

Gender Equity Plan 2024 - ¹

1. Introduction

Since 2018, the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) has undergone several substantive changes to improve and democratise the functioning of the Centre, resulting in institutional developments aspiring to empower the Centre's staff. These changes include building systems for monitoring and promoting gender equality and diversity within the organization, such as the commencement of the Equality Unit, developing the ECMI Code of Ethics and instituting a process for dealing with issues pertaining to employee well-being and complaints. The purpose of the Equality Unit (EQU) is to prevent discrimination, harassment, and bullying within the working environment of the ECMI by providing a mediating and consultative body for the staff, as well as to foster a positive, open, communicative, and constructive institutional culture at the Centre.

During its first term, the Equality Unit primarily focused on defining its mission and establishing the necessary operational procedures. In addition, the ECMI Code of Ethics to set the standard for acceptable behaviour among the Centre's employees was drafted. It outlines clear values and expectations for the behaviour of the Centre's employees, including principles such as equality among colleagues, trust, and appreciation of diverse opinions. It emphasizes that, regardless of hierarchical differences resulting from formal job positions, all employee interactions should be free from bullying, harassment, or discrimination. Essentially, the ECMI Code of Ethics establishes a standard, and the Equality Unit's role is to ensure this standard is upheld.

For the period of 2023-2028, the ECMI has set several strategic goals to further equality, diversity, and employee wellbeing. As the first milestone, a gender equality evaluation of the ECMI was carried out from July to October 2023 to assess the Centre's gender equality situation and offer recommendations for improvement. The Gender Audit aimed to focus on the state of gender equity in the ECMI, as well as to find professional gender mainstreaming options, assess the well-being of staff, identify potential areas for improvement, and for third-party advice on strategies for diversity and inclusion going forward. The final draft of the Gender Audit can be found in the Appendix of this document.

It is out of this context that a Gender Equity Plan for the ECMI has been developed. This document aims to outline the importance of fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace. It is with this intersectional approach in mind that we strive to create equity at the ECMI through diversity and inclusion policies, hiring practices, general work culture and staff relations. The ECMI states clearly in its Code of Ethics that it is committed to gender equality. Thus, through this document, we aim to encapsulate the values of the ECMI and its commitment to equality in the workplace, in a set of guidelines and standardised practice for the further progression of the Centre.

1.1. Mission Statement

Our understanding of equity acknowledges the multiple lived experiences and circumstances of staff at the ECMI. To achieve equity, we need to recognise and analyse the pre-existing inequalities that individuals face, because of their intersecting lived experiences. We aim to address these multiple realities with the overarching goal of achieving equity in the workplace and supporting current and potential staff members from underrepresented groups. To be clear, an underrepresented person refers to a person from a gender minority, language minority,

¹ This plan should be reviewed and revised every year to ensure that it remains in alignment with current Gender Equity trends and reflects the goals and aspirations of the changing needs of ECMI Staff.

religious minority, or ethnic minority, or national minority – either belonging to one or multiple of these groups, and who have multiple intersecting social locations (as described below).

These aspirations are anchored within the ECMI’s broader mission focusing on the equity of minorities, which are also carried by the staff at ECMI engaged in this work themselves.

We have chosen to use the term ‘Equity’ to better reflect the multiple needs of staff members who require different levels of support based on their lived experiences. We also want to stress the importance of intersectional reflexivity, which focuses on the need to understand how individuals’ social locations, such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, language, ability(ies), citizenship, religion, or cultural background, impact their lived realities in and outside of the workplace. In this way, some staff members might have

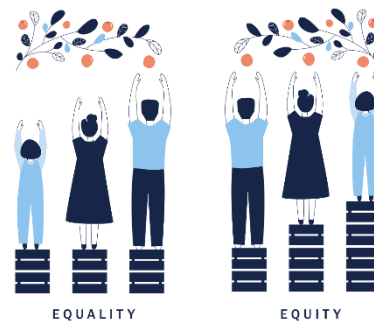


Figure 1: Visual depiction of Equality vs. Equity. Image courtesy: Shutterstock)

or continue to experience levels of privilege or oppression based on the intersections of their social locations in different power structures. Therefore, the Gender Equity Plan seeks to ground the aspirations of gender equality within processes of equity and turn them into the overall organizational goals of the Equality Unit and the ECMI in general.

