

GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

of the Croatian Science Foundation

for the period

2026–2031

1. Vision and Mission

The Croatian Science Foundation (hereinafter: HRZZ) recognises the importance of creating a gender-equal, inclusive, and creative scientific community within the Republic of Croatia.

Its mission is to ensure a stimulating, safe, and fair working environment in which all employees, collaborators, and users - regardless of sex, gender, disability, or other personal characteristics - have equal opportunities for professional development, career advancement, and contribution to science.

The Croatian Science Foundation is committed to promoting scientific excellence and fostering development in the Republic of Croatia, recognising gender equality as a fundamental value and a strategic priority. Gender equality is essential not only for employee satisfaction but also for the quality, excellence, and impact of the scientific results and projects supported by the HRZZ.

The HRZZ's Gender Equality Plan (hereinafter: the Plan) has been developed to systematically integrate principles of equality into all aspects of the HRZZ's work – from employment and career progression to the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence. References to gender in the Plan are neutral and apply equally to men and women.

Commitment to gender equality is not a one-time initiative but a long-term endeavour. All activities are guided by and comply with national and European standards, including the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Introduction and Purpose

According to Article 5 of the Gender Equality Act of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 82/08, 69/17), gender equality means that women and men are equally represented in all areas of public and private life, enjoy equal status, have equal opportunities to exercise all rights, and benefit equally from the outcomes achieved.

The HRZZ Gender Equality Plan constitutes both a formal obligation and a strategic framework to promote and ensure equal opportunities for all employees, associates, and users of the HRZZ, regardless of gender or gender identity. It is founded on the principles of legality, transparency, inclusiveness, and zero tolerance for all forms of discrimination and harassment.

The HRZZ considers gender equality a key element of management quality, creativity, and innovation in the research community, as well as a prerequisite for the success of projects funded by national and European sources.

This Gender Equality Plan has been developed as part of the HRZZ's ongoing commitment to systematically applying the principles of equality across all areas of its work - from employment and career development to incorporating a gender perspective in research and leadership roles.

The Plan recognises that gender inequality is not only a matter of numerical balance but also involves raising awareness of unconscious biases, fostering a supportive organisational culture, and creating opportunities for the advancement of all individuals, regardless of gender.

In line with national and international frameworks, the HRZZ has defined key areas of action: improving the balance between work and private life; promoting a culture of gender equality; ensuring equality in employment and career development; combating gender-based violence and sexual harassment; and monitoring gender equality data in funding procedures.

By implementing the measures and activities outlined in this Plan, the HRZZ contributes to broader social transformation toward gender equality in science, research, and academia.

The Gender Equality Plan represents a long-term commitment, ensuring that the HRZZ's practices are inclusive and transformative, creating a future in which gender is no longer a barrier to success or opportunity.

3. Principles and Normative Framework

The Plan is founded on the principles of legality, transparency, inclusiveness, and zero tolerance for any form of discrimination or harassment. In all activities of the HRZZ, equal representation and gender equality are consistently ensured, alongside sensitivity to vulnerable groups. The XY Gender Equality Plan is adopted in accordance with:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 of the European Committee
- Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans
- Constitution of the Republic of Croatia
- Labour Act (Official Gazette 93/14, 127/17, 98/19, 151/22, 46/23, 64/23)
- Gender Equality Act of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 82/08, 69/17)
- Anti-Discrimination Act (Official Gazette 85/08, 112/12)
- Basic Collective Agreement for Employees in Public Services (Official Gazette 29/2024)
- Act on the Croatian Science Foundation (Official Gazette 57/2022)
- Statute of the Croatian Science Foundation

- Work Regulations of the Croatian Science Foundation
- Internal Rules of the Croatian Science Foundation

Discrimination based on sex, as defined in Article 6 of the Gender Equality Act, refers to any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on sex that has the purpose or effect of impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social, educational, cultural, civil, or other spheres, in the context of equality between women and men. Discrimination based on marital or family status, sexual orientation, or any less favourable treatment of women related to pregnancy or maternity is prohibited.

