

Xjenza Malta

Gender Equality Plan

2022 - 2026

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Gender Equality Plan Working Group

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Definitions

Gender refers to 'social attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male and to the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as to the relations between women and those between men' (EIGE, 2021a).

Sex refers to the 'biological attribute that distinguish male, female and intersex' (European Commission, 2020h).

Gender Identity refers to 'each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function, by medical, surgical, or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms' (EIGE, 2021a).

While the data collection for Xjenza Malta only considers sex-disaggregated data for men and women, it will be important to also consider non-binary gender for data collection in future publications, where possible. Non-binary is an umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary of men or women. This includes individuals whose gender identity is neither exclusively man nor woman, a combination of man and woman or between or beyond genders.

Gender Equality Plan – Xjenza Malta

1.1 Introduction

This Gender Equality Plan (GEP) was developed for Xjenza Malta based on an analysis of an internal gender audit, meetings with stakeholders involved in the GEP implementation, as well as a review of Xjenza Malta's current policies and procedures.

Presently, Xjenza Malta already has a commitment to follow the main areas covered by GEP's and has policies and practices in place which are aligned with the Maltese Legislation. Such principles covering the recommended areas of the GEP include:

1. Work-life balance and organisational culture

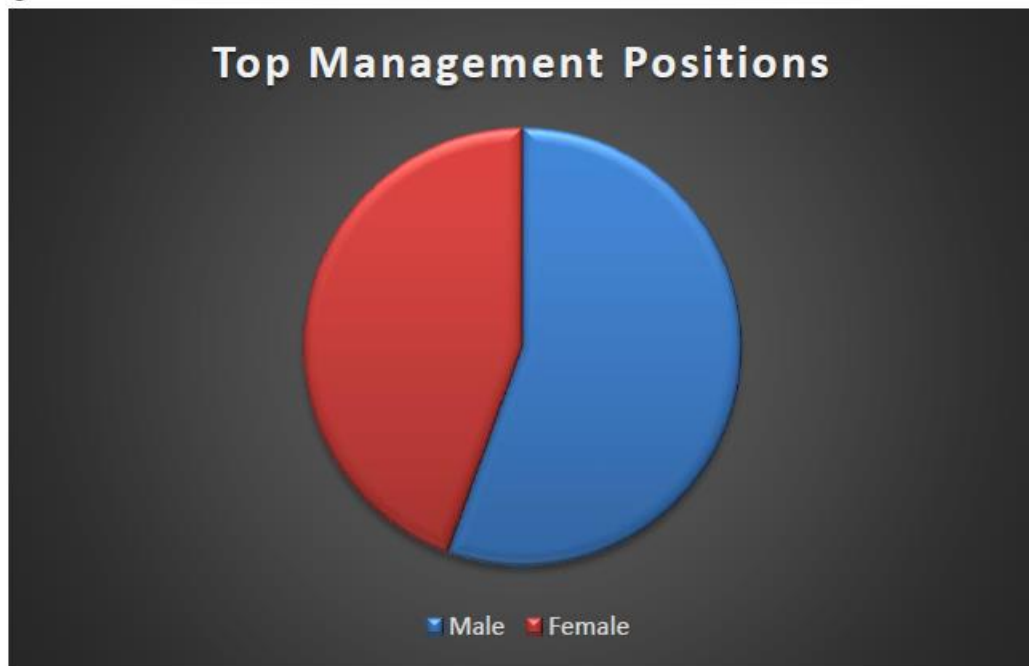
A. The provision of good working conditions for all staff, including staff members with special needs, which will allow both men and women to have the flexibility for a healthy work-life balance and a safe working environment which enables staff to reach optimal performance levels.

These principles are also highlighted in the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 452 of the Laws of Malta) and subsidiary legislation (Organisation of Working Time Regulations – SL 452.87), the Occupational Health and Safety Authority Act (Cap. 424 of the Laws of Malta) and subsidiary legislation (Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements) Regulations – SL 424.15), the Government of Malta Policy Manual (Manual of Work-life balance measures), as well as Article 5, Article 9, Article 15 and Article 16 of Xjenza Malta Terms of Employment Handbook [Version 1.5]

