

# GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

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Polymer Competence Center Leoben GmbH



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# Targets

The Gender Equality Plan (GEP) reflects a set of commitments and actions to promote gender equality in the organization through a process of structural change. The GEP aims to promote gender equality through the sustainable transformation of organizational processes, cultures and structures that create and sustain gender imbalances and inequalities. A GEP should address not only the visible structure and practices of an organization (e.g. policies and procedures), but also the way in which values are being held (what people say and what they believe) and underlying assumptions (unconscious beliefs, thoughts and feelings) can be developed, including in terms of knowledge creation and its application.<sup>1</sup>

In order to be entitled to funding, legal entities which are research organizations from the EU Member States must have an Equality Plan which complies with the minimum procedural requirements set out hereafter.

The gender equality plan must be published by means of a formal document available on the website of the organization and signed by the management.

The provision of resources and expertise in gender equality is also essential for the implementation of the plan.

Data collection and monitoring will be done by collecting personnel data on a gender-disaggregated basis and reporting annually on the basis of indicators.

Furthermore, staff and decision-makers will be trained on gender equality and unconscious gender bias.<sup>2</sup>

The Polymer Competence Center Leoben GmbH (hereinafter referred to as "PCCL") attaches great importance to gender equality and the inter-structural inclusion and promotion of individuals, regardless of gender or origin (diversity).

This applies at all levels of the company. Working in an equality-oriented manner is one of the PCCL's main concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> *European Commission, Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans (2021) 11.*

<sup>2</sup> *European Commission, Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans (2021) 9.*

There is no tolerance of structures or incidents of discrimination at the PCCL. Neither will any form of sexualized violence be tolerated, without exception. In any case, the PCCL takes active steps against it.

All employees have the possibility to contact the Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity as a working unit of the Legal Department for all questions related to gender equality and diversity issues.

The Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity takes up her work in order to prevent and eliminate gender inequalities and to dissolve inequalities in the society structure, which also have an impact on the work in the company.

As in all leading scientific and technical institutions worldwide, the PCCL is challenged by the low representation of women\* at all levels of the academic career. In this respect, the potential, knowledge and perspectives that female employees would bring are also being lost. The need for greater participation of women\* at all academic levels of STEM professions should therefore be a matter of awareness and is beyond question.

***In this respect, the PCCL sets itself the following targets:***

- Elimination of gender inequalities and discriminating situations
- Enforcement of higher quota of women\* in all areas of the company
- Compatibility of studies, career and care work for all students and employees
- Adaptation of work processes to promote equal opportunities
- Ongoing internal training on gender and diversity issues

Hereinafter, the responsibilities and measures at the PCCL that are suitable to promote the achievement of these targets will be presented. They will be presented and discussed in a transparent and objective manner.

# Status Quo

At the beginning of the preparation the Gender Equality Plan, employee data was collected for the years 2020 and 2021. The proportions of female and male employees in the areas of "administration", "technicians" and "scientists" were analyzed and presented in absolute figures for each quarter. In addition, the full-time equivalent (FTE) was presented for each quarter. The distribution of international employees was also analyzed and shown according to gender and nationality.

These data analyses from the years 2020 and 2021 showed that in the PCCL, as a company in the scientific and technical field, women\* are underrepresented as scientists and technicians. However, this does not apply to the administrative staff. In this area, as it is often the case in practice, the majority of staff at the PCCL are women\* (see Annex I).

The PCCL, as an internationally oriented research company that is mainly active in project work, has a high fluctuation of employees. This is also reflected in the graphs evaluating the distribution of employees by gender and nationality (see Annex I).

Women\* are less represented in international scientific exchange. They are less likely to move their place of work and research abroad (e.g., in the course of exchange programmes or similar). In 2020 and 2021, 30% female international staff and 70% male international staff worked in the PCCL. Especially from countries where patriarchal structures are strongly prevalent in society (Iran, Pakistan, India), only or mostly men visited us.

