



Fondazione LINKS

Gender Equality Action Plan

2022 - 2024

Version	Date	Comments	Approved by
V_0	31/01/2022	First	S.Buscaglia – Managing Director



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1 Introduction

Fondazione LINKS takes into consideration the principles of gender equality and diversity issue in its operations and research activities, and promotes the provision of equal opportunities in research for men and women. In line with the current national and EU guidelines included in the plans drawn up at national (Action for Gender Equality 2021-2025) and at European level (Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025, Gender equality in the European Research Area), LINKS currently organises and revises its practices under a Gender Equality Plan (GEP), prepared for the period 2021-2024.

The objectives of LINKS' GEP are the following:

1. Analysis of the current situation and check of procedures and practices applied in LINKS, in order to identify possible weaknesses or gaps.
2. Identification and implementation of innovative practices to address possible identified issues.
3. Setting of objectives and continuous review of the applied practices through a participatory approach and the monitoring of validated indicators.

The GEP takes into consideration the LINKS Strategic Plan for the period 2022 - 2024 as well as with the Sustainability Report that the Institute is preparing for 2022 and all other instruments for employees well-being and equality.

A **dedicated working team** has been set up in the last months of 2021, composed by the Managing Director, the HR manager, the CTO, and 4 senior researchers (women) from the Competitiveness Department. The team and responsibilities during the implementation phase may change, in order to ensure an inclusive yet efficient approach. The presence of representatives from the top management will anyway be assured to facilitate and speed up the decisions, and implementations related to the plan.

2 LINKS profile and values

Fondazione LINKS is a non-profit research organisation founded by Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation – the largest Italian bank foundation – and Politecnico di Torino – the oldest engineering university in Italy. LINKS has been envisaged as an “instrument”, that is to say an institution that operates in applied research, innovation and technology transfer and whose mission is to be a bridge between basic research and market.

LINKS has been working for almost 20 years at national and international level, having merged the competences and backgrounds of two previous research Institutes, Istituto Superiore Mario Boella (IMSB) and Istituto sui Sistemi Territoriali per l'Innovazione (SiTI). Thanks to the cooperation of more than 160 researchers the Foundation operates in the fields of digital technology and regional development. Research activities cover several ICT domains, among which Artificial Intelligence, connected systems and IoT, cybersecurity, advanced computing systems, satellite navigation, Earth Observation, photonics, and more. Specific focus is given to the application of these scientific domains in sectors such as Industry 4.0, Intelligent Mobility, Agritech, Space Economy, Smart infrastructures, Cultural Heritage.



LINKS aims to promote, lead and bolster the innovation processes, through international research projects with a strong innovation potential and impact on productive and public sectors. Thus, LINKS acts as facilitator of the innovative ecosystem, with specific focus on Piedmont area.

Fondazione LINKS ramps the competitiveness up working with big multinational corporations and highly innovative small and medium enterprises, but aims to “ramp the common good up” too by partnering with public institutions, intermediate bodies, non-profit and cultural institutions.

The Foundation’s true wealth is in the people that work here: young, highly specialized, with a deep know-how and passion for their job, highly motivated in achieving sound results by balancing teamwork and high level of autonomy.

LINKS is closely connected to Politecnico di Torino: besides being hosted on campus by the University, most of its researchers hold a degree in engineering or architecture, and many of them graduated at Politecnico di Torino. As shown in **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**, 32% of LINKS researchers are women, a proportion similar to the one found at Politecnico di Torino where women represent the 30% of the teaching staff.

■ 160 Researchers.