2. Gender Balance in leadership and decision making

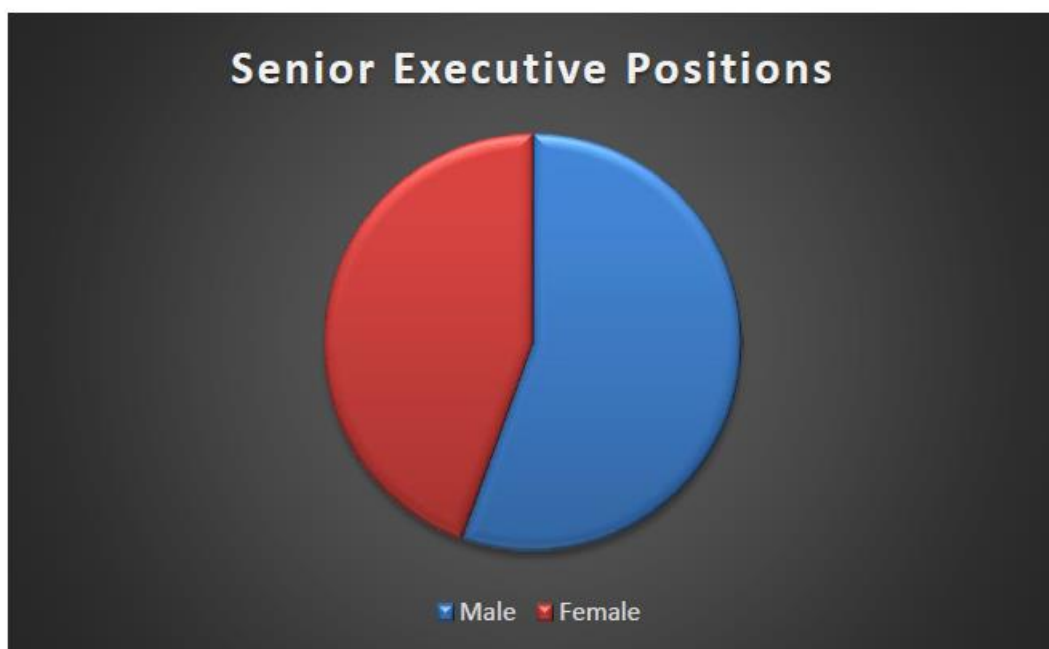
A. Figure 1 illustrates the number of males and females in leading top management positions, namely Directorship posts. As shown in the Figure 1, Xjenza Malta has already achieved a gender balance in leadership and decision-making roles.

Figure 1



B. Figure 2 illustrates the number of males and females holding Senior Executive Position, which are according to Xjenza Malta's grading structure are next in line to Top Management Posts. As shown in the Figure 2, Xjenza Malta has also achieved a gender balance in second line leadership and decision-making roles.

Figure 2



3. Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression

A. Gender balance in recruitment and career progression ensuring equal opportunities at the stage of recruitment and subsequent career progression for all levels of staff, including top management grades.

These principles are highlighted in the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 452 of the Laws of Malta) and subsidiary legislation (Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations - SL 452.95), Article 7 of Xjenza Malta Terms of Employment Handbook [Version 1.5] and Article 2.5 of the Government of Malta Policy Manual (Manual on Industrial Relations and the Selection and Appointment Process under Delegated Authority In the Malta Public Service [Version 4.17])

4. Integration of Gender Dimension into Research and Teaching Content

A. Recognising matters concerning gender diversity and inclusivity, and subsequently create awareness at all levels

These principles are highlighted in Article 10 of Xjenza Malta Terms of Employment Handbook [Version 1.5]

5. Measures against Gender-based Violence including Sexual Harassment

A. Non-discriminatory treatment based on the grounds of religion or religious belief, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, political orientation and racial or ethnic origin.

These principles are also highlighted in the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 452 of the Laws of Malta) and subsidiary legislation (Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations - SL 452.95), the Equality for Men and Women Act (Cap. 456 of the Laws of Malta), the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act (Cap. 540 of the Laws of Malta) as well as Article 8, Article 9, Article 10, Article 14 and Article 20 of Xjenza Malta Terms of Employment Handbook [Version 1.5]

B. Gender matters in addressing gender-based violence that empower staff, amplify their voices, offer opportunities of redress, and promote acceptance of all gender identities and sexualities.

These principles are highlighted in Article 29 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 452 of the Laws of Malta), the Equality for Men and Women Act (Cap. 456 of the Laws of Malta), Article 251A of the Criminal Code (Chapter 9 of the laws of Malta), as well Article 8 and Article 12 of Xjenza Malta Terms of Employment Handbook [Version 1.5].

Circular 15/2012 issued by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) also highlights the importance on gender mainstreaming asserting that gender mainstreaming “will enhance the ability of employers to make the best use of human resources and improve productivity and competitiveness whilst giving employees the benefit equally in society. In practice it requires a pro-active approach, the need to identify those areas where any degree of inequality could potentially arise, assess the underlying causes of such inequalities and take necessary steps to bring about change.”

In response to the guidelines of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), which aim to “identify and implement innovative strategies to promote cultural change and equal opportunities in Universities and Research Centres”, this GEP aims to identify gaps in Xjenza Malta current policies and practices and to introduce new measures that better support gender equality within the Council. Although Xjenza Malta already adopts numerous measures that promote gender equality, the challenges identified are presented in Section 1.2 along with a plan of action presented in Section 1.3.

