Culture

EXO recognises that the way work is organised can affect people's ability to participate fully in professional activities.

Subject to operational and contractual requirements, the organisation promotes:

- organisational flexibility;
- remote or hybrid working arrangements, where applicable;
- reasonable scheduling of meetings;
- adequate notice for travel and other activities;
- attention to work-life balance needs;
- an organisational culture based on respect and inclusion.

Working arrangements are monitored to ensure that they do not create systematic disadvantages.

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8. Area 2 – Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-making

EXO monitors the distribution of its main positions of responsibility.

Responsibilities are assigned on the basis of criteria such as:

- competence;
- experience;
- performance;
- level of responsibility;
- organisational and project-related needs.

Gender is not used as an inappropriate assessment criterion.

Numerical differences are analysed within the context of the organisation and are not automatically interpreted as evidence of discrimination.

Where monitoring identifies barriers or systemic patterns, Management assesses the adoption of appropriate measures.

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9. Area 3 – Recruitment, Selection and Professional Development

EXO implements recruitment and selection processes based on:

- transparency;
- equal opportunities;
- assessment of competence;
- non-discrimination;
- prevention of bias.

Professional profiles and selection criteria are defined according to actual organisational needs.

Information relating, for example, to the following must not be used as inappropriate assessment factors:

- gender;
- marital status;
- pregnancy;
- intention to have children;

- family responsibilities unrelated to the role.

The same principles apply to access to:

- training;
- positions of responsibility;
- project activities;
- representation opportunities;
- professional development.

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10. Area 4 – Gender Dimension in Research and Innovation

As a Research Organisation, EXO considers the gender dimension to be potentially relevant to the scientific and methodological quality of projects.

EXO distinguishes between:

gender balance, referring to the composition of working teams;

and

gender dimension, referring to the possible influence of sex and gender on research content.

For relevant new R&I proposals, a screening is carried out to determine whether sex or gender may affect:

- the research problem;
- methodology;
- data collection and analysis;
- target groups;
- stakeholders;
- the use of solutions;
- results;
- impacts.

Where the gender dimension is relevant, it is integrated into project design and implementation.

Where it is not relevant, EXO avoids introducing it artificially.

The objective of the Plan is to screen **100% of relevant new R&I proposals**.

11. Area 5 – Prevention of Discrimination, Harassment and Gender-based Violence

EXO adopts a **zero-tolerance approach** towards:

- discrimination;
- sexual harassment;
- gender-based harassment;
- intimidation;
- offensive behaviour;
- discriminatory exclusion;
- retaliation.

The organisation provides confidential channels through which potential concerns may be raised.

Reports are handled in accordance with the principles of:

- confidentiality;
- impartiality;
- proportionality;
- respect for human dignity;
- protection against retaliation.

External specialist expertise may be involved when necessary.

Documentation relating to reports is kept separate from ordinary monitoring records.

12. Training and Awareness-raising

Training is an essential component of the GEP.

EXO promotes periodic activities relating to:

- gender equality;
- equal opportunities;
- unconscious gender bias;
- inclusive communication;
- non-discriminatory recruitment;
- prevention of harassment;
- the gender dimension in research.

Particular attention is given to people with responsibilities relating to:

- decision-making;
- coordination;
- selection;
- project management;
- project design and research.

New staff members are also informed about the existence of the GEP and the main tools made available by the organisation.

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13. Inclusive Communication

EXO promotes respectful internal and external communication consistent with the principles of the Plan.

In texts, images and communication materials, attention is paid to:

- avoiding stereotypes;
- using professional and respectful language;
- avoiding automatic associations between specific competences or roles and a particular gender;
- ensuring balanced representation where relevant.

The objective is not to impose numerically identical representation in every communication output, but to avoid systematically stereotyped communication patterns.

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14. Monitoring

The Gender Equality Plan is monitored at least annually.

Where applicable, monitoring covers:

- staff composition;
- distribution of responsibilities;
- new recruitments;
- project responsibilities;
- participation in training;
- application of selection procedures;
- screening of the gender dimension in projects;
- availability of work-life balance measures;
- operation of reporting mechanisms;
- implementation status of the Plan’s actions.

