

**Innovation Fund
Gender Equality Plan
2026 - 2028**

Adopted by the Director on 11/05/2026.
Version 1.0, May 2026.

This Gender Equality Plan has been developed in accordance with the European Commission guidelines for Gender Equality Plans under the Horizon Europe programme (2021)¹ and meets the mandatory eligibility requirements for participation in this programme. The Plan defines the strategy, activities, and monitoring measures of the Innovation Fund and reflects the Fund's commitment to advancing gender equality, ensuring fair treatment, and supporting an inclusive working environment.

1. Introduction

Innovation Fund (hereinafter: the Fund) is fully committed to promoting gender equality and building a work environment based on respect, equal opportunities, and openness for all. We proceed from the belief that fairness, innovation, and overall institutional performance are inseparably linked to the equal participation of women and men. In this context, the Gender Equality Plan represents our long-term and strategic commitment to this area, through clearly defined objectives, activities, and monitoring mechanisms aimed at eliminating potential inequalities and improving equality within the organization. The adoption of this Gender Equality Plan ensures compliance with the requirements of the Horizon Europe programme, while at the same time strengthening our belief that gender equality directly contributes to organizational excellence.

The Gender Equality Plan (hereinafter: GEP) is a systemic document which, based on an analysis of the current situation within the organization, defines specific objectives and improvement measures, as well as mechanisms for their implementation and continuous monitoring of progress. It has been prepared in accordance with relevant European Union strategies and directives, including the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and the Work–Life Balance Directive (2019/1158)². At the same time, the GEP includes all mandatory elements prescribed by the eligibility criteria of the Horizon Europe programme: it ensures public availability and formal approval, clearly defines resources and responsibilities for implementation, includes a system for collecting and monitoring gender-disaggregated data, as well as a framework for awareness-raising and training activities in the field of gender equality.

2. Legal Framework

This GEP has been developed in accordance with the following legal acts and strategic frameworks:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, which guarantees gender equality and prohibits discrimination (Articles 15 and 21).
- The Law on Gender Equality ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 52/2021)³.
- The Anti-Discrimination Law ("Official Gazette of the RS", Nos. 22/2009 and 52/2021).
- The Law on the Innovation Activity ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 129/2021).

¹ https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/GEPs_in_HE_guidelines.pdf

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32019L1158#PP4Contents>

³ By the Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia dated 28 June 2024, proceedings were initiated to assess the constitutionality of the Gender Equality Act, whereby the enforcement of individual acts, i.e. actions taken on the basis of the provisions of this Act, was suspended (IUz-85/2021).

- The Law on the Whistleblower Protection ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 128/2014).
- The Law on the Prevention of Workplace Harassment ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 36/2010).
- The Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection Act ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 105/2021).
- The National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2021–2030 ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 103/2021).
- The European Commission requirements for applicants under the Horizon Europe programme regarding Gender Equality Plans.

3. Scope and Duration

The GEP applies to all employees of Innovation Fund. It covers the period from 2026 to 2028. The baseline year for assessment is 2025, as the most recent full year preceding the adoption of this plan. The first annual report will be prepared in 2027, and the final evaluation will be conducted in 2028.

4. Baseline in 2025

Table 1: Structure of Employees in Innovation Fund by Gender

Role (level)	Women	Men
Management and Supervisory Board	6	2
Director	0	1
Employees	21	20
Total	28	23

As of 31 December 2025, Innovation Fund had 41 employees: 21 women and 20 men, all employed full-time. Gender representation is balanced across all positions, while the majority of members of the Management and Supervisory Boards are female. Working and employment conditions are both formally and substantively identical for all employees.

Salary structures are defined by general internal acts, the Rulebook on Job Classification and Systematization, and the Rulebook on Work, all of which are accessible to all employees and published on the Fund's notice board. The price of labor is the same for all employees, and job categories are determined according to professional qualifications and work experience, regardless of gender.

Upon employment, all employees of the Fund are informed of their legal rights and obligations regarding:

- personal data, including family status (children, for the purpose of exercising rights such as increased annual leave in certain situations, etc.),

- data protection and conflicts of interest,
- whistleblower rights, procedures, and protection,
- prohibition of harassment and sexual harassment,

all of which apply equally to women and men. All employees confirm in written statements that they are informed of the above.

The law and the Fund's Rulebook on Work provide for the possibility of remote work for all employees, regardless of gender.

