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Gender Equality Plan

2026-2028

AO Research Institute Davos

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1. Introduction

Gender Equality (GE) is a core value of the European Union (EU) and a key priority within the European Research Area (ERA) [1]. In 2021, Switzerland adopted its first National Strategy for GE 2030 [2], reinforcing its commitment to advancing equality across all sectors. In the context of Research and Innovation (R&I), GE is widely recognized as a driver of scientific excellence, enhancing the quality, relevance, and societal impact of research, while supporting the attraction and retention of diverse talent.

Despite measurable progress in recent years, persistent gender imbalances and structural inequalities remain across the European R&I landscape. The EU therefore emphasizes the need for a comprehensive and structural approach to GE, requiring coordinated action by research-performing organizations, funding bodies, national authorities, and European institutions. Such an approach aims to embed GE systematically within institutional frameworks, practices, and cultures.

In line with these objectives, Horizon Europe (HE) has strengthened the integration of GE as a cross-cutting priority. Key measures include the requirement for research organizations to establish a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) as an eligibility criterion for funding, the systematic integration of the sex and gender dimension in R&I content, and the promotion of gender balance in decision-making bodies and research teams.

Within this policy framework, in 2021 the AO Research Institute Davos (ARI) Director mandated the Gender Equality Working Group (GEWG) to develop its first ARI GEP. Following the successful completion of the first ARI GEP 2023–2025, ARI is initiating its second ARI GEP 2026–2028.

2. Scope

The ARI GEP 2026-2028 (hereinafter GEP) addresses five key thematic areas: (i) work–life balance and organizational culture; (ii) gender balance in leadership and decision-making; (iii) GE in recruitment and career progression; (iv) measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment; and (v) the integration of sex and gender dimensions into research and teaching content. Within these areas, the GEP defines specific objectives, actions, and indicators to monitor progress and ensure accountability.

The GEP also complies with the requirements set out under the HE program, including mandatory provisions on public documentation, dedicated resources, periodical data collection and monitoring, and organization of trainings and capacity building actions.

The scope of the GEP covers all staff categories, including scientific, technical, administrative, and leadership positions, as well as early-career researchers and trainees. It applies to all stages of the employee lifecycle, including recruitment, career progression, training and capacity building, working conditions, and participation in decision-making processes. The GEP also extends to the integration of the sex dimension into research content, where relevant.

The implementation of the GEP is supported by dedicated resources, including the GEWG and a designated Project Lead (Gender Equality Officer - GEO). The GEP follows a continuous cycle of data collection, monitoring, and reporting.

ARI is the research Institute of the AO Foundation (AO) and therefore the GEP operates in alignment with the AO policies and initiatives on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) related programs, such as the AO Inclusive Excellence Policy (IE Policy) and the AO Inclusive Excellence Plan 2026 – 2028 (IE Plan). While certain measures are implemented at AO level, the ARI GEP 2026–2028 focuses on more targeted, research-relevant actions within the Institute.

3. Methodology

The action plan of the ARI GEP 2026–2028 builds on two complementary fronts. First, it builds on the results, achievements, and remaining objectives identified during the implementation of the first ARI GEP 2023–2025. Second, it is based on the identification and review of the existing measures and institutional policies – particularly on aspects related to human resources and employment conditions – already implemented centrally at AO level, from which ARI employees directly benefit as AO staff members.

3.1 Review of the outcomes of the ARI GEP 2023-2025

The first ARI GEP 2023–2025 established an important institutional framework to promote GE and DEIA. During the implementation period, ARI successfully developed a structured governance, strengthened awareness on gender-related topics, and initiated concrete actions to support a more inclusive and equitable working environment.

One of the major achievements was the establishment and continuous engagement of the GEWG, that supported data collection, monitoring activities, awareness initiatives, and implementation of the plan.

Throughout the project, ARI carried out several trainings and awareness activities addressing unconscious bias, DEIA issues, and integration of the sex and gender dimensions into research content. Participation from employees demonstrated increasing institutional awareness and openness toward these topics.

The GEP also contributed to strengthening institutional policies. Important outcomes included the revision of the ARI career path, including the introduction of clearer guidance for part-time work arrangements and career advancements, the implementation of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for integrating sex analysis into research, and the contribution at the IE Policy of the AO.

In the area of work–life balance, some actions – particularly those requiring AO alignment – were not fully implemented due to lower priority or limited demand. However, the extension of

the policy on working from abroad illustrates the Institute's commitment to supporting ARI staff through flexible arrangements.