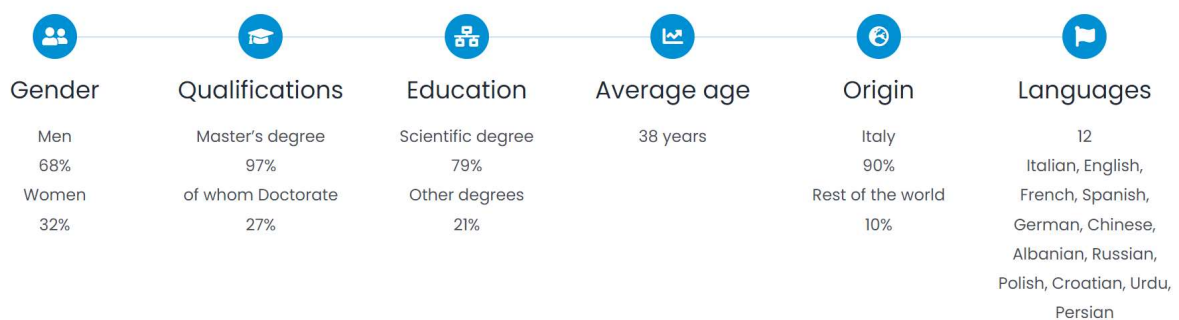


Figure 1. LINKS Researchers as of end of 2021

It is worth mentioning **the company values** that were set by LINKS Foundation with a bottom up and participative effort end of 2020. These are:

- **Sharing:** together we're stronger
- **Trust:** I'm OK and you're OK
- **Care about people:** people who work here are our real asset
- **Sense of belonging:** from ME to US
- **Continuous improvement:** there is always a better way
- **Culture of change:** we're passionate about changing the future
- **Proactivity:** we're entrepreneurs and we stand by it
- **Sustainability:** we work for the future of the Society and of the Foundation.



3 Description of the Plan

The Gender Equality Plan (GEP) for LINKS Foundation, together with its implementation which started in the Fall of 2021, is part of an “continuous process”, constantly revised and updated. As mentioned above, it is rooted both from practices that have been part of LINKS organization and principles for several years, and from guidelines from the European Commission and best practices implemented by other research organizations.

Some of the actions and initiatives included in the plan were inspired by EU guidelines and projects like PLOTINA¹, an H2020 project aimed at supporting RPOs (Research Performing Organizations) willing to undertake the path towards a better gender equality.

The general life cycle of a GEP (which is a continuously ongoing set of procedures and documents) is represented in **Figure 2**