The Fund supports the development of innovation through appropriate instruments of financial, technical, and advisory support, with the aim of empowering innovative enterprises and strengthening the link between research and development on the one hand and the business sector on the other, while respecting the highest ethical, financial, and business standards and practices. The structure of beneficiaries of these instruments is systematically monitored through monitoring and evaluation activities, which, among other indicators, also include and analyze the success rate of applications submitted by women-owned companies, as well as the volume of funds allocated to women-owned companies.

To date, in relation to gender equality, Innovation Fund has been guided by the principles defined in the Gender Equality Policy document, approved by the Director of the Fund and available on the organization's website.

5. Objectives and Strategic Priorities

The main objective of Innovation Fund is to maintain the current level of gender balance and the representation of women within organizational structures, while further improving the integration of a gender perspective into internal policies and project activities. The Fund will continue to actively promote gender diversity among employees, with particular emphasis on the participation of women in governing bodies and decision-making processes, in accordance with relevant institutional and national frameworks.

The Fund will further engage in educating employees in the field of gender equality, in order to provide them with relevant information and present examples of good practices from the European environment, with the aim of strengthening internal capacities and further improving the organizational culture.

At the same time, the Fund will work on raising awareness of the importance of gender equality and its benefits among the beneficiaries of its programmes, through the promotion of gender-responsive approaches and the encouragement of balanced participation at all levels of project activities.

One of the objectives of the Fund is also to improve and maintain a work–life balance for employees. Through support for parenthood and the equal use of leave entitlements, as well as the creation of a supportive and inclusive working environment, the Fund will strive to ensure conditions that contribute to employee well-being and professional productivity.

With the aim of further strengthening the quality and sustainability of its work, Innovation Fund will systematically integrate the principles of gender equality into all project activities, including the

Horizon Europe programme and other relevant initiatives. The consistent application of these principles in research design, activity implementation, and dissemination of results will contribute to improving project quality, ensuring compliance with programme requirements, and enabling more efficient implementation of overall activities.

6. Action Plan and Indicators

For the definition of activities and indicators to be monitored under this GEP, the approach and thematic areas recommended in the European Commission guidelines under the Horizon Europe programme have been taken into account.

I. Work–Life Balance and Organisational Culture

As reflected in the baseline situation described in Section 4 of this GEP, Innovation Fund pays particular attention to organisational culture and work–life balance. In order to maintain and further improve this area, the following measures will be implemented in the upcoming period:

- Maintain flexible options and the possibility of remote participation in all organisational activities, meetings, and events, where necessary and feasible;
- Schedule meetings and events with due consideration for caregiving responsibilities, avoiding late evening hours and weekends whenever possible;
- Ensure that parental or caregiving responsibilities never constitute a barrier to participation or career advancement within Innovation Fund.

II. Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-Making

The share of women in the Management and Supervisory Boards of Innovation Fund is 75%. In order to maintain this trend in the coming period, the Fund will:

- Strive to emphasize the importance of gender balance in the governing bodies of Innovation Fund;
- Ensure gender-balanced representation in working groups and advisory bodies in which the Fund may participate.

III. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

The current employees' structure of Innovation Fund is such that, out of 41 employees, 21 are women. In addition, all documents used by the Fund are gender-inclusive. In order to maintain this balance, in the coming period the Fund will:

- Continue to formulate calls for collaborators and positions using gender-inclusive language in both Serbian and English;
- Evaluate all candidates based on merit, while ensuring that selection committees (where established) include members of different genders.

IV. Integration of the Gender Dimension into Research and Teaching Content

As stated in Section 4 of this Plan, the structure of beneficiaries of the instruments of Innovation Fund is monitored through the Monitoring and Evaluation activities, and all statistics are presented in the Fund's annual reports. In the coming period, the Fund will:

- Pay particular attention to information related to gender equality in the development of methodologies, data collection, and interpretation of results.
- Ensure that publications, public policy recommendations, and educational materials produced by Innovation Fund use gender-inclusive language and, where relevant, address gender-differentiated impacts.
- Establish cooperation with associations and organisations that promote women's entrepreneurship in order to promote the Fund's instruments, where possible.
- Promote examples of good practice related to inclusion and gender equality, where possible.

