

ESSRG's Well-being and Gender Equality Plan

2022-2023

Draft version, currently under deliberation with ESSRG team members

Introduction

ESSRG cherishes diversity and is committed to provide equal opportunities to all, regardless of their gender, gender identity, gender expression, any type of disability, economic and family status, ethnicity, nationality, age, and other diverse backgrounds. ESSRG's organizational culture builds around respectful personal relationships, care towards others, and acceptance of different perspectives. Although gender equality has not been formally documented so far in ESSRG, the principle is well-aligned with our organizational culture.

This document – ESSRG's first official Well-being and Gender Equality Plan designed for a period of 2 years – formally acknowledges our responsibility and commitment to create a welcoming, free, and safe working environment for everyone, as well as equal chances to build a career while living a fulfilling life.

This GEP has been created over a period of nine months by four team members who volunteered to immerse in the gendered aspects of our work, with the full support of ESSRG's leadership. In the preparatory phase, they assessed the academic literature and examples of best practice and conducted semi-structured, anonymous interviews with all ESSRG team members. Based on the interviews, the four volunteers drew up a list of gender equality dimensions potentially relevant to the ESSRG and organised a half-day online and a full-day in-person workshop, open to everyone in the organisation, to identify each dimension and brainstorm on possible actions.

This document sums up the results of this process: it defines five key gender equality dimensions, assesses the status quo for each dimension in qualitative and/or quantitative terms, identifies objectives and potential future actions, and dedicates resources for the implementation of the GEP (including capacity building, monitoring, and further organisational development). Since the process was initiated and led by ESSRG team members, with the involvement of everyone, the resulting document can be seen as a self-evaluation rather than an externally driven initiative.

The leadership of ESSRG is fully committed to act upon the objectives defined in the GEP and will take initiative to address the main challenges identified.

Budapest, 15 September 2022



Bálint Balázs

managing director



1. Gender Equality dimensions within ESSRG

ESSRG is a non-profit SME working in the research and development sector. The average number of staff has ranged between 12-16 people in the last couple of years, but there is a recent increase in the number of employees (23 people as of 15-09-2022). Since European funded projects provide the main source of income, employment contracts are often project-based and part-time. ESSRG operates with a flat organizational structure: work-related operative decisions are made by project teams, main decisions are made together by the three owners who are all employees and one of them is the managing director of the organization, while long-term strategic decisions are made with the whole team in a participatory manner. These specificities – in particular the small size and the flat and flexible organizational structure – distinguish ESSRG from many other research organizations within Europe and requires a tailor-made approach to gender equality: some frequent problems might not occur in our context, while some other challenges might be much more prevalent.

During the gender equality planning process, five main dimensions of gender equality have been identified where challenges may occur and action is needed to provide equal opportunities to all within ESSRG (fig.1.). These include 1) reconciling work and caring duties while providing opportunities for recreation and recharging; 2) offering flexible working arrangements while strengthening team spirit; 3) paying attention to gendered dimensions of recruitment, career planning and dismissal while fostering a balanced representation of different genders within each employment category; 4) avoiding gender-stereotyped organizational roles and thriving for gender balance in decision-making; 5) providing tools and measures to avoid, recognize and act against sexism and sexual harassment.

Figure 1: The five key dimensions of well-being and gender equality at ESSRG



In the next pages, each of the five dimensions is presented in detail in terms of assessing the status quo, defining the objectives, and highlighting potential future actions to achieve the objectives.

1.1. Work-life balance

Assessing the status quo: The recent years – especially the changing work environment and the increased demand for care activities due to Covid – put pressure on many of us, leading to exhaustion and difficulties to find balance between work and personal life. The boundaries between work and private life have become more blurred, and it is more challenging to find time to make a transition from work to family and vice versa.

Vision: At ESSRG, it is important to recognize individual life situations and help each team member to achieve a work-life balance in line with individual life preferences. The physical and mental well-being of our team members is important to us. To this end, we consciously help eliminate workplace stress and look for models of how to reduce the time spent at work.