Data are primarily used in aggregated form.

Given the limited size of the organisation, EXO pays particular attention to data protection and to the risk of indirect identification of individuals.

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15. Indicators

EXO uses a set of indicators to monitor implementation of the Plan.

Area	Indicator
Staff	Gender distribution

Leadership	Distribution of positions of responsibility
Recruitment	Application of GEP criteria to selection processes
Training	Participation in training activities
R&I	Relevant proposals subject to screening
Work-life balance	Availability of the organisational measures envisaged
Prevention	Operation of the reporting system
Implementation	Status of GEP actions
Governance	Completion of monitoring and management review

Indicators are interpreted taking into account the size of the organisation and not through purely quantitative automatic mechanisms.

16. Action Plan 2026–2029

Action	Responsibility	Frequency / Deadline

Coordination and updating of the GEP	GEP Coordinator	Ongoing
Monitoring of staff composition	GEP Coordinator	Annual
Monitoring of positions of responsibility	GEP Coordinator	Annual
Application of GEP principles to selection processes	Selection Managers	For each relevant selection
Training and awareness-raising	GEP Coordinator	Periodic
Gender dimension screening in R&I projects	Project Managers	For each relevant proposal
Monitoring of work-life balance measures	GEP Coordinator	Annual
Maintenance of the reporting system	Management / Coordinator	Ongoing
Monitoring report	GEP Coordinator	Annual
Management review of the system	Management	Periodic
Improvement actions, where necessary	Management / Coordinator	As required

17. Review and Continuous Improvement

The GEP is considered a dynamic system.

Monitoring results are analysed in order to assess:

- trends in indicators;
- implementation of planned actions;
- any critical issues;
- the need for new initiatives;
- adequacy of resources;
- opportunities for improvement.

Management may update:

- priorities;
- actions;
- indicators;
- procedures;
- training tools;
- organisational arrangements.

Statistical variations do not automatically lead to corrective measures: each result is interpreted within its organisational context.

18. Internal Audit and Management Review

The GEP system is subject to **internal audits at least annually**.

Internal audits are intended to verify the correct implementation of the Plan, the adequacy of the related processes and the availability of appropriate supporting evidence.

The outcomes of internal audits are taken into account by Management as part of the periodic review of the system.

The Management Review assesses, in particular:

- the adequacy and effectiveness of the GEP;
- implementation of planned actions;
- monitoring results and indicators;
- outcomes of internal audits;
- adequacy of available resources;
- training and awareness-raising activities;
- any critical issues or opportunities for improvement.

On the basis of the review, Management may confirm the existing arrangements or define specific improvement actions.

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19. Transparency and Publication

This Gender Equality Plan is a **public document**.

EXO ensures its publication on its institutional website and promotes awareness of it among:

- staff;
- collaborators;
- partners;
- stakeholders;
- parties interested in the organisation's activities.

Information relating to individuals is published only in aggregated form and in compliance with confidentiality and data protection principles.

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20. Validity and Updating

The Gender Equality Plan is valid for the **2026–2029** period.

The Plan may be updated before its expiry where there are:

- significant organisational changes;
- new applicable requirements;
- monitoring results requiring intervention;

- changes in EXO's priorities;
- improvement opportunities emerging from audits or management reviews.

Any revisions are approved by Management.

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21. Final Management Statement

EXO considers gender equality an integral part of the quality of its organisation and of its research and innovation activities.

Through the Gender Equality Plan 2026–2029, EXO commits to creating and maintaining a professional environment in which:

- people are assessed on the basis of their competences;
- opportunities are accessible under equitable conditions;
- potential barriers can be identified and addressed;
- respect for the individual is an essential principle;
- the gender dimension is considered in research where relevant;
- training, monitoring and continuous improvement support the effective implementation of the Plan.

The GEP is therefore not regarded merely as a formal requirement, but as a concrete tool for **governance, organisational quality and accountability**.