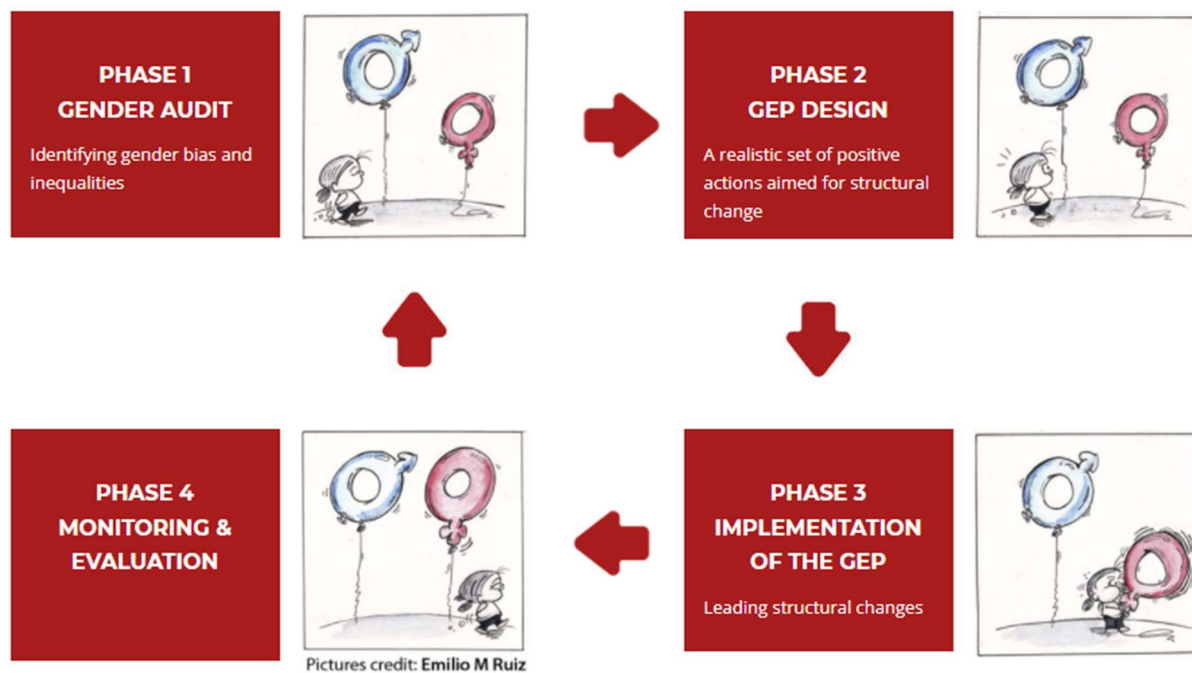


Figure 2. The continuous life cycle of the Gender Equality Plan

¹ www.plotina.eu



The plan draws inspiration and its main structure both from well-known principles and from the results of a **Gender Audit** procedure whose main purpose is highlighting the current situation within LINKS, pointing out the strengths and the possible critical conditions, an essential base to build the following phase, the **GEP detailed design**.

The **GEP design** is then followed by the **actual implementation**, for which a detailed timeline must be specified, and finally a **monitoring and evaluation** phase aimed at checking the obtained outcomes against the planned expectations.

Among the areas of intervention commonly included in the GEP of an RPO, we selected the following four, also shown in **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.:**

- Work and Personal Life integration
- Gender Equality in Research
- Recruitment and Career progression
- Gender Equality in Governing Bodies and Decision Makers



Figure 3. Areas of intervention for LINKS' GEP

These areas will be the targets included in the first version of the GEP. It is likely that the audit procedures that will be activated at the beginning of 2022 - as part of the GEP implementation process – will highlight additional areas which will be included in the future versions of this plan.

At the time of this version, a structured analysis phase, in which sex-disaggregated data is collected, has not yet been performed. The aim of such analysis is to critically assess the state of play of LINKS Foundation in terms of procedures and practices with a view to detect gender inequalities and gender bias. Data collected are indispensable to define SMART objectives and measure the impact of initiatives.

Such analysis will consider LINKS Foundation peculiarities and will be based on the guidelines provided by EU official documentation, such as the [GEAR Guide for establishing a Gender Equality Plan](#).

Information provided in the following part of this document is based on the existing measures promoting gender equality in LINKS.



The pandemic condition experienced in the past two years and the recent reorganization of the Foundation in 7 organizational units² were the first opportunities for LINKS to collect through online questionnaires requests from its researchers and employees on several topics, some of which were closely related to gender equality measures. Even before having formalized this GEP, LINKS responded to some of these requests by introducing changes in its working environment and organization, particularly in the area of “work and personal life” integration and balancing (smart working project started in Summer 2019 – before the COVID-19 emergency - and its wide adoption during the lockdown periods).

Furthermore, a pilot initiative concerning the implementation of some welfare and wellbeing actions for LINKS’ employees has been realized during 2021.

The project WE WIN TOGETHER, co-funded by the Piedmont Government through the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund, has been implemented by LINKS. The project promoted and implemented training actions and information activities aiming at sensitizing workers and management to activate wellbeing measures and to adopt healthy and sustainable lifestyles.

Some of the actions realized will be taken over and kept as good practices in the GEP implementation.

The following sections include a focus on each of the selected areas, listing the objectives that LINKS identified with highest priority, actions to be implemented as well as targets and indicators.

² 4 research oriented departments (Domains) and 3 strategic departments (Objectives)



4 Key Areas and Objectives selected for LINKS GEP

4.1 Key Area 1: Work and Personal Life Integration

4.1.1 List of Objectives

In line with its nature of Research Centre - focused on innovation and strongly connected with the university environment – LINKS carries out research, prototyping and technology transfer activities.

Research is, by nature, a type of job allowing some part of flexibility and can be partly carried out independently and/or remotely. However, research, but also and mainly prototyping and technology transfer require also that some activities are carried out in presence.

The list of objectives identified by LINKS for this Key Area is presented in **Table 1**.

Obj ID	Objective name
1.1	Develop a corresponsible working culture
1.2	Ensure availability of structured supports for work and personal life integration
1.3	Enable individuals on parental leave to have an easier return to work

Table 1. LINKS GEP Objectives for Key Area 1

4.1.2 Actions planned to reach the objectives

LINKS has implemented a flexible organization of work:

1 - leaving the different research and operations teams the freedom to organize their work as needed to reach the assigned goals.

Allowing a flexible working time during the working day as well as accessing different types of part time contracts.