1.2. Current Status Assessment

At the time of writing this document, the ECMI has a gendered balance among staff (see Appendix 1), we acknowledge that a gendered balance does not necessarily mean gender equality. From an intersectional perspective, challenges for staff members based on their gender identities in intersection with other parts of their identities influence their career trajectories and experiences, which are also shaped by power structures of sexism and patriarchy both in previous and current positions. We acknowledge that there are multiple ways in which ECMI staff can express their gender identities or not, and therefore have avoided using the reductionist gendered language of simply woman or man throughout the document, to avoid misgendering staff. We note that there is a relative gender balance across all positions, namely, senior researcher, principal researcher, post-doctoral researcher, researcher, and administrative staff (see Appendix 1). We directly view the employment of minority candidates as an asset to the ECMI and acknowledge the under-representation of staff who are members of multiple minority groups.

The Gender Audit report showed that the Centre is currently in a relatively balanced situation in terms of gender and across some other parameters, however, many of the diversity aspects could be improved through deepening employee variety in terms of geographies, minority backgrounds, and gender and sexual identities. The Gender Audit noted that previously, the gender balance and the improvement of the staff composition in this regard has not been a result of a formal strategy of diversity. These aspects were informally regulated, with a general understanding of the goals and mission of the ECMI and remained situational in relation to hiring practices. However, this Gender Equity Plan aims to enshrine gender equity within the hiring process, so that it becomes intentional and grounded in gender mainstreaming initiatives. Furthermore, this document also puts forward a series of detailed strategies for inclusion concerning the day-to-day functioning of the Centre, as a path towards the ultimate goal of equity.

2. Goals and Objectives

2.1. Equal Representation

ECMI strives for a balanced representation of genders at all levels, within all departments and in relation to its various activities. Staff and management are therefore explicitly encouraged to **ensure diverse representation** when organizing a workshop, event, publication, etc. This entails representation based on the intersections of gender, ethnicity, language, citizenship, and religion. The same applies to selection committees for recruitment and any kind of work unit within the Centre. This process is regularly **monitored and overseen by the Equality Unit**.

It has been noted that it is more difficult for underrepresented people to gain access to the Centre through recruitment. As improving this situation is one of the top priorities of the Equality Unit, it goes without saying that once the Centre succeeds in recruiting and hiring people of underrepresented groups, **it should fully support them**.

Consequently, potential barriers such as general access to information, housing and childcare should be avoided as far as possible. **The comprehensive update of the ECMI handbook** and the **measures to make work more flexible** will contribute to these efforts. In addition, **the mentoring programs** can improve the situation described. Furthermore, the **production, amendment and streamlining of ECMI documents describing its functions** (new and old) should be monitored by the Equality Unit to ensure that it complies with the Gender Equity Plan.

Apart from the aforementioned support initiatives, it is helpful and important that staff and management are aware of the complex career paths and associated difficulties particular employees face to reach their current positions. This is also relevant in consideration that some employees have experienced more privilege in this regard than others. It is important to note that employees should not be tokenised because of their experiences of multiple oppression, but rather there should be a general awareness that individuals come with multiple backgrounds, and those are appreciated and viewed as an asset.

This **general awareness should be regularly trained through self-reflection and group workshops** (e.g., unconscious bias training). By ensuring that there is the capacity for this type of training in the **Centre's annual budget planning**, the ECMI can signal its strategic commitment to equal representation and equal thinking.

2.2. Recruitment and Hiring Processes

Recruiting and hiring employees of the underrepresented groups has been a weakness of the Centre², as mentioned earlier. It is therefore important to improve the recruitment process by **changing the language of the calls and the addition of specific encouragement targeted at groups in focus here**, for example: “If you feel you don't quite meet all the qualifications, we encourage you to apply regardless. We encourage applications from people belonging to different minority and underrepresented groups. We understand that people have multiple lived experiences and encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply”. In addition, specific mention should be made encouraging candidates who have gaps in their CVs due to career breaks, such as childcare, parental leave, care for sick relatives or health-related breaks, to apply and that their application will not be penalised as a result.

Vacancies should be advertised across Europe, and not region-specific. Bearing this in mind, staff of under-represented genders already working at the Centre should be given more support, thus, vacancies should be communicated to them first (in case they are working with a time-limited contract or part-time), and they should be explicitly invited to apply (in written form as well). **This process requires continuous monitoring by the Equality Unity**.

If it is assumed that the applicants are equally qualified in terms of academic achievements, experience and skills, and have multiple minority identities, **preference should be**

² See p. 13 of Gender .

given to candidates from a gender minority. When both candidates are from a gender minority and are equally qualified, other intersecting factors should be considered. Under no circumstance should a candidate's career breaks (like those mentioned above) be considered in the decision-making process. Gender balance should also be ensured in the composition of the selection committee. All these measures should be monitored by the Equality Unit as well.

