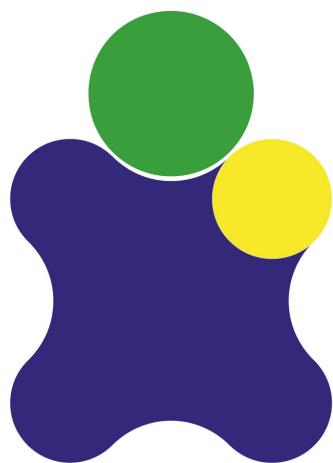


Attachment 1



Fondazione
Regionale
per la
Ricerca
Biomedica

Gender Equality Plan

Rev.	Date	Reason	Drafted	Verify	Approved
0	October 2018	1°EMISSIONE	Gestione Progetti Europei	RSGQ	DG
1	02.08.2021	full review	Gestione Progetti Europei	RSGQ	DG
2	16.05.2025	full review	Responsabile politiche di genere		

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Background

1.1 Gender Equality as a Strategic Priority in Research and Innovation

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of the European Union (EU), consistently emphasized across its policy documents, which call for concrete actions to transform this principle from a formal declaration into an operational reality.

Goal 5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is dedicated to gender equality. It aims to promote equal opportunities across all sectors—including education, employment, and political participation—and to eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence, both in public and private spheres. This goal not only highlights gender equality as an essential aspect of sustainability but also serves as a cross-cutting objective influencing all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), marking a global commitment to building a more just and equitable society.

The **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025**, now approaching the end of its implementation phase, underscores the importance of a dual approach to gender equality. This strategy combines targeted actions for gender equality with the mainstreaming of a gender perspective across all decision-making processes and policy areas within the EU, specifying intervention domains.

In the field of **Research and Innovation**, the European Union has long advocated for increasing women's representation in leadership positions, supporting scientific careers by fostering family-friendly working environments, and integrating the gender dimension in research. These initiatives aim to ensure that research and innovation better address the needs of all EU citizens.

Since 2021, a key requirement has been introduced: organizations seeking funding through the **Horizon Europe** program must have a **Gender Equality Plan (GEP)** in place. This measure supports the adoption of a gender perspective in all research and innovation activities.

In alignment with EU directives, Italy's **National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)** has introduced a comprehensive national strategy to combat gender-based discrimination. This strategy is integrated across all missions of the PNRR and is structured around five priorities: employment, income, skills, time, and power. One of its explicit objectives is to improve Italy's ranking in the **European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) Gender Equality Index** by five points by 2026. While Italy improved its score from 65 to 68.2 out of 100 in 2023, this still falls about two percentage points below the EU average. To access PNRR funding, organizations must adopt a Gender Equality Plan and integrate the gender dimension into their research and innovation activities.

Italy's **Ministry of Health** has also developed a **National Plan for the Application and Dissemination of Gender Medicine**, which calls for the adoption of gender-specific approaches not only in biomedical research but also in healthcare services, professional training, and public health communication. In 2022, the Ministry acknowledged the existence of gender disparities within healthcare institutions and established a technical working group to promote the professional advancement of women in the health sector.

This document has also been developed in accordance with the principles outlined in the **UNI/PdR 125:2022** reference practice "*Guidelines for a Gender Equality Management System*"—published in March 2022 by the Italian Organization for Standardization (UNI). This guideline defines the criteria for national gender certification and introduces specific **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** for evaluating gender equality policies in organizations. The

framework covers six main areas: culture and strategy, governance, HR processes, opportunities for growth and inclusion, gender pay equity, and work-life balance. Organizational maturity is assessed based on these KPIs, tailored to each organization's size category. Progress is tracked annually through performance monitoring and improvement measures implemented by the organization.

Finally, the **Horizon Europe** program has funded **INSPIRE**, a European Centre of Excellence for Inclusive Gender Equality in Research and Innovation. Reflecting its commitment to these goals.

1.2 Fondazione Regionale per la Ricerca Biomedica

Fondazione Regionale per la Ricerca Biomedica (FRRB) is a not-for-profit organisation established in October 2011 by Lombardy Region.

Its aim is to promote and enhance scientific research in the field of Life Sciences, particularly in the biomedical area. FRRB represents one of the main strategic platforms for boosting progress, research, development and innovation in hospitals, universities and research centres focused on biomedical research and located in Lombardy Region.