Women\* are underrepresented in the majority of management positions within the company. While the distribution within the management is balanced with one male person (CSO) and one female person (CEO), the male share of employees predominates in the division management with 5 male division managers and only one female division manager. The distribution within the group leaders is the same. There are also 5 male group leaders and one female group leader.

The Supervisory Board of the PCCL consists entirely of 8 men. The shareholders are also represented by men in the General Assembly. The scientific advisory board is made up only of 3 men and the strategy board is also made up only of men.

# Responsibility

The effective GEP is a strategic document that involves the entire organization of a company. The GEP requires the support and formal commitment of senior managers. There are ways to involve the whole organization in developing a plan, in initial audits or reviews of the issue, in setting targets, in reviewing and introducing new ways of working, and in communicating the plan in general.

Relevant functions to be included throughout the organization may be the management, senior managers, administrative staff, including human resources and the legal department, and gender equality specialists.<sup>3</sup>

It is the task of the management of the PCCL to ensure the implementation of the above-mentioned goals by means of the described measures (with the involvement and control of the Supervisory Board).

The Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity supports the management in this task. The leaders (division head, group leader and project leader) in the PCCL also have to actively ensure that all measures are complied with and implemented in their area.

Other units of the PCCL, such as the Controlling Unit, the Public Relations Unit and the Legal Department, have the task of supporting the process of implementing the aforementioned targets and measures. A future-oriented and interactive cooperation of these areas is assumed.

The Gender Equality Plan is hereby considered as adopted by the Management of the PCCL.

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans (2021)



# Measures

The measures for the implementation of the targets from the Gender Equality Plan are presented below. These measures were initiated by the Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity, and their implementation was decided by the management. The measures developed relate to five thematic areas, namely: work-life balance and organizational culture, gender balance in leadership and decision-making, gender equality in recruitment and career advancement, integration of the gender perspective in research and teaching content, and measures against gender-based violence, especially sexual violence.

## 1. Gendercontrolling and Monitoring

Internal gender monitoring takes place once a year. The annual reports should each have a specific focus (e.g. gender pay gap, visibility of scientists, secondment and incoming of scientists). The gender monitoring reports can be used to determine the measures for the future work of the Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity. In this way, problems can be identified, presented and dealt with. It must be noted, that this monitoring cannot currently cover non-binary persons due to the data situation. Therefore, the monitoring data is binary, which cannot and should not reflect reality.

The main task of gender controlling is to support management in integrating gender aspects into planning and control processes, e.g., in the context of target agreements or allocation of funds.

## 2. Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity

There was no specific unit for equality and diversity at the PCCL in the past.

Matters that fell under this topic area were dealt with by the Legal Department and the Management.

In January 2022, a Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity was appointed within the Legal Department to deal with this complex issue. The employee entrusted with this task has the necessary know-how and education to be able to handle this topic in all aspects.

### 3. Gender-sensitive Representation & Language

The use of inclusive language (internally and externally)<sup>4</sup> makes all staff feel included and respected. The use of gender-sensitive language also demonstrates to the outside world that the PCCL and all its staff are actively committed to diversity and inclusion.

A guide written by the Coordinator and further instructions provided via the e-learning platform "Moodle" should help all staff members to become familiar with this topic and to implement the instructions on the use of gender-sensitive language. The Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity will use the guide to set out a preferred method to be used consistently by staff.

Regardless of gender-sensitive language, all PCCL employees must use politically correct language<sup>5</sup>.

Workshops on gender-sensitive representation and language can be offered at any time if requested by staff.

### 4. Recruiting Measures

We strive to increase the proportion of women\* in our organization and therefore try to fill positions with women\*. Accordingly, women\* should be particularly encouraged to apply for job advertisements in the spirit of gender equality. This also applies to internships.

Discriminatory questions must never be asked during job interviews. The suitability of applicants is assessed without using discriminatory criteria. Career setbacks due to private care work are taken into account during the selection process in order to avoid a discrimination of applicants.