Furthermore, it is desirable to guarantee that all new staff members receive onboarding training, in this case specifically related to their rights as employees, services available in that regard at the Centre, and possibilities involving the access to and functioning of the internal bodies relevant to them.

2.3. Pay Equity

Considering the widespread instances of various kinds of inequities present at the Centre in the relatively recent past and identified in the most recent external evaluation of the ECMI's operations, it is of utmost importance not only to closely follow rules resulting from the recommendations formulated in the evaluation but also to establish mechanisms allowing for a regular assessment of the level of adherence to the requirements defined in them. As a result, to ensure that equal pay is indeed guaranteed throughout the ECMI and that the TVL table is interpreted correctly and fairly regarding the recognition of professional experience relevant to the ECMI's work, the Equality Unit strongly recommends **regular external equal pay audits, coordinated by the Equality Unit** to identify, and eliminate various pay gaps related to recognition of past experience, including those related to gender.

2.4. Inclusive Work Culture

The notion of Inclusive Work Culture, similar to the Elimination of Gender-Based Discrimination and Harassment discussed below, is related to a set of values and attitudes which should guide the ECMI's day-to-day functioning in all respects. It is, therefore, crucial to aspire to the creation of a work environment guided by such principles as inclusion, care, mutual respect, and comprehensive support. To foster a work culture permeated by inclusion it is recommended to conduct annual training programs (as mentioned above) on unconscious bias and diversity, as well as implement monitoring efforts allowing to assess to what degree those principles are indeed guiding the ECMI's work.

2.5. Flexible Work Policies

One of the strategically important aspects in relation to Gender Equity concerns flexible work policies. The Gender Audit (see Appendix 1) resulted in the identification of several shortcomings. These concern: **vagueness of some of the currently existing internal regulations at the Centre**, the associated potential risk of unequal access to certain solutions, and – relatedly – the challenges resulting from the need to individually ask for relevant modalities, instead of being offered a clear and transparent mechanism guaranteeing flexibility in relation to day-to-day work. In this context, the need for flexible work policies requires a conceptualization of a comprehensive set of practical solutions, resulting in a framework allowing for work conditions which support employees in their career-related goals, whilst at the same time, and no less importantly, guaranteeing that their family lives will not be negatively affected.

To further support staff members, a more reflexive and flexible approach to working hours is recommended. In this respect we suggest shifting from “traditional” office hours to individualised approaches combining, for example, being able to split working hours based on family and childcare needs that reflect a combination of remote work and home office hours within a single day, and outside of traditional working times. Additionally, for example,

individuals have different productive working hours, which might be better reflected in an office-home combination.

ECMI staff are highly motivated and deeply committed to the outputs they produce. Consequently, providing a more individualized approach to their specific mental, emotional, and physical well-being, as well as adjusting to life situations, productivity style and neurological diversities would create a more inclusive and fruitful working environment. Staff should be allowed to organise their working day according to their needs, which might include a combination of remote work and in-office hours.

It is considered equally crucial to embed within the Centre's work culture **family-friendly policies** and **establish facilities resulting from that commitment**. In terms of ideas for consideration, an **emphasis on childcare** is of primary importance. Because of the specificity of the ECMI's work, for staff members who are parents, childcare can become an acute problem during various events, particularly those held in the evenings or during weekends. Therefore, a childcare offer during workdays' late afternoons/evenings has to be considered, alongside weekend options. Importantly, this should be extended to scholars and/or guests participating in the Centre's events, with the possibility clearly mentioned, for example, in the calls for abstracts etc. A "small children's corner" and a room for breastfeeding staff and new parents at the ECMI are also worth of being discussed in this context.

Furthermore, a **transparent and family-friendly policy concerning new staff moving to Flensburg needs to be implemented**. This is important for instance in relation to the allocation of time off during workdays and in the amount adjusted to a particular case, as at times moving between countries can result in very complex and time-consuming logistical operations, not to mention Flensburg's relative geographical isolation. This applies to staff members moving alone, with partners or with families. According to German law, employees receive 1 day off for moving within the Bundesland and 2 days across Bundeslaender/International. This, however, due to the circumstances mentioned above might not be enough. Due to ECMI's aspiration to hire the most qualified staff with various international backgrounds, **the allocation of time envisaged in German regulations** might not be enough, therefore, **increased flexibility from the Centre is necessary**. **Furthermore, this increased allocation of time off should not be counted towards the annual leave balance of a given employee. A clear announcement concerning that aspect in job advertisements can enhance the Centre's reputation as a family-friendly and flexible workplace, whilst in parallel contributing to a wider and better pool of candidates for a given position.**

Solutions **concerning cumulative remote work** are a further aspect in need of immediate attention. Currently, this area belongs to the Director's discretion. Such context usually results in a situation where staff members are reluctant to ask for a given possibility, as a negative answer is expected. Since manifold life situations justify flexible solutions in this area, an alternative system should be considered, where staff's access to extended remote work should be more broadly available and not exclusively based on difficult family circumstances.