1.2 Challenges and Objectives

The challenges related to gender equality and diversity were identified and discussed during various meetings held between Xjenza Malta’s Executive Chairman, Dr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, members of the HR Department, members forming part of the top management team as well as from feedback gathered during staff committee meetings held between July 2021 and September 2021. Xjenza Malta has also appointed three gender equality officers who throughout the period covering this GEP, shall be overseeing and following up on progress on the challenges which Xjenza Malta shall be implementing between 2022 to 2026. Xjenza Malta’s gender equality officers are listed in Section 1.4.

The challenges and actions identified are outlined in Section 1.3 and are followed by the actions that Xjenza Malta will be taking to collect and monitor data.

1.3 Challenges and Action Plan

Challenge 1: To extend the possibility of teleworking for all staff members irrespective of gender and/or family responsibilities

Key Area	Objectives	Challenges	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline					
					2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Work-life Balance and organisational culture	To promote and implement measures that aim at improving the balance between work and personal life	To extend the possibility of teleworking for all staff members irrespective of gender and/or family responsibilities	All staff	Families of members of staff	x	x	x	x	x	x

XJENZA MALTA already has a teleworking policy which enables office-based employees to enter into a voluntary agreement with Xjenza Malta wherein work which is normally performed at the employer's premises, is carried out from home on a regular basis. It was identified that the telework policy was only being extended to a particular segment of staff and that staff was required to meet the following criteria to be considered as eligible:

The employee is a parent or legal guardian of a disabled child who needs applicant's constant care and attention

The employee is the parent or legal guardian of a child under 3 years of age

The employee is a son/daughter of a disabled parent who needs applicant's constant care and attention

The employee is the parent or legal guardian of a child aged 3 to 6

Goals: To extend teleworking to allow all staff members to benefit from it irrelevant of gender and/or family responsibilities.

Action Plan: Xjenza Malta is set to improve and enhance modern workplaces and increase employee flexibility. Further to the lessons learned during the COVID pandemic, Xjenza Malta will extend the opportunity of teleworking to all its members of staff in an effort to increase employee flexibility and provide a better work/life balance.

Subject to the completion of the probationary period, those employees applying for telework must be able to perform their tasks and duties remotely and will be permitted to apply for a maximum of sixty percent (60%) of their contracted hours to be worked away from the office. This measure shall be implemented from 2021 and shall continue to be accessible throughout until 2026.

Challenge 2: To ensure a mixed representation of genders on recruitment and interviewing boards

Key Area	Objectives	Challenges	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline				
					2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression	To promote processes to support gender sensitive recruitment and career progression opportunities	To ensure a mixed representation of genders on recruitment and interviewing boards	Newly recruited staff as well as current staff applying for internal positions	NA	20	20	20	20	20
					22	22	22	22	22
					23	24	25	26	26
					x	x	x	x	x

Presently, recruitment panels are made up of three or more persons as part of the selection and recruitment process. All interviewers and selection committees are fully versed with equality issues and would have been given a copy of such policy. Whenever possible, such recruitment and selection panels are gender balanced however it was identified that at times, such panels were composed of only male members.

Goals: Ensuring mixed representation of genders in interviewing panels.

Actions: Xjenza Malta will ensure that recruitment panels are made up of at least three or more panel members and will include both males and females. This will address the issue of gender representation and participation of both males and females in the recruitment and selection process of Xjenza Malta, and in its efforts, Xjenza Malta will further promote equality, diversity and inclusion in matters concerning recruitment & selection and promotion decisions.

Challenge 3: Staff returning to work after availing themselves of parental leave, will have their service in grade reckoned for up to 12 months therefore their years in service will continue to accumulate in their favour

Key Area	Objectives	Challenges	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline				
					2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression	To promote processes to support gender sensitive recruitment and career progression opportunities	Staff returning to work after availing themselves of parental leave, will have their service in grade reckoned for up to 12 months therefore their years in service will continue to accumulate in their favour	All staff	Families of staff	x	x	x	x	x

Xjenza Malta offers an array of measures to better support the work life balance of its employees. Parental leave is an unpaid entitlement and is applicable to employees on the grounds of birth, adoption, legal custody, and foster care of children who are under ten (10) years of age. Applicants must have completed their probationary period and may utilise parental leave in aggregates of four (4) month, six (6) month, nine (9) month periods or the maximum of twelve (12) months. Although employees on parental leave are still notified of any new positions which may arise from time to time, such leave was not considered in the calculations of years of service of the respective employee. In this light, it could be the case that at times when an employee avails himself of such leave, they would be at a disadvantage to meet the eligibility criteria as outlined in the internal call for application, relating to the work experience required for the new position.