Smart working was first tested in mid-2019 offering some employees the opportunity to work out of LINKS' facilities for about 20% of the total working time per months. Employees were provided with a laptop and a modem.

The pandemic started in 2020 forced LINKS (and most organizations) to speed up the process, introducing smart working for a significant portion of the time (up to 100% during lockdown). In the Spring of 2020, a survey was proposed to all LINKS employees, to check whether the abrupt increment in smart working caused issues in the organization of work and personal life. Another survey was proposed in February 2021, in the framework of the LINKS project WE WIN TOGETHER. Those surveys represented the base for the design of new rules and a new organization of work (the so-called "post pandemic new normal"), pushing paperless operations even further and introducing digital signature functionalities for most of the approval requirements of internal processes. Worth mentioning, the Italian law allows "shore leaves" (Permessi) on top of the normal holidays. Shore leaves are specifically designed to manage work and private life balance, for example in case of any urgency in family.



The Gender Audit Team will run periodic surveys (at least once per year) in order to give all employees, the possibility of making any inconvenience and other issues emerge, and will also assess the effective use of smart working and shore leaves.

Parental leave is already in place where required by the Italian job regulation, and it is equally available for men and women.

The majority of activities carried out in LINKS (with the only exception of administration and management) are organized in projects, divided in work packages and tasks. This makes it easy to allocate the proper amount of work to the researchers considering parental leave and other days off. The administration team got organized throughout the years to make sure parental leave does not have an impact on individuals when they get back to work. Specific questions will be introduced in the periodic auditing procedures in order to detect issues as soon as possible. As for all other GE related issues, the dedicated messaging system can be used by all employees and employees to notify (anonymously if needed) critical aspects of the personal / work life balancing.

4.1.3 Team / Department in charge of the actions

The HR team performs checks and activities aimed at ensuring that employees in LINKS can benefit from a good work-life balance consistently with the activity and sustainability of the Foundation. Periodic surveys will be organized and run by the Gender Audit Team following guidelines coming from HR and General Management.

The organization of the work of the project teams is responsibility of the Domains and Objective leaders: during the Management Committee meetings the situation and progress of the work / personal life balance will be evaluated on a regular basis every 3 months, or on demand should any urgent matter arise.

4.2 Key area 2: Gender equality in Research

4.2.1 List of Objectives

The list of objectives identified by LINKS for this key area is included **Table 2**

Obj ID	Objective name
2.1	Promote diversity on research management
2.2	Advance towards a gender inclusive / aware research excellence
2.3	Raise awareness and train researchers on integrating the gender dimension in research content

Table 2. LINKS GEP Objectives for Key Area 2

4.2.2 Actions planned to reach the objectives

Research is the main focus of LINKS Foundation, and research projects cover the majority of the activities carried out at LINKS offices and labs.



Gender equality has not been the focus of specific investigations in past years and an accurate analysis from this point of view has not been carried out recently. It is, therefore, a key goal introduced in the GEP: to plan and implement specific monitoring of the participation of individuals to research management with focus on gender balance, by including specific questions in the periodic Gender Audit. The goal of having gender equality in research management is closely related to the goal of gender equality in recruitment and career progression (Key Area 3), which will be evaluated and monitored as well.

4.2.3 Team / Department in charge of the actions

LINKS Governance (Members of the Board) and General Manager ask the Management team to ensure that management of research activities and projects is equally distributed between genders yet considering the gender distribution in the overall LINKS population and the competencies and experience level available by gender. The checks and improvement activities can be carried out by the HR team. The Gender Audit Team will organize surveys and will proactively search for guidelines coming from HR and General Management.

The organization of the work of the project teams is responsibility of the Domains and Objective leaders: during the weekly Management Committee meetings the current situation and progress of project management and research progression will be evaluated with a specific focus on gender equality on a regular basis every 3 months, or on demand should any urgent matter arise.