Its *raison d'être* is to serve as support for the implementation of the regional healthcare research policy, in order to place Lombardy system in a leading position in Europe. The Foundation also aims to invest local and European resources in innovative basic and translational research projects to generate positive impact on the local healthcare ecosystem and citizens.

FRRB main activities:

- Promoting research and innovation in Lombardy by allocating regional funds to basic and translational research projects through competitive calls for proposals.
- Supporting local and national technological clusters in life sciences, enabling a better coordination of research agenda in the biomedical field, as well as a more efficient use of funds.
- Attracting European and international research funds to Lombardy by participating in European projects, as those in the Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, and international partnerships.
- Disseminating scientific knowledge and culture, integrating Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) principles, and promoting gender equality among research organisations, hospitals and research partners.

FRRB acknowledges the benefits of gender equality in research, as part of the scientific excellence of the projects it funds.

FRRB aims to proactively set itself as an example to promote institutional changes in other Lombardy biomedical research institutions.

With this Gender Equality Plan (GEP), FRRB seeks to address gender inequalities and imbalances in R&I through the development and implementation of a context-specific GEP, formalising a set of actions aiming at a long-term institutional transformation.

Gender Equality Plan is a strategic document that promote equal opportunities and the inclusion of all individuals working within the FRRB organization. They also recognize gender medicine as a crucial tool for achieving scientific excellence.

Drafting a Gender Equality Plan is a prerequisite for accessing both European and national funding, which increasingly require the integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation activities. In the biomedical field, this means promoting research that adopts the gender medicine approach. The Italian Ministry of Health has also established the National Plan for the Implementation and Dissemination of Gender Medicine, which calls for the application of this approach not only in research, but also in healthcare services, communication, and education.

The first version of GEP has been developed as part of the EU project "TARGET, TAKing a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation" (H2020, GA 741672).

The design and implementation of this GEP will tackle the main issues of gender equality in research, following the advice of the Community of Practice, a community composed by healthcare staff, researchers, grants offices staff with a shared interest in promoting gender equality.

KEY POINTS

- This GEP is a public document.

This GEP is an official document, approved by the Legal Representative and publicly available on FRRB website. The aim of this GEP is to acknowledge FRRB commitment to gender equality.

- Dedicated resources have been committed to the work on the GEP.

FRRB Director appoints every two year a staff member as Equality Coordinator, responsible for the coordination of the activities related to the implementation of the GEP. The Equality Coordinator will ensure that all FRRB staff members are actively involved in the actions of the GEP.

- Data collection and monitoring processes are in place.

FRRB supports a clear and transparent data collection in all processes related to internal staff recruitment and to funded research teams. Some data, in compliance with the EU GDPR, may not be published.

- Raising Awareness and promoting training.

FRRB promotes and organises events for training to promote awareness on the areas covered by the GEP for the regional scientific community and its partners. All staff is involved in the implementation of the GEP. FRRB management is committed to promote actions of awareness raising among staff members and to offer special trainings.

1 Gender Analysis in FRRB

1.1 Current situation (2025)

During the last years, FRRB employees have been growing to manage the increasing amount of research projects to be managed. To date, FRRB has 14 employees. However, out of the 14 people, 64% are women and 36% are men, as shown in Figure 1.

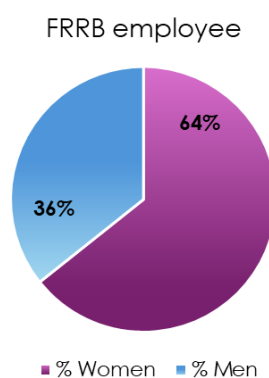


Figure 1. Total gender analysis in FRRB

Based on the role and the career level, FRRB personnel can be divided into:

Type of contract	Men	Women	Total	Men (%)	Women (%)
General Manager	0	1	1	0 %	100 %
Area Managers	1	1	2	50 %	50 %
First-level contract	2	2	4	50 %	50 %
Second-level contract	1	3	4	25 %	75 %
Third-level contract	1	2	3	33 %	67 %
Total	5	9	14	36 %	64 %

Table 1. Gender distribution based on different roles and career levels in FRRB.