An important outcome was the contribution to a broader discussion within the AO: the ARI experience supported the initiation of a wider DEIA strategy at AO level: AO IE Policy.

However, the report identifies persistent challenges that remain central to future planning. Women are underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles. These disparities highlight the need for further targeted interventions that strengthen visibility, equitable access to leadership opportunities, and balanced representation in scientific activities.

3.2 Review of the existing measures at the AO

Below are listed the main policies and measures already in place at AO related with DEIA topics:

- AO Inclusive Excellence Policy (IE Policy)

The IE Policy was implemented in AO offices in Switzerland in March 2025 and in the regional offices in April 2026. The policy is intended to be a further specification of the principles set out in the AO Code of Ethics and Conduct and outlines the vision in more detail. It establishes the basis for future discussions and defines the terms discrimination, bias, and harassment, as well as the different responsibilities and duties of care. It also explains the different channels available to report an incident, the steps and process following an incident report, and the possible consequences should a violation be identified. Lastly, it briefly touches upon the different initiatives and practices already in place to ensure a diverse and inclusive work environment.

- AO Inclusive Excellence Plan 2026 – 2028 (IE Plan)

In June 2026, the AO has established its first IE Plan 2026 – 2028, which includes the ongoing objectives of the long-term IE Policy, combined with the requirements by the HE Program on GE. The objectives of the IE Plan are clustered under 3 key pillars (awareness, education, and Policies & Practices) and include the 4 mandatory HE eligibility requirements.

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The AO is offering an EAP in Switzerland and all regional offices since October 2024 and April 2026, respectively. The EAP is an external professional consultation and support service to provide confidential support and expert information for all employees facing challenges. The EAP was implemented as an anonymous point of contact in harassment cases and is an integral part of the IE Policy.

- Benefits at the AO

The AO supports employees with flexible working to allow maximum flexibility and work life balance. In addition, the AO has consciously invested in and expanded flexible working and wellbeing by introducing in 2025 a "Remote Working for AO Employees in Switzerland" Policy.

It allows employees to work from home and from abroad within the EU for a defined period per year and thus, adhering to social security and legal requirements.

- People Development: Training & Development, Employee Survey, Performance & Development Compass

In 2024, the AO established the People Development working group to strengthen employee development, training, and career progression. The group developed a skills training catalogue and a policy supporting continuous learning. An organization-wide employee survey was introduced to assess workplace experience, including GE aspects. The survey, conducted in January 2025, supported the AO's accreditation as a *Great Place to Work*. Based on the survey findings, a revised performance appraisal process - the *Performance and Development Compass* - was implemented in 2025. The process promotes structured dialogue on performance, development, and career progression, ensuring equal opportunities for all employees.

- Compensation Policy

In 2025, the AO reviewed and updated its Compensation Policy to strengthen transparency, fairness, and organizational trust. This initiative included the alignment and internal communication of compensation levels across the organization. The revised compensation policy and standardized job level structure were communicated organization-wide in January 2026. The review was informed by external market data and supported by an external firm, Mercer, which assisted in mapping the organization and defining market-aligned salary ranges.

- AO Access

AO Access came into force in 2018 and aims to create transparency and awareness, and to assess whether bias and/or barriers exist for entry and/or progression of women and other underrepresented minorities in the AO with a focus on the external world-wide community of the AO (faculty, officers, leading surgeons).

- AO Health Management initiative

In 2025, the AO Health Management initiative came into force. The "*Mind, Motion, & More*" program offers a variety of activities designed to support both physical and mental resilience.

Overall, the first ARI GEP 2023–2025, together with the AO-wide DEIA initiatives, has established a strong foundation for long-term cultural and organizational change, by increasing awareness, improving transparency and initiating structural improvements. The new strategic action plan therefore aims to consolidate the progress achieved, while further strengthening areas with persistent challenges that require continued development and long-term commitment.

4. Action Plan

4.1 Mandatory requirements

The GEP complies with the mandatory requirements (MRs) set out under the HE Program, including provisions on public documentation, dedicated resources, periodical data collection and monitoring, and organization of trainings and capacity building actions (table 1).

Table 1: Summary of the mandatory requirements.