4. Gender Distribution of Employees and Members of the HRZZ's Bodies

The HRZZ is a foundation founded by the Republic of Croatia and serves as the central organisation for financing science across all scientific fields in the country. The HRZZ operates through two offices, located in Opatija and at its headquarters in Zagreb, and is governed by three bodies: the Board, the Complaints Committee, and the Director.

As of 29 October 2025, the HRZZ employed 42 employees, of whom 34 were women and 8 were men (Figure 1).

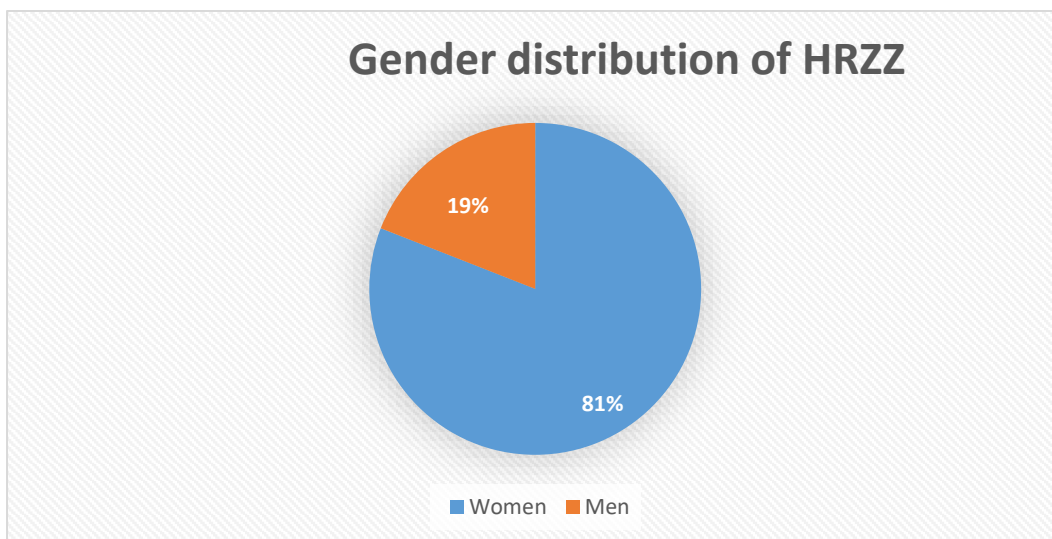


Figure 1. Gender distribution of employees in the HRZZ

The Board of the HRZZ consists of seven members, five men and two women (Figure 2)