4.3 Key Area 3: Recruitment and Career Progression

4.3.1 List of Objectives

The list of objectives identified by LINKS for this key area is included in **Table 3**

Obj ID	Objective name
3.1	Ensure that every person involved in the recruitment process is aware of gender issues, discrimination and stereotypes
3.2	Promote gender inclusive and bias free recruitment, career progression, retention and evaluation policy in the institution
3.3	Understand more deeply the multiple gender biases that happen in the recruitment, career progression and retention processes
3.4	Ensure all individuals in the institution are empowered regardless of their gender
3.5	Ensure that the internal evaluation system is not gender-biased
3.6	Ensure a wide pool of diverse applicants is reached in all vacant positions

Table 3. LINKS GEP Objectives for Key Area 3

4.3.2 Actions planned to reach the objectives

Recruitment and people / career management is a key topic for a research center oriented to hi-tech disciplines. The recruitment process is divided between LINKS and PRISMA, the company in charge of recruitment for the whole Compagnia di San Paolo group.



This plan introduces specific actions and checks to make sure that all the colleagues involved in recruitment are aware of gender issues. Reaching this goal will be easier considering that all the organizations in the group started specific gender equality related actions and plans in the past months.

Some of the topics on which LINKS carries out its studies and research are more popular among men compared to women, and this is something that cannot be easily changed. A certain bias in the number of male and female employees in favor of males needs therefore to be considered normal for LINKS. A specific request to put special attention to gender equality in evaluating candidates will be issued to all the HR and recruiting teams of Links and PRISMA, so that it will become part of the LINKS regular hiring process.

As far as career progression goes, LINKS has appointed throughout the years some women in management positions (research management, team leader, members of the board, etc.). An accurate picture of the current situation has not been recently taken though, and it is going to be introduced by the GEP: this plan introduces specific monitoring of the recruitment and career evolution of individuals with focus on gender balance, also by including specific questions in the periodic Gender Audit. The messaging system introduced by this GEP can be used by all employees and employees to notify (anonymously if needed) critical aspects of career progression with respect to gender equality.

4.3.3 Team / Department in charge of the actions

LINKS Governance (Members of the Board) and General Manager want to foster Diversity at all levels (gender, nationality, language...).

The Gender Audit Team will periodically conduct audits of the recruitment process including potential suppliers involved in the process and will include the guidelines coming from HR and General Management.

The HR team ensures that employment, hiring and career progression are managed fairly for all types of Diversity (taking into account the gender distribution in the overall LINKS population) and carries out periodic checks and self-assessments.

The selection and recruitment processes are initiated and partly managed by the Domains and Objective leaders: during the weekly Management Committee meetings the current state and the evolution of gender balance in the Links population will be evaluated on a regular basis every 3 months, or on demand should any urgent matter arise.

4.4 Key Area 4: Gender Equality in Governance Bodies and Decision Makers

4.4.1 List of Objectives

The list of objectives identified by LINKS for this key area is included in **Table 4**

Obj ID	Objective name
4.1	Promote decision-makers institutional engagement on gender equality
4.2	Create structures and offer tools to support and promote gender equality in the institution with the engagement of key figures



4.3	Promote a more horizontal, gender-aware and egalitarian leadership in the institution
4.4	Prevent and combat sexual and gender-based harassment in the institution
4.5	Ensure all stakeholders are aware and have easy access to the information about the gender equality policy and GEP implementation

Table 4. LINKS GEP Objectives for Key Area 4

4.4.2 Actions planned to reach the objectives

The GEP detailed design phase will involve most of the decision-makers of LINKS, including the General Manager, the HR Manager and the research and operational groups leaders, in order to keep them informed and to collect their requirements and specific issues.

Specific tools will be made available to all Links employees to notify the management about issues related to gender equality: these will include a regular e-mailbox for regular requests and communication, and an anonymous channel dedicated to all those who are willing to report specific facts or situations that require attention by the management.

The GEP itself, all the periodic outcomes of the Gender Audit and all subsequent planned actions (GEP review) will be made available through the Foundation website (GEP and official documents) and Intranet (internal-use documents and reports). All Links employees will have access to these documents, in order to propagate the knowledge about all the actions taken or planned in the process towards gender equality.

4.4.3 Team / Department in charge of the actions

The activities aimed at having Governance Bodies and Decision Makers informed and involved in the most relevant procedures, decisions and activities related to Gender Equality are coordinated and carried out by the HR team and the General Manager. Specific surveys and information kits dedicated to Governing Bodies and Decision Makers will be organized by the Gender Audit Team following guidelines coming from HR and General Management.