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<sup>4</sup> Note: "Internal and external" use of gender-sensitive language in this context means using gender-sensitive language not only in official letters (e.g. proposals, contracts), but also in everyday language use. This also includes not using the generic masculine in a way that applies to all genders.

<sup>5</sup> Definition: "Politically Correct Language" means a way of language that does not offend or discriminate individuals. The use of expressions and ways of speaking that offend other people because of their particular characteristics (e.g. origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, skin colour) is not politically correct.

Researchers should be present at career exhibitions, and their positioning as experts has to be in the foreground.

## 5. Gender-sensitive Conferences & Events

The general underrepresentation of women\* in STEM professions means that only a few women\* are represented at PCCL conferences and events. Organizers must actively counteract this problem.

As the PCCL's Public Relations Unit is responsible for events, it has developed a gender-sensitive checklist for event planning together with the Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity.

This checklist should include, among other things, an appropriate number of female speakers and moderators, as well as preferred topics in which comparatively more women\* are active.

## 6. Career Programs & Mentoring

Mentoring measures can encourage women\* at all levels of education to learn and pursue STEM professions. The PCCL will increasingly implement the promotion and mentoring of women\* in the course of project work.

It is also possible to mentor and guide women\* as master's students and doctoral candidates in the course of mentoring. In the PCCL, it is particularly important to retain and promote women\* as employees in the company after their studies. TOP job sharing should also be further promoted for post-doc positions.

## 7. Internal Awareness-Raising Trainings for Employees

In order to ensure that equality and diversity are lived as values in the company, all employees must be made aware of these issues. Likewise, a (joint) reflection on behavioral patterns must take place on a regular basis.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, internal trainings and workshops on gender and diversity are offered by the Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity.

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<sup>6</sup> See: *European Commission*, Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans (2021) 28 ff.

## 8. Public Relations Work at Educational Institutions

With the help of orientation days, information days, brochures, videos, etc., girls\* and young women\* can be motivated to work at the PCCL or to take up a corresponding study in the future. The Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity and the public relations unit are therefore constantly coordinating the organization of such measures. As soon as the pandemic situation allows, taster days especially for girls\* and young women\* should take place on site at the PCCL locations. This type of event took place successfully before the pandemic and should therefore be continued and intensified in the future.<sup>7</sup>

## 9. International Exchange

Unfortunately, in the course of international exchange, there are less women\* as scientists at the PCCL. In the course of incoming activities, it should therefore be taken into account that preference should be given to women\* as scientists visiting the PCCL.

In case of equal qualification of scientists\* who want to visit the company as incoming, priority must be given to women\*.

In addition, women\* from the PCCL must also be more actively encouraged to undertake outgoing activities. The public relations unit will be involved in this process (e.g. dissemination of field reports in the course of public relations work).

## 10. Family-Friendly Infrastructure

The PCCL promotes the use of parental leave by all genders. In the future, the PCCL will also try to encourage not only mothers but also fathers to take parental leave.

Employees as parents are permitted to carry out their work in their home office (if this makes practical sense) after agreement with their superiors.

Working hours and the holding of meetings should also be geared to the needs of parents or carers.

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<sup>7</sup> See for example the program „TakeTech“ via <https://taketech.sfg.at/>.

## 11. Possibility of working from Home

The Polymer Competence Center Leoben GmbH has been offering its employees generous home office options for quite some time.

In this sense, people working in care work in particular, as well as menstruating/menopausal or chronically ill people, should have the opportunity to work from home on burdensome days.

In this respect, the company supports all persons in carrying out their work despite additional burdens. In compliance with data protection and employee rights, the persons concerned can inform their respective supervisor of an existing "additional physical burden"<sup>8</sup> and agree to work from home on the days in question.

## 12. Measures against Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

In order to prevent discrimination and sexualized violence, a behavior code, which will be available on the company's website, will be drawn up by the Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity.