Objectives and actions:

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe
Recognize and accommodate team members with care-related responsibilities	Provide opportunities for flexible working hours	already in place
	Provide space/opportunities for team members who have care-related responsibilities to enable them to bring their family members to meetings and office hours	already in place
	Organise team building events where team members can bring their family members	already in place
Promote the conscious transitioning between work and private life	Offer training on mindfulness practices to team members which can be practiced individually to reduce stress and help the transition between work and private life	within 1 year
Reduce working hours and start transitioning to a 4 working days employment model	Assess team members' preferences for prolonging the weekend by one day (i.e. no work on Fridays)	within 1 years
	Assess legal and economic consequences of transitioning to a reduced working hours model	within 2 years
	Run a pilot with volunteering team members to assess how a reduced working hours model can work and improve the work-life balance of the employees	within 2 years

1.2. Flexible working arrangements

Assessing the status quo: ESSRG is a forerunner of providing flexible working arrangements. Since the pandemic most of ESSRG's employees have been working from their home, there is only one fix team meeting per week, while the rest of the work can be planned according to individual schedules and project timetables. While this flexibility is welcome by our team members, it also raises challenges. Some of the major issues are to be able to insert breaks into the daily schedule (e.g. for a coffee or a decent lunch), to create a comfortable working environment in the homes of our team members, to draw clear boundaries between working hours and free time (see also point 2.1), and to keep up the team spirit despite working remotely most of the time. While some of these challenges are prominent for those who live in bigger families and have care-related family duties, working from home can also be difficult for those who live alone both emotionally and financially.

Vision: Flexible working hours do not mean that employees must always be available: ESSRG respects lunchtime, free time, and weekends. We indicate to other team members when we are available at an individually established time interval. Team members may dispose of their annual leave in accordance with project work. Except the regular weekly meeting, other project related meetings are scheduled in advance after screening the availability of team members. We strive to meet in person at least once in a week, and we offer a physical co-working space for those who wish to work in a team.

Objectives and actions:

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe
Create a flexible working schedule on an individual basis which includes regular breaks	Each employee is encouraged to communicate her or his working schedule to project partners and insert regular breaks in the daily schedule for regeneration	already in place
	No phone calls and emails during weekends and holidays	already in place
	Meetings scheduled in advance to flexibly adapt to individual schedules	already in place
Provide a suitable working environment at home and in the office	Weekly in-person meetings and co-working opportunities offered to everyone to improve team spirit	in 2 months
	Contribute to home office costs (e.g. internet, heating etc.) of those colleagues who work from home - the amount should be defined in accordance with the actual national law (currently 10% of the minimum wage)	in 4 months

1.3. Recruitment, career path and dismissal

Assessing the status quo: Recruitment has been organised via professional links without open calls. ESSRG employs mostly female staff (14 out of the total 23 employees are women, which is 60,9% as of 15-09-2022), while the employer side is dominated by men (two male and one female owner). Given the imbalance in the proportion of female team members, a higher percentage of women leave the ESSRG. Further to that, there is a lack of transparency and clearly communicated recruitment, rankings and pay scales. Therefore, equal pay for equal work could not be calculated in the case of ESSRG. There is also a lack of clear pathways to career progression for younger team members when joining ESSRG.

Vision: We promote better communication and predictability around career progression and opportunity promotion, while maintaining the confidentiality of individual pay scales. Clarification of duties and expectations can minimise unexpected leaves, while respecting individual preferences in career advancement, which at times may include time off or unexpected career changes.

Objectives and actions:

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe
Promote gender balance and sensitivity in all phases of the recruitment process	Determine and balance the proportion of female and male employees through recruitment	within 2 months
Promote well defined roles and gender-balanced work share in all positions	Organising weekly meetings (team and group, one-on-one) to clarify responsibilities and roles in each project	already in place
	Offer potential career progression plan for junior and senior team members alike (further trainings, PhD, post-Doc, project WP leader, project coordinator)	within 2 months

1.4. Gendered stereotypes and organizational roles

Assessing the status quo: As ESSRG is a SME, its transparent organisational structure makes it easier to capture interpersonal interactions in terms of gender and power dynamics. It is common experience that gender-sensitive language is widely used among ESSRG team members, while some daily practices may leave gender stereotypes undetected.

Vision: At ESSRG, we create a respectful and safe working environment where all members of the team are encouraged to speak up if they experience any uncomfortable situations, whether they stem from gender stereotypes or power dynamics related to positions. To enable effective and safe communication, appointment of two volunteered gender officers is necessary.