The General Manager and the HR Director will ensure that the Administration Board and all the Governing Bodies (included the relevant people at the founding partners Compagnia di San Paolo and Politecnico di Torino) are updated with the progress of the GEP implementation, as well as with the current state and evolution of all Links activities from the gender equality point of view.

5 Plan for the LINKS Gender Audit and expected outcomes

The path towards a better gender equality starts from a deep understanding of the current situation, built using information coming from all involved parties: researchers, administrative professionals, management, and all other employees. Both strong points already in place and gaps to be filled need to be precisely identified. As depicted in **Figure 2**, the GEP is not a static plan, but it requires to be constantly monitored and – if needed – reviewed and updated. This implies that the Gender Audit must become a periodic activity that in LINKS is executed once a year. Apart from the formal, periodic audit activity, LINKS will allow for any employee to raise any kind of issues related to gender equality throughout the whole year, by emailing the



HR Team or directly contacting the HR Manager. In case of critical issues, all employees are urged to directly contact the Managing Director.

5.1 The Gender Audit Team and the Gender Audit Report

A specific team will be appointed for the Audit activity. The team, named GAT (Gender Audit Team), will ideally include representatives from several different Domains and Objectives teams of LINKS, and will carry out the audit as a participatory activity including the following tasks like:

- One to one or group interviews (spread over the whole year)
- Focus Groups
- Preparation and conduction of a survey (once a year)

The team might change every year, to increase the involvement level of LINKS employees over time.

The outcome of the Gender Audit is the Gender Audit Report, which is divided in sections corresponding to the 4 Key Areas selected by LINKS. For each area the current status is included, pointing out strength points, critical situations and gaps to be filled.

An example of the content of the Gender Audit Report is presented as an Appendix in Section 6.



6 Appendix : Tentative Gender Audit Report Content

This section presents a tentative content of the Gender Audit Report, subject to change based on the outcomes of the Gender Audit preparation phase.

6.1.1 Key Area 1. Working and Personal Life Integration

Work-Life Balancing policies in LINKS

Describe the situation by comparing the eligibility and the actual use of the measures and policies that are in place. Look again at differences regarding gender and regarding grades.

- *Work-life balance measures: how many of the men eligible used them, how many of the women (%). Is there a tendency? Do more women/ men use this kind of measures? Regarding roles, do more people employed with a specific role use them? Are numbers balanced among roles and gender? Any critical issues?*
- *Work-life balance services: how many of the men eligible used them, how many of the women (%). Is there a tendency? Do more women/ men use this kind of services? Regarding roles, do more people employed with a specific role use them? Are numbers balanced among roles and gender? Any critical issues?*
- *Working hours and flexibility. How many of the men eligible used it, how many of the women (%). Is there a tendency? Do more women/ men use this kind of measures? Regarding roles, do more people employed with a specific role use it? Are numbers balanced among roles and gender? Any critical issues?*

If there are any items that specifically need to be mentioned, and the picture is not as uniform, then specifically mention the issues that seem relevant.

Description of the specific measures that exist or do not exist to keep the link with people on parental leave and to promote joint responsibility in care. This will be either a strong point or a weak point that needs to be revised.

6.1.2 Key Area 2. Gender Equality in Research

Referring to the research staff in LINKS:

- *Name the teams with **higher % of women** employees and describe the situation within them:*
 - *Within these, describe the percentages of men and women by levels and types of contracts.*
 - *Are there any relevant differences? Are there women/men gathered at a certain level?*
 - *Do men or women tend to have a specific kind of contract?*
- *Name the teams with a **higher % of men** employees:*
 - *Within these, describe the percentages of men and women by levels and types of contracts.*
 - *Are there any relevant differences? Are there women/men gathered at a certain level?*



- Do men or women tend to have a specific kind of contract?
- Name the teams with a **balanced (40/60 to 50/50) number of men and women** and describe the situation within them:
 - Within these, describe the percentages of men and women by levels and types of contracts.
 - Are there any relevant differences? Are there women/men gathered at a certain level?
 - Do men or women tend to have a specific kind of contract?
- If there are any clear tendencies state them as conclusions.

