

Gender Equality Plan (GEP) **2023-2026**

Introduction

Observa - *Science in Society* is an independent, non-profit, legally recognized research centre that promotes reflection and debate on the relationship between science and society, fostering dialogue between different social actors (e.g. experts, researchers, policy makers and citizens).

Since its foundation, in 2001, gender equality has always been a matter of interest to Observa; this is already evident in the composition of the Scientific Committee, the Steering Committee and the Observa team. Furthermore, the gender dimension represents a specific element of debate in science and science communication and Observa also pays close attention to it in the conduct of its research, for example, in the choice of experts, stakeholders and participants, ensuring that it is gender-balanced.

In this direction, the need to adopt a *Gender Equality Plan (GEP)* is in line with its vocation and it is believed that the decision of the European Commission, to establish the presence of GEP as an eligibility criterion for participating in the Horizon Europe Framework Program, is a further step forward an effective equality.

This need has prompted greater attention and a systematic review of gender dynamics within Observa, in order to identify some measures to support gender equality, despite the small size of the organisation. Seizing this opportunity, Observa members have decided to make more explicit and value the existing gender equality practices and what they intend to do in the next four years.

That said, the GEP presented in this document is divided into three sections:

1. Brief profile of Observa;
2. Observa's status as concerns the four mandatory process-related building blocks established by the European Commission;
3. Observa's actions with respect to the five thematic areas recommended by the European Commission to be addressed through a GEP.

Brief profile

Observa - Science in Society is an independent and non-profit research centre in Vicenza (Italy), since 2001. It promotes reflection and debate on the relationship between science and society, fostering dialogue between different social actors. To develop this main goal, Observa is partner of many national and international projects, some of them already funded by European Commission within the Horizon Europe Framework Program.

Furthermore, gender equality is one of the principles on which Observa is based to regulate its internal life as well, making use of the experience gained through theoretical and applied research on gender equality also thanks to the collaboration with many Universities, Research Institutes and Institution at Italian and international level, such as: London School of Economics (UK), University of Valencia (ES), Lisbon University (PT), VA Sweden (SE), Dialogik (DE), University of Sao Paulo (BRA), Compagnia di S. Paolo (IT).

As a well-known research centre in Italy, on science and technology issue, Observa published two books regarding the role of Women in Science (Women in Science, 2013; Donne e Scienza, 2010). These volumes have been published in the framework of the Gender Action Plan, launched by two European project on genomics: SABRE¹ and EADGENE². As part of these projects, Observa has promoted a survey among research personnel involved in the networks with two aims: a) to monitor researchers' perception and attitudes towards gender issues and potential differences in recruitment, career advancement and private life choices between men and women in research; b) to compare men and women's attitudes in order to highlight critical features of women role in research processes and identify potential causes of inequality and measures to deal with gender issues.

Given the small size of Observa and in regard of its broad network of contacts, many collaborations are with freelances in order to be able to meet the needs of the projects, such as the presence in the field work. Anyway, in the end of the 2022, the overall staff consisted of 38 people, 21 women and 17 men. The following tables show the gender distribution of the different management bodies and of the Observa team.

Tab. 1: Gender distribution of the Scientific Committee - last updated December 2022

Female	Male	TOT
2	6	8

Tab. 2: Gender distribution of Steering Committee - last updated December 2022

Female	Male	TOT
1	3	4

Within the Steering Committee, the current president of Observa is male; he was elected in compliance with democratic norms and with the majority of votes of the members

¹ SABRE project: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/16250>; <https://www.observa.it/genere-e-ricerca-2/>

² EADGENEproject: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/506416>; <https://www.observa.it/genere-e-ricerca-2/>

of the shareholders' meeting and approved by the Board of Directors following the Constitution document.

Tab. 3: Gender distribution of Observa team - last updated December 2022

	Female	Male	TOT
Employees	2	0	2
Freelancers	16	8	24
TOT	18	8	26

Observa's process of systematic review of the gender issue was already launched in 2022 with some webinar and training tools that will be described in the second section.

2. Four mandatory process-related building blocks

To comply with the eligibility criteria established by the European Commission, four process-related requirements (building blocks) must be complied: *public document, dedicated resources, data collection and monitoring, and training*³.

a. **Public document:** on the Observa website there are some documents that take into account the gender dimension, such as the Constitution document and the deed of incorporation. (2009). Furthermore, in the Yearbook that Observa publishes every year and which collects the latest research on science and society, gender balance is always taken into account in relation to the respondents and participants involved. Finally, this document is the formal act with which Observa declares its position with respect to gender equality and its intention to adopt some useful actions to guarantee the effective development of gender equality within its organization. The creation of the document is part of a training and study process that began in the spring of 2022. This path has had moments of confrontation with the initiatives of the European Commission, in particular the webinar "Gender Equality Plan eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe: Who is concerned? How to comply with it?", and other moments of discussion and comparison between the two editors of the text: Chiara Piccolo and Giuseppe Pellegrini. The document was approved by the Observa shareholders' meeting during the annual meeting held in Vicenza on May 23rd 2023 and signed by the current president. Finally, this GEP was uploaded to the organization's website and made available for the public⁴.

b. **Dedicated Resources:** the Observa Steering Committee is responsible for the GEP and is supported by a gender expert internal to the organisation. Overall, 1 half person/month per year is allocated to lead and monitor the process. Some activities are performed by Observa members on a voluntary basis. A lump sum of € 500,00 is allocated for the implementation of the entire GEP.