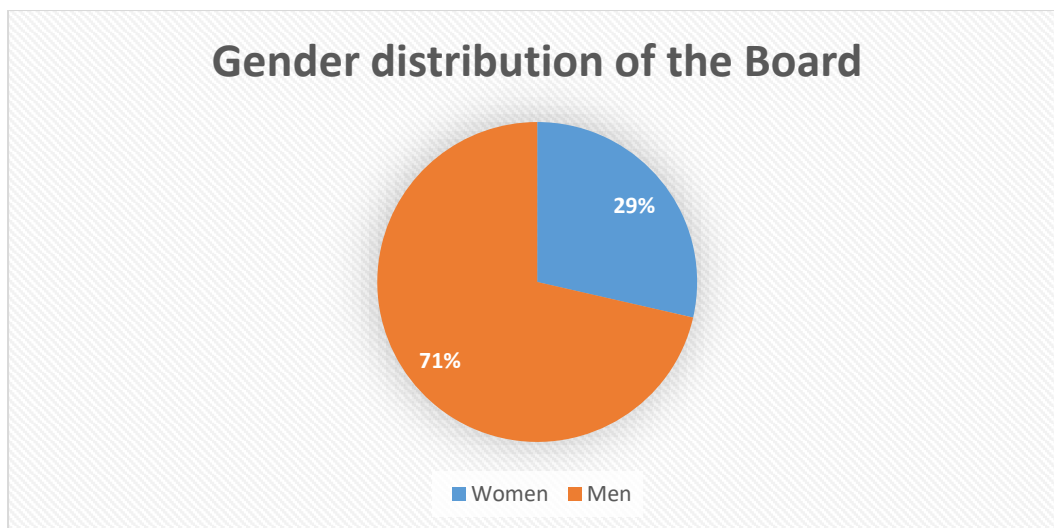


Figure 2. Gender distribution of the HRZZ's Board members

On 14 March 2024, the Croatian Parliament appointed the first Complaints Committee, consisting of two women and three men (Figure 3).

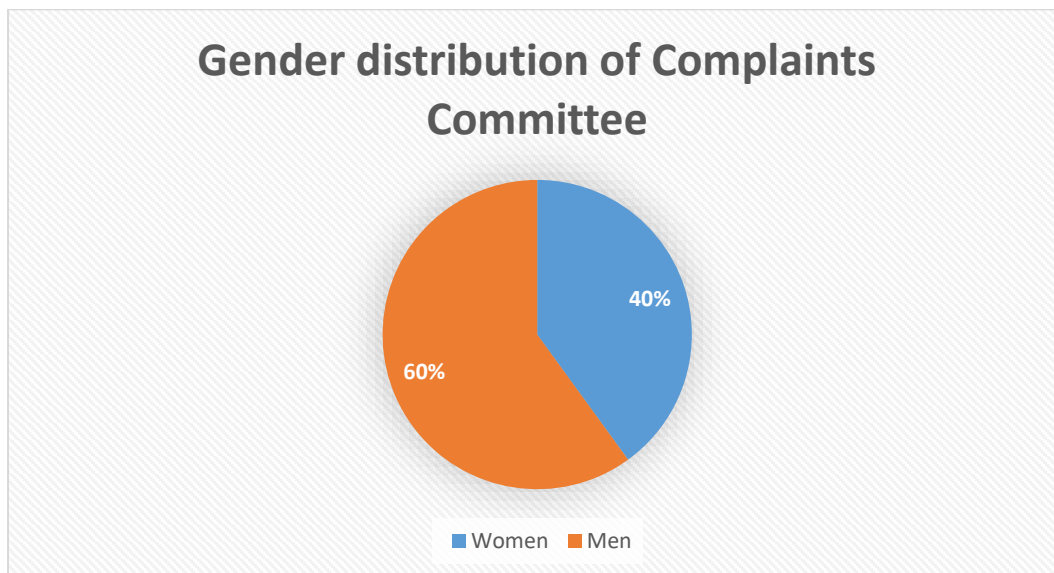


Figure 3. Gender distribution of the HRZZ's Complaints Committee members

The Director of the HRZZ is currently a man. Previously, there have been three directors or executive directors, two of whom were women and one a man.