MR1: Public document			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
Publish the GEP 2026-2028 and reports on the progress and outcomes on the ARI's website and disseminate them around the ARI	Documents signed, published and disseminated annually	GEO, GEWG	Y1, Y2, Y3
MR2: Dedicated resources			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
Allocate adequate resources and expertise	Gender Equality Project opened to book time for people working on the GEP	GEO, GEWG	Y1, Y2, Y3
MR3: Data collection and monitoring			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
Collect sex-disaggregated data of staff across roles, including a survey (review of the questions on Y2, send survey Q1-Y3, review of the results Y3)	Report published and disseminated annually as part of the GEP report (see MR1)	GEO, HR	Y1, Y2, Y3
MR4: Training and capacity building			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
Organize, in collaboration with AO GEP, awareness raising and training events	At least 1 event per year	GEO, HR	Y1, Y2, Y3

The GEP, duly signed and approved by the ARI Director, together with all related annual reports on the outcomes and progress, will be available on the Institutional website and disseminated around the institute throughout different channels (i.e. ARI newsletters, ARI social media, ARI general meetings).

Also, the ARI has ensured the allocation of adequate resources and expertise to support the effective implementation of its GEP. The GEWG, including a GEO, is composed in line with the HE guidance on GEPs and ensures balanced representation across staff categories, hierarchical levels, educational backgrounds, and genders. To ensure continuity and sustained

capacity building, the GEWG has been largely maintained from the previous GEP cycle, with minor adjustments reflecting staff changes (table 2).

A dedicated project over the entire duration of the GEP cycle has been established for all GEWG members within the SAP system to enable systematic recording of time spent on related activities. In addition, the ARI, as part of the AO, can benefit from a dedicated budget that has been allocated from the AO HR department as of 2026 to support the implementation of specific measures related to work-life balance, staff training, and professional development for all AO employees, including ARI staff (AO IE Plan 2026 – 2028).

Collection of sex-disaggregated data of ARI staff across roles and leadership will be published annually on the Institutional website as part of the ARI annual GEP report.

Awareness-raising activities, training, and capacity-building actions related to DEIA topics will be primarily implemented in collaboration with the AO IE Plan, ensuring alignment with broader AO-wide initiatives (refer to AO IE Plan 2026 – 2028). Planned measures include:

- Awareness-raising activities, such as webinars, events, and communication campaigns, including initiatives linked to internationally recognized dates (e.g. International Women’s Day, Pride Month, Equal Pay Day, and International Men’s Day);
- Employee events dedicated to the promotion of intercultural engagement;
- Training on inclusive language to support inclusive communication practices.

Table 2: Composition of the GEWG: name, initials, and function.

GEWG	Men	Women
Leadership	Geoff Richards (RIG) Director ARI & Executive Director AO R&D Daniel Arens (ARD) Senior Project Leader	Nora Goudsouzian (GON) Program Deputy, Focus Area Leader Zhen Li (LIZ) Deputy Leader Focus Area
Administrative	Ulrich Bentz (BEU) Quality Management and Procurement	Nunzia Di Luise (DIN) Gender Equality Officer (GEO)
Student/ researcher	Maximilian Heumann (HEM) Junior Project Leader Jorge Úbeda Garrido (GAJ) PhD Student	Carla Hetreau (HEC) Junior Project Leader Elena Della Bella (DBE) Senior Research Scientist Maria Hildebrand (HIM) Project Leader
Human Resources (HR)		Bettina Brühlmann (BRB) Senior HR Business Partner - AO

Figure 1 illustrates the roadmap of the ARI GEP 2026-2028, including set up, reporting, and data collection.

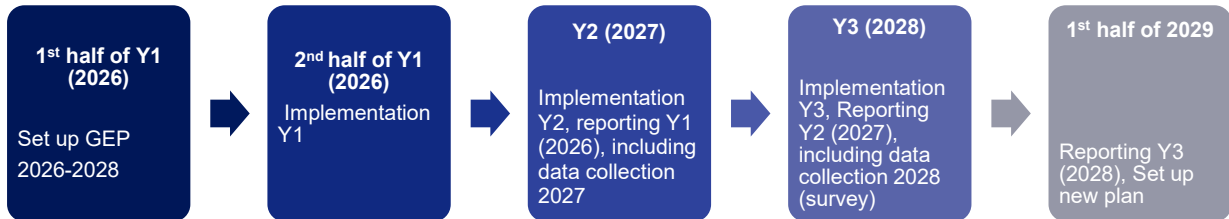


Figure 1: Roadmap ARI GEP 2026-2028.