Goals: To provide a better opportunity for career progression.

Action: In considering this matter and to further eradicate any barriers which might be hindering staff members from availing themselves of this measure, Xjenza Malta has decided that employees availing themselves of parental leave, shall continue to accumulate their service in grade in their favour. Such new measure, which is normally availed of by female employees, will further support the role of females within Xjenza Malta.

Challenge 4: Communication and implementation of gender sensitive content in all formal communication

Key Area	Objectives	Challenges	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline				
					2	2	2	2	2
					0	0	0	0	0
					2	2	2	2	2
					2	3	4	5	6
Integrating the gender dimension	To promote inclusivity and address gender issues	Communication and implementation of gender sensitive content in all formal communication	All staff		x	x	x	x	x

A review of Xjenza Malta policy as well as internal documentation and communication has uncovered the need to pro-actively address matters relating to the effective use of gender sensitive language in all formal communication. Although Xjenza Malta already makes use of gendered pronouns such as 'he/she' in its official documents, such pronouns are generally drafted in the traditional order of 'he' before 'she', therefore placing more importance on the male gender rather than the female gender. Furthermore, Xjenza Malta recognises that such language might not be gender inclusive, as it conforms to the binary gender system. In view of this, Xjenza Malta recognises that the additional use of inclusive pronouns such as 'they/them', will ensure that non-binary persons are not excluded and that all its staff members are addressed through language as persons of equal value, dignity, integrity, and respect.

Goals: To be more inclusive on the basis of gender through the use of gender sensitive communication.

Action: The Gender Equality Working Group will be providing tailored made training on the use and application of gender sensitive communication to its present staff members which shall focus on the importance, applicability and use of gender-sensitive communication. Newly recruited staff from 2022 onwards, shall also start receiving this training as part of their induction programme. Furthermore, all official HR documentation and correspondence shall be communicated in a gender-neutral language.

1.4 Data Collection and Monitoring

For the purpose of this GEP, the data in relation to each challenge shall be collected as follows:

- Challenge 1: To extend the possibility of teleworking for all staff members irrespective of gender and/or family responsibilities

Applications are open to all Xjenza Malta staff members. Gender disaggregated data is collected upon application and a report is issued on an annual basis.

- Challenge 2: To ensure a mixed representation of genders on recruitment and interviewing boards

Xjenza Malta HR Department staff has been made aware of this requirement and when a recruitment file is opened, gender disaggregated data of the members of the selection panel is collected and a report is issued on an annual basis. Any shortcomings will require a justification.

- Challenge 3: Staff returning to work after availing themselves of parental leave, will have their service in grade reckoned for up to 12 months therefore their years in service will continue to accumulate in their favour

Both staff and the Xjenza Malta HR Department staff have been made aware of this new measure. A record of staff members availing themselves of parental leave is already kept by the HR Department and a report shall be issued on an annual basis should there be any staff members on parental leave who apply for new vacancies whilst availing themselves of this entitlement.

- Challenge 4: Communication and implementation of gender sensitive content in all formal communication

Existing and new employees shall receive training in relation to inclusivity on the basis of gender. A training session for existing staff members will be held in January 2022 and all new existing staff will also receive this training as part of their induction process. A record of training delivery shall be kept at the HR Department and on a bi-annual basis, the Gender Equality Officers shall monitor that all staff have received this training.

Gender-neutral official documentation and correspondence issued by the HR Department shall be vetted by the Director of HR and a sample of such documents shall be taken on a bi-annual basis so as to monitor that the use of gender-sensitive communication is being applied.

Xjenza Malta is an entity falling under the portfolio of the Ministry for Education, Sports, Youth and Research and Innovation. Xjenza Malta also endorses the Equality Policy drafted by the Office of the Principal Permanent Secretary.

Date: 12/08/2025

As the Chief Executive Officer of Xjenza Malta, I am honoured to express my full support and formal endorsement of our Gender Equality Plan (GEP). This Plan is a strategic and values-driven commitment to advancing gender equality across our institution.

Gender equality is both a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustainable development, effective governance, and social justice. As an agency, we have a responsibility to lead by example in creating a workplace and culture that is inclusive, fair, and representative of the communities we serve.

The Gender Equality Plan outlines our institutional goals and commitments in five critical areas:

1. Work-Life Balance and Organisational Culture
2. Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-Making
3. Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression
4. Integration of the Gender Dimension into Research and Teaching Content
5. Measures Against Gender-Based Violence Including Sexual Harassment

As CEO, I pledge to ensure the effective implementation of this Plan through strong leadership, clear accountability, appropriate resource allocation, and regular monitoring and evaluation. This commitment reflects our broader role in contributing to a more equitable and just public service.

Sincerely,



Silvio Scerri

Chief Executive Officer
Xjenza Malta