Procedures and processes that take place in the event of discrimination and sexualized violence will be defined in advance. In this way, the responsible persons can intervene and investigate internally in the best possible way in the event of a violation being reported.

Bullying is dealt with as a separate additional topic in the behavior code.

All employees are sensitized to these issues and, above all, trained. Management staff in particular must be trained. In any case, the Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity is the reporting body for victims and is required to act discreetly.

If sexualized violence occurs, the management must also be informed.

## 13. Cooperation with the Gender Equality Office of the University of Leoben

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<sup>8</sup> Note: The wording "additional physical burden" can be adopted and does not need to be elaborated further.

Many employees of the PCCL also work at the University of Leoben, so networking with the Office for Gender Equality at the University of Leoben is planned. In the future, joint projects are also intended.

# Monitoring

The efficient implementation of the above measures is monitored by the Coordinator for Gender Equality & Diversity, who reports to the Management (CEO & CSO).

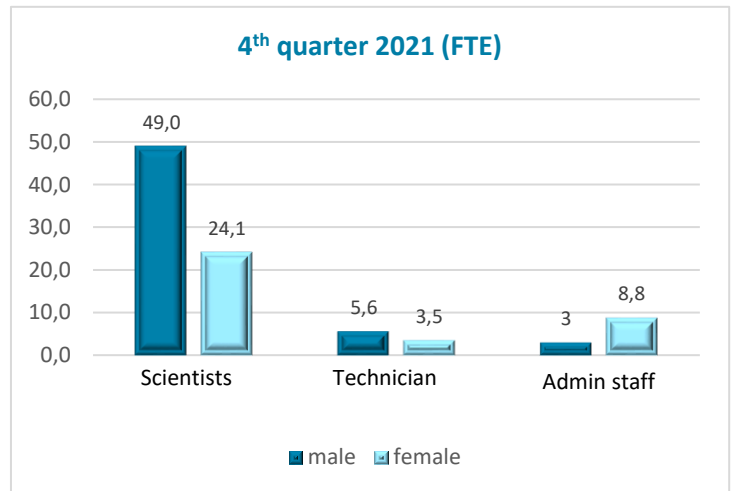
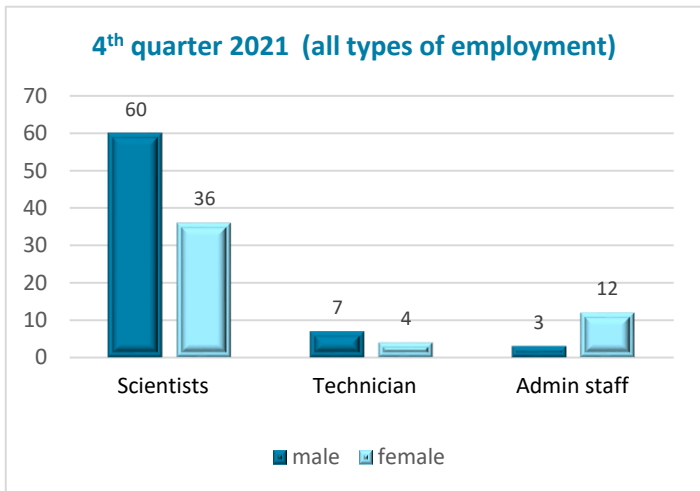
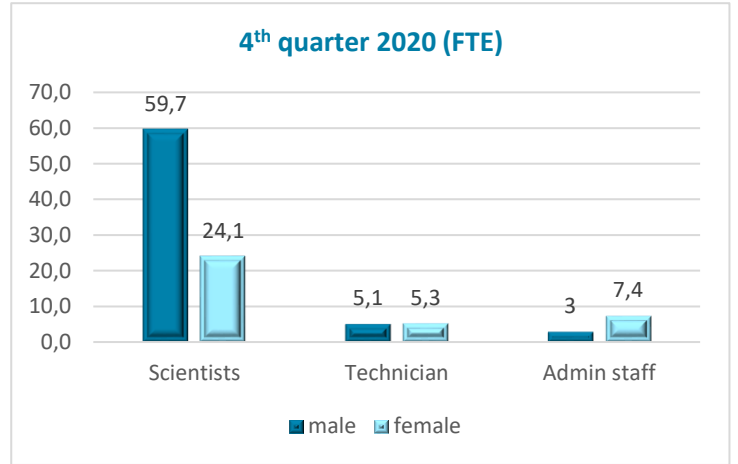
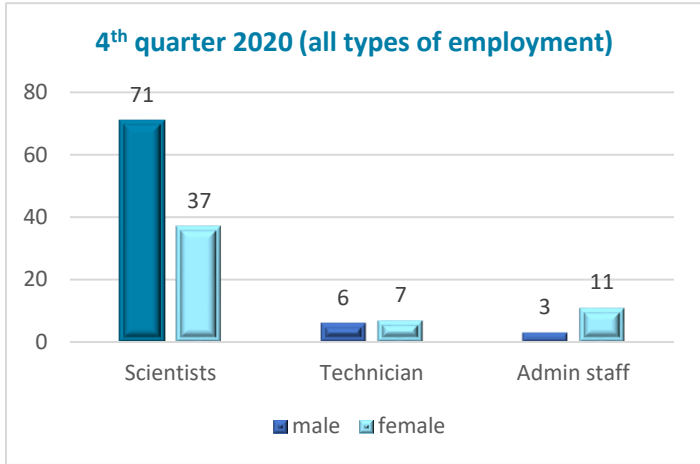
In addition, annual data surveys and evaluations are carried out to assess the success of the measures. An annual monitoring report is prepared for this purpose.