6.1.3 Key Area 3. Recruitment, Career Progression and Retention

Selection and Recruitment

Firstly describe the selection and recruitment processes in a general way, analyzing the process of selecting the new people hired in LINKS in the last year and the inclusiveness of them. The composition of the selection committees will also be taken into account for this analysis.

In this section pay attention at things such as:

Outcome of the process

- Looking at the percentages of Women CVs and Men CVs received, is there a balance? Do more women/men apply in general? Does this change for specific teams (Research Domains, Objectives, Administration, etc)? Do the numbers show any tendencies in this respect/anything we should pay attention to?
- Are the percentages of women and men CVs received and the percentages of finalist and hired people linked? Is there any “positive action” taken to make sure that the gender with lowest representation is also present (if such a case)? If people at any cases are hired by direct appointment also specify.
- If we have relevant information about support programs/activities happening in LINKS please specify – those would be linked to the “positive actions” mentioned at the previous point.

Design of the processes themselves

- Where there any processes where they specifically looked for women candidatures? Is there any really masculinized area in LINKS where such a policy could be needed?
- The type of advertisement used. If only the two first items have been answered yes, then we can conclude that inclusive language has been used during the process. If not, we would there identify an issue where attention should be paid in future. A critical issue to pay attention to. In the cases where a mix of the two happened, it will be interesting to compare the outcomes of both kinds of advertisements: did more men/women reply in any of the cases? In which? Is there a standard set of questions to be used in the interviews?
- The way of approach. Look if there are any relevant tendencies/differences among men and women in this sense and describe the way it has happened in LINKS.
- Selection committee. Look at the composition of the Selection Committee, are there balanced numbers in terms of positions in the hierarchy of LINKS and men and women?

Career progression

A description will be made with special attention paid to things such as:



- Percentages of M and W by level at the moment they were hired. Where there differences in terms of balance? Level?
- Can we see any differences in the careers of those men/women?
- How many people left from those who started? This might be caused by different reasons: if evidence is found, make a link with that information. If not, describe the situation in terms of percentage of men who left and percentage of women. Compare them and if there are relevant differences then it might be a critical issue, at least an issue to look at deeper in the future.
- Average age of women in high level and average age of men in high level positions. Is there a difference?
- Average age of women in medium level and average age of men in medium level positions. Is there a difference?
- Average age of women in low level and average age of men in low level positions. Is there a difference?
- When applicable also look at the technical and administrative staff data.
- General conclusions regarding age and gender by level: did certain tendencies appear? (for example if women are only relevantly present in some categories, in terms of numbers)

Description of career promotions within the institution:

- Are there differences in % of men and women who asked for promotion in reference to the ones who met the criteria?
- In the number of men and women who progressed in the promotion process?
- In the amount of years who stayed in their previous categories? Do men/women stay longer in a category or not?
- Description of selection committee and the gender of the Chair of the committee.

Finally, if there is relevant information regarding support and training programs, describe it here.

Gender pay-gap

Describe the average salary of women employed in a specific role and compare it to the one of men. If there are differences state the ones caused by amount of years in the institution or other causes.

6.1.4 Key Area 4. Gender Equality in Governance Bodies and Decision Makers

Composition of Governing and Decision Making Bodies

- List the governing bodies with their tasks, roles or responsibilities and decision-making bodies where the composition of men is of over 60% and less than 40% women.*
- List the governing bodies with their responsibilities and decision-making bodies with a balanced composition (40/60).*
- List the governing bodies with their responsibilities and decision-making bodies with over 60% women and less 40% of men, if any.*

Analyze if there are differences in the tasks/responsibilities that those Governing bodies carry out, and if there is a link to traditional gender roles.

Explain the reasons for (a), (b) or (c) happening. If there is any policy in place with situation (b) as an effect, then specify.



Gender Equality Structures in LINKS

- a. Name the people or groups working on gender equality in LINKS. Specify the composition in terms of amount of women/men and in terms of researchers / teams (Research Domains, Objectives, Other) involved. Also, specify the frequency of meetings of the group, their dynamic and the best practices emerged.
- b. Do members of the governing bodies take part in these structures? Are the workers union representatives also included in the structures?

Torino,	<i>Managing Director</i>
Torino,	<i>HR Manager</i>
Torino,	<i>Gender Audit Team representative</i>