V. Measures against Gender-Based Violence, Including Sexual Harassment

Innovation Fund has a set of documents with which employees are familiarised, and which specifically address whistleblowing and workplace harassment. These documents define and provide information on whistleblower rights, the whistleblowing procedure, and other matters relevant to whistleblowing and whistleblower protection, as well as information on the prohibition of harassment and sexual harassment at work and the misuse of the right to protection from such conduct. In the coming period, the Fund will:

- Continue to implement a zero-tolerance policy towards gender-based violence, harassment, and sexual harassment, while ensuring clear communication and established mechanisms for reporting and handling such cases.
- Ensure that any potential complaints are handled in a timely and confidential manner, with full respect for the rights and well-being of all parties involved.

Progress will be assessed on an annual basis through the collection of data and indicators.

Table 2: Indicators for the Period 2026–2028.

Area	Indicator	Baseline (2025)	Target	Monitoring period	Data Source
Governance	Share (%) of women in governing/supervisory bodies	75%	≥ 50%	Annually	Legal and General Affairs Department
Employee Structure	Share (%) of women in the total number of employees	≈51.22%	≥50%	Annually	Legal and General Affairs Department
Salaries	Overall salary structure of women compared to men	≈53,46%	≥50%	Annually	Finance Department

Applicants for the Fund's programmes	Share (%) of applicants that are majority women-owned (companies)	17,8%	18,5%	Annually	Monitoring and Evaluation
Recipients of funding under the Fund's programmes	Share (%) of women-owned beneficiaries of funding	19%	19%	Annually	Monitoring and Evaluation
Discrimination	Number of reported cases	0	0	Annually	Internal documentation
Training / awareness-raising activity	Conducted training / activity	n/a	1	Annually	Internal documentation
GEP Management	Share of implemented measures from the GEP	n/a	≥ 90%	Annually	Annual report

Innovation Fund will prepare internal reports on an annual basis. In order to ensure that activities remain aligned with evolving needs, the first review of the defined objectives and indicators will be conducted in 2027. A final evaluation will be carried out at the end of 2028 to provide guidance for the next cycle of the GEP.

7. Publication and Visibility

The GEP, in both Serbian and English, has been published on the website of Innovation Fund under the section "About the Fund / Documents and Acts".

The GEP has been adopted and signed by the Director of the Fund.

8 . Management and Resources

The GEP and its implementation will be monitored by Innovation Fund employee, whose appointment will be regulated by a separate decision. In this way, the Fund allocates dedicated human resources for the implementation of this GEP. Specifically, 10 hours per month of a designated employee will be allocated to tasks related to the Plan, including monitoring indicators, coordinating activities, data collection and reporting, supporting internal trainings, and updating relevant policies and procedures. The designated employee will submit the prescribed reports to the Head of the Legal and General Affairs Department in accordance with the planned timeline defined in Section 11. All employees will be involved in the collection of necessary data and consulted as needed by the designated employee.

In the event that the Fund receives project funding (including funds from the Horizon Europe programme), gender equality activities will be included as eligible costs within project budgets. This may include training materials, engagement of external experts, event organisation costs, and similar expenses.

9. Methodology (Data Collection and Monitoring)

The GEP is based on internal data collection, financial reports, consultations with employees, and an analysis of existing organisational practices. Data will be collected in full compliance with data protection regulations, including the Personal Data Protection Act of the Republic of Serbia and, where applicable, the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

10. Awareness-Raising and Training

Innovation Fund recognizes that progress in the field of gender equality requires more than formal policies; it requires active awareness-raising and engagement of all staff members. To this end, the Fund will:

- Conduct at least one awareness-raising activity or training on gender equality during each calendar year, tailored to the Fund's context;
- Share relevant resources, research, and examples of good practice in the field of gender equality and inclusion with all employees;
- Where feasible, cooperate with organisations from Serbia and abroad working on gender equality in order to implement joint activities or utilize external expert support.

11. Timeframe

Table 3: Timeframe

Phase	Year
Initial assessment	2025
Adoption of the Plan	2026
Implementation period	2026-2028
First annual report	2027
Final evaluation	2028

12. Revision and Amendments

This Gender Equality Plan is a living document. Amendments may be adopted at any time by decision of the Director, in order to align it with changes in the size of Innovation Fund, its activities, legal requirements, or the results of monitoring and evaluation. All revised versions will be published on the Fund's website.

13. Approval

This Plan was adopted by the Director of Innovation Fund on 11 May 2026.

15.05.2026
S.L.


Sasa Lazovic
Director