If certain conditions should get acutely worse, countermeasures will be worked out and taken as soon as possible. Otherwise, the measures are adapted to the respective results of the annual reports.

Studies on specific issues (also in cooperation with other institutions) are conducted as required.

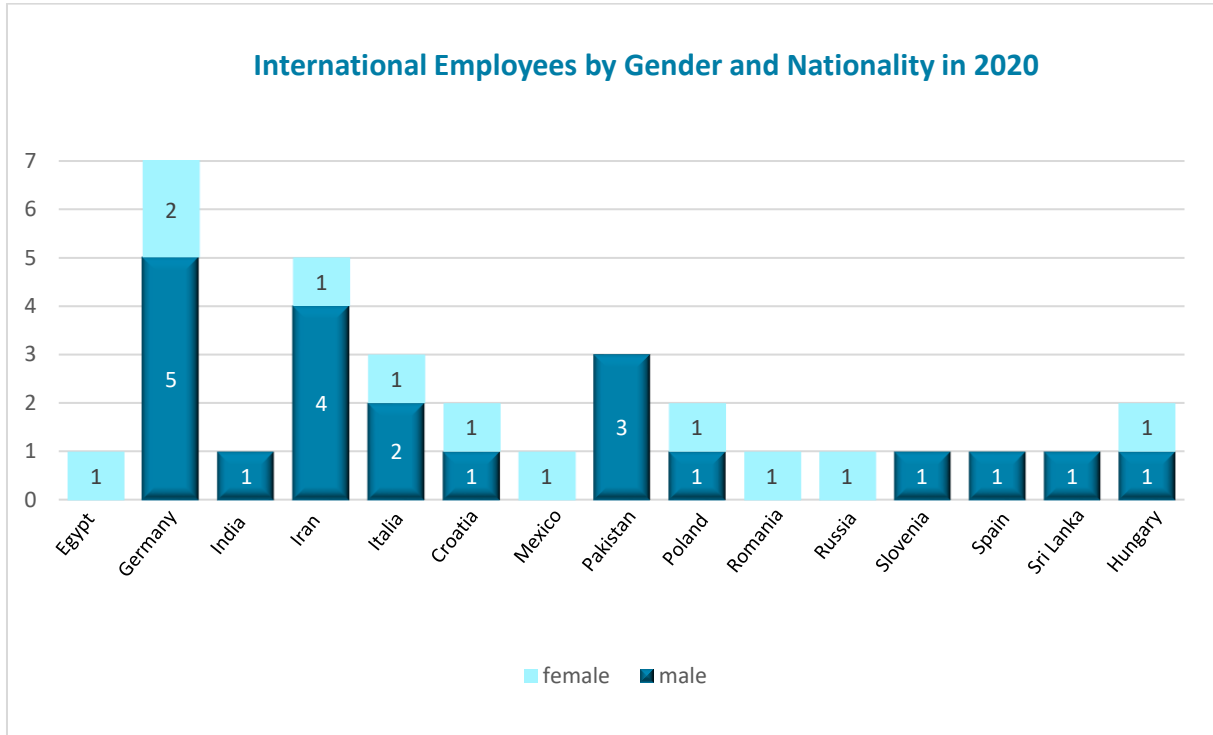
Annex I.