4.2 Strategic Plan

Area 1: Work-life balance & organizational culture			
Objective 1A: Improve reconciliation of work and personal duties			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T1A-1 Deliver recommendations for scheduling ARI internal meetings within defined core working hours	Core hours guidelines implemented and presented at the ARI General meeting	<u>HEC</u> , LIZ, ARD	Y1
T1A-2 Analysis of the possibility of improving parental leave regarding duration and flexibility	Analysis presented to the GEWG and possibly to AO Executive Committee	BRB	Y2
Objective 1B: Increase networking among ARI and AO			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T1B-1 Increase visibility of the existing Teams group dedicated to physical wellbeing “Mind Motion and More” (M, M &M)	Teams group M, M & M made accessible to everyone in AO	<u>LIZ</u> , ARD	Y1
T1B-2 Organize lunch/coffee between 2 people from different AO areas following each Lunch & Learn	- Develop a matchmaking mechanism through Teams group M, M & M - Organize 1-2 matches / year	<u>ARD</u> , LIZ	Y1, Y2, Y3

Area 2: Gender balance in leadership and decision-making			
Objective 2A: Increase gender balance in Boards and Commissions			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T2A-1 Prepare a presentation to raise awareness on the importance of gender balance in Research Commissions (RCs) and International Boards (IBs)	Presentation delivered at the ARI GEWG	BEU, DIN, Claudia Siverino)	Y1
T2A.2 Deliver the presentation above to the RCs and IBs	Presentation delivered	Working group	Y2
Objective 2B: Increase gender balance in ARI Advisory Committee			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T2B-1 Nominate 1 male and 1 female for the replacement of 2 members and present them to the AO Board for final decision	Presentation of the 2 members at AO Foundation Board delivered	RIG	Y1 (nomination) Y2 (change)
Objective 2C: Increase gender balance in scientific societies and ARI conferences			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T2C-1 Submit at least one formal recommendation (i.e. a presentation, proposal, vote) to promote gender and geographic diversity within ICORS membership and committees, with particular attention to low- and middle-income countries and underrepresented regions	- Recommendation submitted -Report presented internally at an ARI GEWG	ARI Representative of the Steering Committee of International Combined Orthopaedic Research Society (ICORS), Martin Stoddart, RIG	Y2
T2C-2 Implement guidelines for adopting a practice of aiming for 50:50 gender balance in invited speakers at ARI conferences	- Guidelines implemented and disseminated - Report on the gender balance among invited speakers and participants	DIN, Matteo D'Este	Y2

Area 3: Gender equality in recruitment and career progression			
Objective 3A: Review of the ARI career path			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T3A-1 Adapt the ARI career path to the AO Compensation Policy 2026	ARI career path adapted and presented at ARI General meeting	RIG, Program Leaders, Administrative Manager, BRB	Y1
Objective 3B: Support and promote women in leadership positions			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T3B-1 Organize presentations on career journey by successful female researchers in the field	At least 1 presentation in the GEP cycle	DIN	Y1, Y2, Y3
Objective 3C: Increase diversity in ARI fellowships			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T3C-1 Implement guidelines introducing gender and geographical diversity balance for ARI-APOA/APORS and Perren fellowships and disseminate them to the selection committees	Guidelines implemented and disseminated	RIG	Y1
T3C-2 Collecting data to assess the fellow composition against the defined criteria upon dissemination of the guidelines	Data report	DIN	Y1, Y2, Y3

Area 4: Integration of gender dimension into research and teaching			
Objective 4A: Raise awareness of sex-studies in Research Commissions (RCs)			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T4A-1 Prepare a presentation to raise awareness on the importance of sex-studies in ARI Research grants	Presentation presented at ARI GEWG and ARI Advisory Committee December 2026	DEL, HIM	Y1
Objective 4B: Raise awareness of sex-studies among ARI research staff			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T4B-1 Review the SOP and disseminate	SOP reviewed and presented annually at the SIM meeting	<u>HEM</u> , GON, DBE, BEU, HIM	Y1, Y2, Y3
T4B-2 Monitor the number of grants/publications that involve sex studies	Report annually	DIN	Y1, Y2, Y3
T4B-3 Organize communications (i.e. email, ARI newsletter)	Communication done annually around sex-studies	DBE, HIM	Y2, Y3

Area 5: Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment			
Objective 5A: Continue to support measures against gender-based violence			
Task	Deliverable	Responsibility	Timeline
T5A-1 Improve the questions of the survey to be delivered in Y3	Presentation of the new survey to the GEWG	GON	Y2

5. References

1. EU Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, HE guidance on GEPs, 2021
doi:10.2777/876509
2. EU, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *Gender equality plans: how to be ready for ex-post checks*, 2026, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/9460977>
3. Gleichstellungsstrategie 2030, April 2021