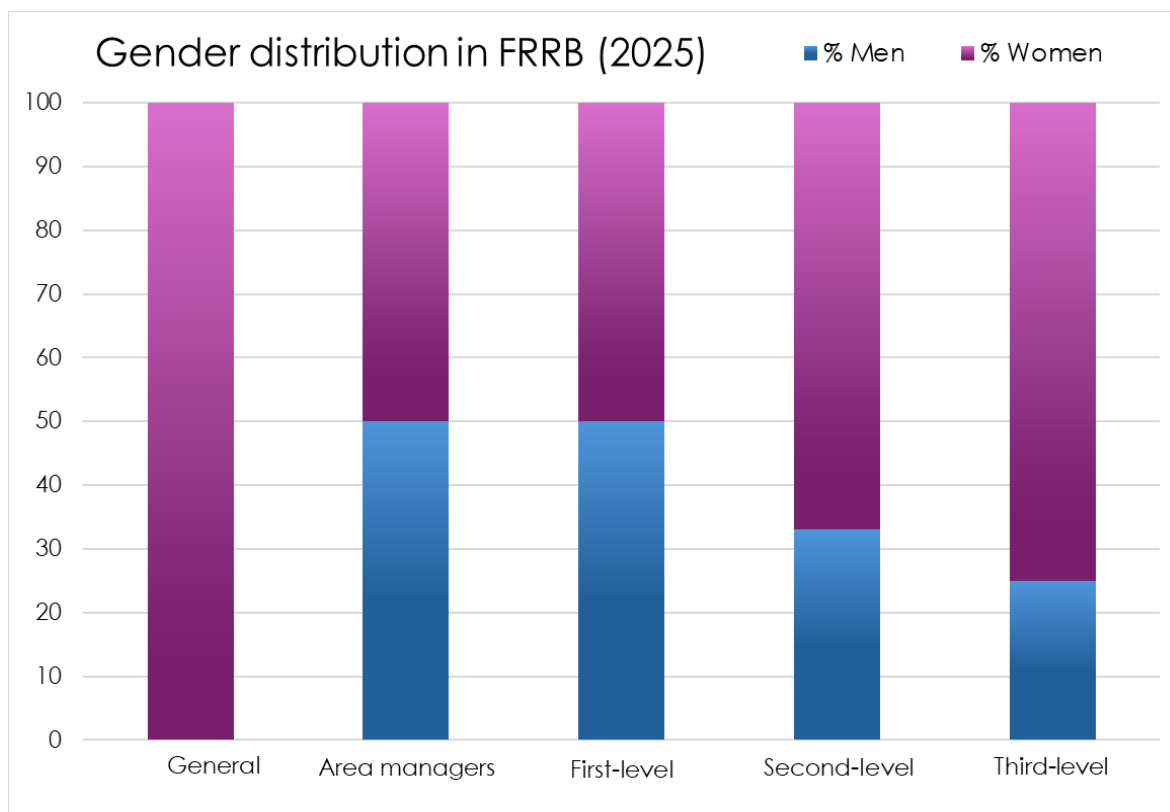


Figure 2. Gender distribution in FRRB (2025)

Data shown in Table 1 and Figure 2 suggest that at the top-level positions, such as General Management, Area management and first-level contract employee, there is gender balance. The gap becomes more evident in the lower positions, starting from the second-level contract employee. This scenario is actually in contrast with many studies conducted in Europe, in which usually the top-management positions were almost exclusively held by men. In accordance with this view, people recruitment in FRRB considers the principles of gender equality at every role and career levels.

2 Main Objectives

In line with the new requirements of Horizon Europe Framework, specific thematic areas have been identified:

- 1) Work-life balance and organisational culture;
- 2) Gender balance in leadership and decision-making;
- 3) Gender equality in recruitment and career progression;
- 4) Integrating the gender dimension into research content;
- 5) Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.
- 6) Raising awareness of gender issues and promoting training on gender equality for stakeholders

All areas are of equal importance for FRRB and can be viewed as priorities.

The Foundation aims at providing support to the organisations it funds to remove any existing barriers to gender equality, especially addressing the factors that limit equal participation and advancement of individuals.

All activities are presented according to five thematic areas, which are interconnected.

2.1 Work-life balance and organisational culture

2.1.1 Incorporating gender-related issues into internal procedures and regulations

Why? Internal procedures are operational documents that describe the *modus operandi* of FRRB, according to the different roles. Clear, well-written and up-to-date procedures support transparency and accountability.

Goals: To provide an institutional recognition of the non-discrimination principle.

How? A careful analysis of internal procedures is carried out once every two years.

Indicators: Nr. of relevant procedures modified to include gender equality issues.

Output: Ethics code and recruitment procedures revised.

2.1.2 Providing the institutional GEP to newly recruited staff as part of the welcome pack

Why? It is fundamental that all new recruited staff members are aware that gender equality and inclusiveness are the core of FRRB organisational structure.