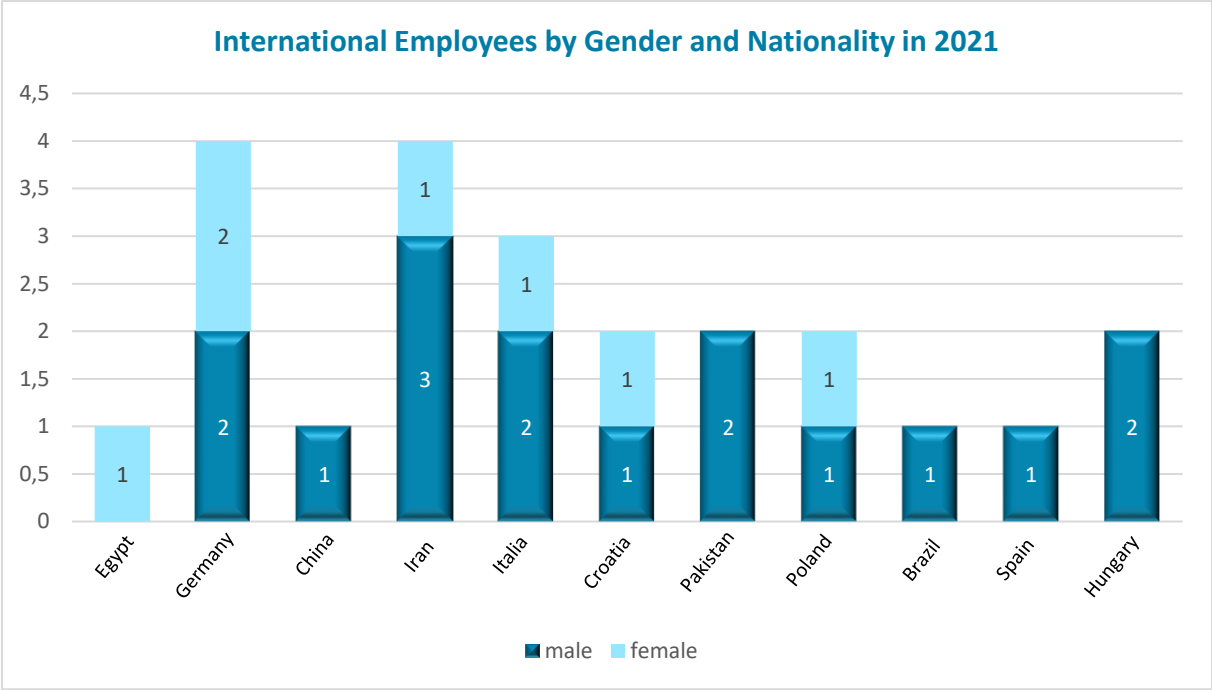
**A. Gender analysis of employees at the PCCL in 2020 and 2021**





**B. Proportion of international Employees by Gender and Nationality in 2020 and 2021**







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