Finally, the Centre should be able to **offer a well-thought-out onboarding process to the newly hired personnel**. This needs to entail the provision of comprehensive information concerning such aspects as, for example, tax regulations in Germany, access to healthcare (also for family members), and available housing opportunities in the Flensburg area.

2.6. Career (Development) Opportunities

The Centre's Gender Equity Plan puts a strong emphasis on aspects related to career and development opportunities. A subtle approach to the potential gender inequalities in this area is of the utmost importance, as when left unaddressed, those can result in significant obstacles when it comes to the affected staff members and their career progression possibilities.

Therefore, **when conceptualising internal strategic documents focusing on career (development) opportunities, it is necessary to ascertain whether the proposed solutions indeed result in equal opportunities for professional development and advancement for all groups of employees.** Such a critical analysis of the discussed frameworks must involve aspects related to gender, as oversight concerning them can easily result in solutions perpetuating inequalities instead of addressing them from the onset. In this context, mentorship programs deserve special attention, as efficient, longstanding and trust-based mentoring can significantly contribute to the growth of employees from underrepresented minorities, particularly gender minorities. It is equally important to create a possibility for mentoring to include aspects related to career planning in the context of parenthood.

Similarly, there is a need for complex **career support initiatives** for wom*n³ and people with various minority backgrounds. Strategies contributing to their career progression can focus, among others, on the participation in relevant workshops, trainings, or courses (for example concerning publishing and thus enhancing one's academic potential); the implementation of dual career support initiatives (in relation to group- as well as individual training opportunities); and the creation of consultation opportunities thematically focusing on the intersection of gender and career planning. Funding for these trainings, workshops, seminars, or career progression opportunities should be transparently discussed and based on specific individual needs. The implementation and maintenance of transparency in this process should be managed by an oversight body, whose composition will be discussed and described at a later stage.

2.7. Elimination of Gender-Based Discrimination and Harassment

The conceptualisation and implementation of the Centre's complex Gender Equity Plan consisting of various elements discussed throughout this document needs to take place within a social milieu anchored in a set of values, critically important for the establishment of a work culture conducive to the achievement of gender equity-related goals. A key aspect of this is a strong commitment to the elimination of all instances of gender-based discrimination and harassment at the Centre, whether currently existing or arising in the future.

A central practical aspect related to the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy for gender-based discrimination and harassment is well-functioning internal procedures and bodies allowing staff members not only to report situations of a problematic nature but also to have them addressed thoroughly and in the context of trust and confidentiality. Included here is a zero-tolerance policy for any kind of sexual harassment, including inappropriate comments, micro-aggressions, and physical altercations, amongst others.

This brings to the fore the strategic importance of such bodies as the Equality Unit and the Personnel Council. A widespread knowledge of their scope of competencies and respective procedures among staff members is crucial for the achievement of the aims mentioned above and therefore requires the implementation of practical solutions contributing to the awareness-rising among staff in relation to those bodies' importance within the Centre's institutional setup and work culture.

3. Implementation Strategies and Monitoring

****For the internal Implementation Plan please contact the current members of the Equality Unit.**

4. Ways Forward

The Gender Equity Plan was created to enshrine not only the values of an equitable working environment but also to provide a written reference point on how to implement and foster

³ Reflects gender-inclusive language.

an inclusive working environment. To reiterate, our understanding of equity acknowledges the multiple lived experiences and circumstances of staff at the ECMI. To achieve equity, we need to recognise and analyse the pre-existing inequalities that individuals face, because of their intersecting lived experiences. We have incorporated this understanding in the outlining of the goals and objectives of the plan. Specific implementation steps are highlighted in the internal Implementation Plan.

Going forward, the Gender Equity Plan will be reviewed by the Equality Unit once per year, with specific timeframes to be decided by the sitting Equality Unit. The purpose of this is to ensure that the goals and aspirations are reflexive of the changing needs of the ECMI staff. In addition, the implementation of the goals and objectives should also be re-examined to assess whether they remain feasible or should be updated to be more effective. Acknowledging the changing nature of the staff needs and fostering the creation of a more inclusive and diverse workplace that promotes a culture of care, the Gender Equity Plan, and the recommendations within, seek to enshrine a practical way forward.

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