Goals: Increasing general awareness of gender equality and anti-discrimination principles in the organisation.

How? Providing a copy of the GEP to the newly recruited staff, to be signed along with the ethics code at the moment of the start of the contract.

Indicators: Nr. of staff members who are provided with a copy of a GEP

Output: Inclusion of the GEP in the induction pack for newly recruited staff members.

2.1.3 Promoting work-life balance as an improved approach to work

Why? Reaching a balance between work and personal life can lead to significant improvements in productivity, a lower risk of burnout and a greater sense of well-being.

Goals: Adopting an internal procedure for remote work to allow all staff member to benefit from it.

How? Establishing a procedure regulating remote working.

Indicators: Nr. of staff members benefitting from remote working arrangements.

Output: The remote work arrangements have demonstrated to be extremely useful and well managed by all staff members. A new regulation is being elaborated.

2.2 Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

2.2.1 Developing a tool for the internal monitoring of gender related data and indicators

Why? Collecting data on gender distribution can help reflecting on decision making processes, impacts on implementation of different activities, career progression for each staff member.

Goals: Monitoring gender distribution in the different staff category and adopting corrective measures if needed.

How? Creating a monitoring tool constantly updated that reports data on the role, the level of career, the type of contract of FRRB staff. This document is managed by the administration officer and is available in a secure online folder.

Indicators: Constant update and monitoring of the tool.

Output: A management tool to monitor the gender distribution among all roles in FRRB.

2.2.2 Establishing unbiased and transparent progression and development paths

Why? Establishing clear, unbiased and transparent objectives, based on the different roles, for each staff member, supports the engagement of employees. In addition, it offers the opportunity of a motivating conversation with the employer, that creates clarity about employees' performance and objectives.

Goals: Establishment of transparent criteria for progression and promotion.

How? Approving an institutional procedure that establishes clear criteria to define the objectives, the evaluation, the reward.

Indicators: Correct and regular implementation of the procedure by FRRB management.

Output: Approval of a procedure establishing objectives for each role. The achievement of the assigned objectives can lead to a financial reward.

2.3 Integrating the gender dimension into research content

2.3.1 Providing support, as Research Funding Organisation (RFO), to women's careers in science

Why? Data show a limited number of women in top management positions, both in academia and in healthcare institutions. This is also due to major difficulties in advancing in the career. Although this is changing, more needs to be done to increase the participation of women in research, encouraging their participation in grant applications and in research projects.

Goals: Supporting women's careers in science, increasing the number of women PIs, encouraging a more gender equal research.

How? Introducing new criteria in FRRB Calls for Proposals and on its institutional website to sponsor applications from female researchers (i.e., compulsory minimum number of women PIs in collaborative projects, requesting the submission of a GEP together with the

applications, including in FRRB Calls for Proposals specific measures for maternity/paternity leave).

Indicators: Nr. of women PIs applying for funding; Nr. of women PIs awarded funding.

Output: Increased participation of women PIs in research projects, including women with children.

2.3.2 Collecting information on gender policies in place in the applicant and funded institutions

Why? In light of the growing importance of gender equality in research, also given the upcoming requirements of a GEP to apply for EU funding, it is important to monitor how gender policies are adopted and implemented in the organisations and institutions who apply for funding to FRRB.

Goals: Monitoring the development of gender policies in the stakeholder organisations applying for funding to FRRB. Awareness raising among the scientific community through presentations of the Calls and the results of the survey.

How? Collecting data on gender representation in research and healthcare institutions through a survey. Following the survey sent to applicants participating to a Regional Call for proposals in 2018, FRRB is working on a more detailed survey structure.

Indicators: Nr. of surveys completed and submitted together with the project proposals.

Output: In 2023, 2024 and 2025 100% applicants submitted their GEP to participate to the FRRB call). A new survey, more structured according to applicant's organisations, will be elaborated to submit to FRRB stakeholders. A report on gender related data (nr. of women PIs, nr. of women Full professors/in leading roles, etc.) will then be realised.

2.3.3 Including in the call texts a focus on sex and gender in the content of the research

Why? For a long time, gender equality in research has been intended as gender balance in research team. However, with the development of the studies in the field of gender medicine or gender-specific medicine, it is becoming necessary to consider the biological differences between females and males and also the gender differences, meant as the result of socio-cultural processes. The attention to sex and gender differences is strictly linked to the implementation of personalised medicine.