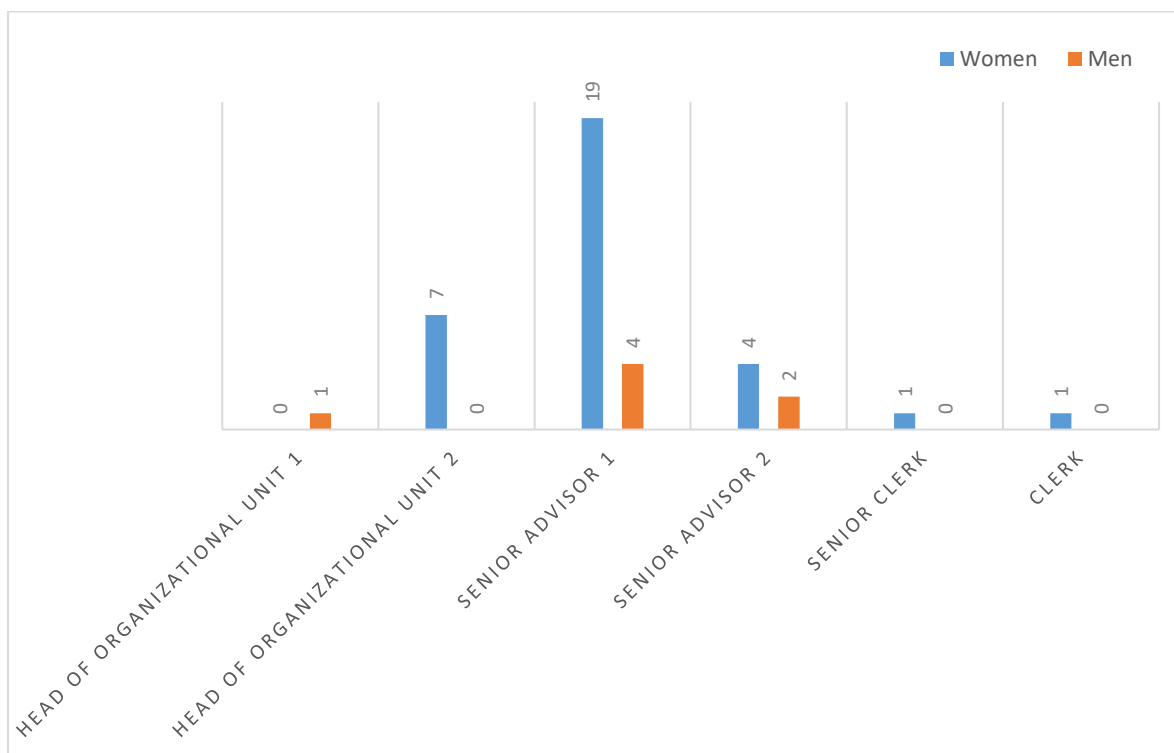


Figure 4. Gender distribution of HRZZ's employees by job category

5. Minimum Process Requirements

A *Gender Equality Committee* (hereinafter referred to as: the Committee) shall be established to implement the Gender Equality Plan. The Committee, appointed by the Director, shall consist of at least three members from different departments of the HRZZ. It will be responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of the Plan. The Committee shall meet at least once a year, submit a report to the Administrator, and carry out the following activities:

- Continuous analysis and evaluation of policies and practices
- Monitoring of job advertisements, employment, and promotions to prevent discrimination
- Maintaining a register of incident reports and feedback on the implementation of measures
- Monitoring the participation of both genders in research projects and teams, as well as the success of applications to public calls
- Identifying areas for improvement and proposing measures based on regular situation analyses

The HRZZ will continuously collect gender-disaggregated data on employees, project applicants and participants, and funding beneficiaries. These data will serve as the basis for an annual Gender Equality Report.

All employees and board members will undergo training on gender equality, unconscious bias, and the prevention of harassment.

6. Key Areas and Strategies

The objectives are as follows:

- Promote a culture of gender equality within the HRZZ.
- Foster a diverse and inclusive work environment, where sex or gender does not hinder career development.
- Ensure equal opportunities for women and men, particularly in decision-making roles and career advancement.
- Systematically encourage the integration of a gender perspective in research activities funded by the HRZZ.

The objectives are further refined using a SMART approach¹ and include:

a) Work Environment and Work-Life Balance

- Adoption of the Gender Equality Plan and publication on the HRZZ's website
- Regular annual reporting on gender representation
- Reporting workplace harassment
- Promotion of flexible work arrangements (remote work, flexible hours)
- Active promotion of parental and guardian leave for all employees
- Internal website with updated employee rights information
- Measurement of employee satisfaction using anonymous surveys (target at least 70% positive ratings)

Objective: Increase the use of flexible work arrangements and parental leave, achieve at least 80% employee satisfaction according to the annual survey, and provide support to victims of harassment.

b) Promoting a Culture of Gender Equality

- Organising seminars and workshops for employees and members of HRZZ bodies at least annually, to raise awareness of gender equality, harassment victim rights, and related topics
- Encouraging the use of gender-sensitive language

¹ SMART goals are an acronym for five characteristics: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound).