³ See the Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffc06c3-200a-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232129669>.

- c. **Data Collection and Monitoring:** disaggregated data on staff composition are annually collected and shared with the Observa shareholders' meeting. The data collection and monitoring process will be also used to oversee the implementation of the GEP and to analyse its impact.
- d. **Training:** training activities on the topic "Gender equality" are already used by Observa and employees and partners are always invited to take part in several occasions, such as the aforementioned webinar offered by the European Commission and followed by a discussion among Observa team. This kind of training will also be aimed at any new professional figure who will come into contact with Observa. Training is delivered by internal and external gender experts.

3. Actions with respect to the five thematic areas

Observa takes into consideration the five thematic areas proposed by the European Commission to identify the actions to be put into practice in order to ensure effective gender equality. These five areas are: *work-life balance and organisational culture; gender balance in leadership and decision-making; gender equality in recruitment and career progression; integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content; measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment*⁵.

- a. **Work-life balance and organisational culture:** considering that many of the professionals with whom Observa usually collaborates are freelancers, there are no rigid schedules for carrying out daily work activities or presence in the Vicenza office. With this in mind, timetables and activities are agreed in a flexible and reasoned manner based on the project requirements. As for the two employees, to meet the needs of life, one of them is on a 30% part-time basis and ensures his presence in the office as agreed in the contract; and the other has an 80% part-time contract and a flexible remote working arrangement. Therefore, many work-life balance measures are already in place, such as flexitime work, remote work and balanced workload. To improve work-life balance, over the next four years, Observa is committed to increasingly developing a culture of gender equality, through the following measures:
- Remote work: remote work had already been implemented and was scaled up and improved during the COVID-19 pandemic to allow staff members to work from home for personal reasons or care responsibilities. Moreover, the experience has shown that it also contributes to better work performance. Therefore this measure will continue to be implemented and improved if necessary.
 - Online meetings: in line with the remote working concept, meetings are organized adopting a hybrid format (online and offline) according to the specific needs of the participants. This measure will also continue to be implemented and

⁵ See the [Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans](#)

improved if necessary through technological updating and the choice of the most appropriate tools.

- Flexible working timetable: flexible working hours exist and are already widely applied in order to meet the life and work needs in accordance with project commitments. As with flexible working, thanks to the experience it has been understood that these conditions also improve the quality of the work produced by employees and freelancers. Therefore, this measure will continue to be implemented and improved if necessary.
- Organizational culture: promote greater awareness of gender issues and gender equality among the different figures who work and collaborate with Observa. This also includes greater attention to gender language in internal dynamics as well as in the production of information and dissemination documents addressed to the public.

b. Gender balance in leadership and decision-making: due to its associative nature, Observa is subject to the supervision of the shareholders' meeting which approves its activities and budget once a year. From now on, the GEP will also be reviewed on a fixed basis and the decisions in this regard will be shared. Therefore, the internal dynamics, including what pertains to the election of the president and other roles, are characterized by democratic norms and consensus among equals. Gender balance is one of the explicit criteria adopted for nominations and Observa is committed to making women's work and their role in decision-making leadership more explicit.

c. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression: Given the small size of Observa and the type of collaborations, new hires and career advancements are not a frequent activity. In any case, as evidenced by the showed tables on the gender distribution of collaborators, Observa supports and guarantees a good gender balance.

d. Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content: Attention to the gender dimension is present throughout Observa's scientific production. Specifically, this applies in three parallel directions: the choice of experts and participants involved in research is always gender-balanced; the language in the production of scientific content is inclusive and sensitive to the gender dimension; the choice of collaborators maintains gender equality (see the tables shown in the first section).

Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment: There are no specific measures to prevent and manage gender-based violence also because in the history of Observa there has never been a case of gender-based violence. In any case, the GEP is also an opportunity to adopt a code of conduct in the light of gender equality and this will include a section on procedures for reporting cases of gender-based violence and one on support measures for victims of such violence. In the next year (2024), the Steering Committee will elaborate and approve a specific code of conduct.

This document was discussed in the appropriate forums, such as Board of Directors, the Steering Committee and disseminated among employees, freelances and members of Observa. It was shared and discussed during the Assembly during the Shareholders' Meeting of 23 May 2023; thus, this document was approved.

The President and the Board of Directors:

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