Goals: Raising awareness on sex and gender differences in research. Specifically, all researchers and professionals involved in research should be aware and consider, starting from the research design stage, how health conditions differ between men and women, and how they affect measures for prevention, clinical signs, therapeutic approach, psychological and social issues.

How? In the upcoming calls sponsored by FRRB, we are planning on introducing specific extra points to those projects considering gender differences in their research regardless of the topic of the project proposal.

Indicators: Nr. of project proposals obtaining the extra points in the evaluation process because of inclusion of gender dimension in their research

Output: Raised awareness on sex and gender differences in research to achieve new insights and to shed lights on gender role in well-studied diseases.

2.3.4 Promoting gender equality awareness among peer reviewers

Why? Sex and gender differences represent a crucial issue in designing a good research study, but are often overlooked in research design, study implementation and scientific reporting, as well as in general science communication. This leads to a limited generalizability of research results and findings, with limited successful application into clinical practice, especially for women, but also for men.

Goals: Peer reviewers are scientists whose responsibility is to evaluate the quality of a research project and, consequently, to allow a research project to be funded. It is fundamental that elements of sex and gender are adequately addressed and properly evaluated, and that reviewers are aware of the relevance of these aspects.

How? Providing a guidance document to reviewers, focusing on the correct use of words to describe sex and gender, and on how these elements are described in the proposal. Reviewers will be also asked to take into account in their evaluation the gender composition of the research team.

Indicators: Approval of a guidance document that reports information of how to evaluate gender equality in research and a well balance composition of a research team.

Output: Guidelines for reviewers will be developed, formally approved by the General Director and distributed.

2.4 Measures against gender-based violence, bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment

2.4.1 Adopting specific policies to contrast gender-based violence, bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment

Why? Gender violence, as well as situations of bullying and harassment, are complex issues that occur in different situations and environments, including research organisations and research funding organisations. Often, these issues are not properly acknowledged or addressed, leading the victims to feel more isolated, let alone discriminated.

Goals: Raising awareness on these issues within FRRB staff and among the stakeholder organisations (hospitals, research institutions, universities, policy makers), introducing policies to tackle these issues into internal documents and procedures.

How: Including a gender perspective in internal policies and in the actions, including training, towards the Community of Practice and the scientific community, to prevent situations of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, mobbing and bullying. The General Director, with the support of the Equality coordinator, is required to ensure that all staff and collaborating institutions are aware of FRRB Gender equality policies.

Indicator: Update of the internal regulation on the human resources management to include a definition of gender-based violence, bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment.

Output: Dissemination of the updated human resources management regulation. All episodes of gender-based violence, bullying and harassment shall be reported to Director (or otherwise to the Board of Directors, should the Director be directly involved) who is in charge of remedying a possible situation, including by establishing formal disciplinary actions.

3.6 Raising awareness of gender issues and promoting training on gender equality for stakeholders

Why? It is important to bring up and to clarify gender issues in the academia and research-related institutions to increase awareness of this problems not only among women but also among men involved in academic career.

Goals: Facilitating and encouraging more women to reach top-management positions by also contrasting discrimination.

How: Organizing training courses to promote gender issues awareness, as we did in 2024.

Indicator: Nr of participants to the training event.

Output: Dissemination of what it was discussed during the event

3 Future perspectives

In relationship with the key points presented above:

- **This GEP is a public document:** this second version of the GEP will be published on our website and shared with all FRRB employee.
- **Dedicated resources have been committed to the work on the GEP:** all FRRB employee are involved in the implementation of the GEP and in the training events on gender awareness.
- **Data collection and monitoring processes are in place:** for FRRB staff, data monitoring measures are in place and for FRRB stakeholders, a new survey, more structured according to applicant's organisations, will be elaborated.
- **Raising Awareness and promoting training:** as already done in the past, FRRB will organize training events and courses to promote general awareness of gender inequalities among FRRB staff and our stakeholder. Moreover, FRRB will always include admission criteria based on preserving gender balance and scientific criteria to promote the inclusion of gender dimension in research projects in calls sponsored by FRRB.

4 Conclusions

Funding excellent biomedical research is the main goal of FRRB.

Achieving the GEP objectives is key to generate a gender-aware institutional culture among the research community of Lombardy Region and within the Foundation itself.

The Foundation understands the importance of monitoring as a tool to assess if positive changes are taking place, as the result of the development of new policies and actions and as a self-reflective process.

Monitoring also works as a tool to support effective actions and commitment, which increases legitimacy and creates accountability.