- Creating and publishing educational materials to promote a gender equality culture

Objective: Raise awareness of gender issues.

c) Gender Equality in Employment and Promotion

- Ensuring equal pay for work of equal value
- Job advertisements in the HRZZ and professional bodies stating that all persons, regardless of gender, are equally invited to apply
- Introduction of an employment monitoring and evaluation system, detecting possible gender bias
- Promotion of transparent performance evaluation criteria
- Organisation of leadership and career development programs for all interested parties, regardless of gender
- Continuous financing of employee training and professional development

Objective: Achieve a balance between women and men in employment and promotion.

d) Monitoring Data on Gender Equality in Funding Procedures

- Analysis of the proportion of women and men among applicants
- Analysis of the proportion of women and men among applicants who received funding
- Analysis of the financial value of projects by gender
- Analysis of the proportion of men and women among reviewers, panellists and panel leaders, and members of the evaluation committee

Objective: Impartial implementation of the funding procedure.

7. Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms

The Gender Equality Committee is responsible for:

- Monitoring the implementation of all measures, analysing the participation of both genders, the success of training, advancement, employee satisfaction and reported incidents
- Preparing the Annual Report, which is published, and measuring progress through clearly defined indicators.
- Regularly proposing revisions and improvements to the Plan based on feedback and international examples of good practice.

The monitoring indicators include:

- Representation of women and men as employees, members of management bodies and evaluation panels

- Number of participants in gender equality training
- Cases and solutions to harassment reports
- Frequency of use of measures to reconcile work and private life

The reports and the Plan are published on the HRZZ's website.

8. Planned Measures

Education and workshops:

Regularly conducting seminars and workshops for all employees, associates, and management on topics such as career development for women in science, work-life balance, unconscious bias, stereotypes, and sexism, to raise awareness of gender issues and promote a culture of gender equality.

Awareness and access to information:

Information on parental leave rights, funding and training opportunities, occupational safety, and other relevant employee rights is available in shared folders. All protocols and documents related to gender equality are systematically updated.

9. Procedure for Protecting Employee Dignity, Reporting, and Resolving Harassment

In accordance with the Labour Regulations, Articles 42-46, the Croatian Science Foundation protects employee dignity by ensuring a working environment free from discrimination, psychological, physical, or sexual harassment, and by taking preventive measures.

An employee who believes that they have been subjected to harassment in any form by other HRZZ's employees, business associates, or any other individuals encountered during work-related activities has the right to submit a written complaint to an authorised person appointed by the HRZZ's Director. The authorised person is required to investigate the circumstances, interview the complainant, the person to whom the complaint pertains, and all other relevant parties, and establish the facts and evidence within eight days of receiving the complaint.

Employees must participate in the procedure with mandatory record-keeping, and data collected during the dignity protection procedure will be treated as confidential.

Measures that can be taken to prevent further harassment include:

- Verbal warning,
- Written warning regarding the possibility of employment contract termination in the event of repeated harassment,
- Termination of the employment contract

Harassment is any violation of an employee's personal dignity or the obligations under the employment contract that creates an unpleasant, hostile, humiliating, or offensive environment.

10. Final Provisions

This Plan shall enter into force on the eighth day after its publication on the HRZZ's website and shall be published in Croatian and English. The Croatian version shall be considered the official document. The Plan will be revised every four years or sooner if necessary. Its implementation and further development will be overseen by the Gender Equality Committee in cooperation with the Director and all employees.

The Gender Equality Plan of the Croatian Science Foundation for the period 2026–2031 was adopted by the Decision of the Board of the Croatian Science Foundation (Class: 120-02/26-02/02; Reg. No.: 410-03-01-26-2) at its 120th session held on 27 January 2026. This Plan replaces the document “Ensuring Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities”, which was adopted by the Decision of the Board (Class: 120-02/23-02/08; Reg. No.: 400-03-01/01-23-3) at its 54th session held on 20 April 2023.

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