Objectives and actions:

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe
Increase awareness of existing and perceived gender stereotypes, discrepancies resulting from differences in organisational roles	Each employee is encouraged to report any unpleasant experience emerging during work. Time is set aside for possible sharing at weekly meetings	already in place
	Offer in person and online trainings to sensitise team members to gender stereotypes and position-related power dynamics (see point 3.2.)	within 1 year
Provide a respectful and safe working environment with the elimination of gendered prejudices	Appoint two gender officers for a period of 2 years (see point 3.1.)	within 2 months
	Offer confidential consultations in case any team members are in need (see point 3.1.)	within 2 months
	Rotate gender officer roles to avoid overburdening volunteered gendered officers (see point 3.1.)	within 1 and 2 years

1.5. Sexism and sexual harassment

Assessing the status quo: The ESSRG is an SME that does not have a formalised policy on internal procedures for reporting sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace. There is no precedent for reporting cases, as the ESSRG has a long history of working with a small staff in a friendly and transparent environment. In the interviews conducted by the ESSRG team, team members mentioned sexism experienced during interaction with project partners, but not with other team members.

Vision: A policy with step-by-step procedures to eliminate all forms of sexism and sexual harassment is important. The ESSRG will encourage all team members to come forward with their complaints and find a solution and attend group trainings to ensure that all steps are taken to prevent and address sexual harassment and sexual exploitation. This will be done through the appointment of two volunteer gender officers who will implement the institutional policy.

Objectives and actions:

Objectives	Actions	Timeframe
Increase awareness of all forms of sexism, sexual harassment, and exploitation	Each employee is encouraged to report when experienced sexism, sexual harassment, or exploitation	within 2 months
	Offer in person group training for all team members to ensure that all steps are taken to prevent and address sexual harassment and sexual exploitation	within 1 year
Provide a respectful and safe working environment with the elimination of all forms of sexism, sexual harassment, and exploitation	Appoint two gender officers for a period of 2 years (see point 3.1.)	within 2 months
	Offer confidential consultations and follow the policy procedure in case of reporting sexism and sexual harassment (see point 3.1.)	within 2 months
	Rotate gender officer roles to avoid overburdening volunteered gender officers (see point 3.1.)	within 1 and 2 years

2. Implementation of the GEP

To ensure progress towards the above listed objectives, ESSRG will dedicate resources to appoint two part-time gender equality officers, offer capacity building, and carry out regular data collection and monitoring, as detailed below.

2.1. Resources dedicated to implement the Well-being and Gender Equality Plan

So far, organizational functions dedicated to well-being, diversity and gender issues have been served on a voluntary basis by team members, instead of setting up official structures within ESSRG. Due to its small size, it is unlikely that a full status or an independent unit will be required (and feasible) in the near future. However, to ensure that the actions proposed in this GEP are duly implemented, and to make the team members' contribution to the overall management more transparent, ESSRG will appoint two gender equality officers who allocate 10% of their working time to support the implementation and monitoring of the GEP. Gender equality officers will rotate on a biannual basis, each serving two years but starting in consecutive years to ensure both continuity and flexibility. Their main tasks will be 1) to collect data on the gender equality dimensions on a yearly basis, 2) to offer counsel and supervision to other team members on gender related challenges incl. conflict mediation within the organization, 3) organize a one-day capacity building workshop on gender equality related issues as part of ESSRG's yearly team building retreat, and 4) to search for other capacity building options (e.g. online trainings) to increase our sensitivity to gender biases.

2.2. Capacity building

ESSRG is dedicated to creating a safe space within its organization to discuss gender sensitive topics, minimize unconscious gender bias and avoid tabooing of sexism and sexual harassment. We believe that bringing up these topics regularly through interactive discussions, games, or drama plays are the most effective and enjoyable way to sensitise our team members. Therefore, in our yearly team building retreat, we will dedicate one full day to work on gender issues by using interactive tools. In addition, we will initiate short (1-2 hours) workshops or group discussions on selected gender-related topics throughout the year, based on experiences we gain in our projects that have a strong focus on gender issues. Whenever there is a possibility, ESSRG invites external experts from its wider network.

In addition to these deeper learning opportunities, we encourage team members (including existing staff and newcomers) to read the GEP carefully and initiate a discussion if something is not clear or if they find aspects that need further improvement. Furthermore, gender equality officers will seek out online training on gender equality and make a list of these resources available to everyone in the organisation to promote self-development and raise awareness.

2.3. Regular data collection and monitoring

ESSRG first assessed gender inequalities and related challenges within the organization when this document was prepared. Assessing the status quo was built on semi-structured interviews and workshops with the participation of all team members. To provide continuous monitoring of the GEP, each of the five GEP dimensions will be assessed on a yearly basis through structured interviews conducted with at least 75% of the team members. These interviews will provide qualitative data to assess progress towards the GEP objectives and will also help revise the plan and refine and add new objectives, if necessary. In addition, quantitative data will be collected on gender equality within employment and career opportunities.

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