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GENDER EQUALITY PLAN (GEC)

1. Introduction

The NeuroDev project is firmly committed to promoting gender equality, diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities across all project activities, institutional structures, research initiatives, and capacity-building actions. As a project funded under the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) programme, NeuroDev recognises gender equality as a fundamental European value and an essential component of academic excellence, innovation, social justice, and sustainable development.

Despite significant progress worldwide, gender inequalities remain evident in higher education, scientific research, academic leadership, healthcare professions, and decision-making processes. Women continue to face barriers affecting access to leadership positions, academic advancement, participation in research and innovation activities, and visibility within scientific communities. These challenges are often compounded by cultural, social, institutional, and structural factors.

The field of neurodevelopment and disability studies particularly requires a gender-sensitive approach. Biological sex and gender-related social determinants can influence diagnosis, access to healthcare, educational support, family experiences, treatment pathways, and research outcomes. Consequently, integrating a gender perspective enhances both the scientific quality and societal impact of the project's results.

This Gender Equality Plan (GEP) establishes a comprehensive framework to ensure that gender equality principles are systematically integrated into all dimensions of the NeuroDev project, including governance, management, research, training, dissemination, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, and institutional development.

The Plan is intended to serve not only as a project management tool but also as a catalyst for long-term institutional change within partner universities, healthcare institutions, research centres, and the three University Centers for Neurodevelopment (UCN) established under the project.

Research and knowledge generation are fundamental pillars for achieving effective gender equality. An inclusive scientific ecosystem not only guarantees academic excellence but also acts as an engine for innovation, capable of providing more precise solutions to societal challenges. Equality within the field of development is a strategic value and a universal human right; its integration ensures that scientific progress benefits all people in their diversity.

A neurodevelopment center committed to equality ensures that talent is distributed equitably, strengthening social well-being and economic growth. Only through bias-free science and a paritarian institutional structure can we lead technological and social advancements that are truly just, safe, and prosperous for all.

2. Purpose and scope of the Plan

This Gender Equality Plan establishes the framework through which the NeuroDev consortium promotes gender equality, diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities throughout the implementation of the project.

The Plan applies to all NeuroDev partners, project bodies, researchers, academic and administrative staff, students, external experts and stakeholders participating in project activities.

The Plan is intended to guide the project partners in fostering inclusive practices throughout project implementation while contributing to the long-term sustainability and impact of the UCNs established under the project.

3. Link with Erasmus+ Priorities

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This Plan contributes to the horizontal priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme, particularly Inclusion and Diversity, Equal Opportunities, Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality.

Through the implementation of the measures described in this document, NeuroDev aims to ensure inclusive participation, fair access to opportunities, and gender-sensitive approaches in education, research, healthcare and community engagement activities.

4. Implementation and Responsibilities

The implementation of this Plan shall be supported by the NeuroDev Gender Equality Committee in cooperation with the Project Coordinator, Steering Committee, Work Package Leaders and partner institutions.

This Gender Equality Plan was developed through the work of the NeuroDev Gender Equality Committee, established at the beginning of the project to support the integration of gender equality and inclusion principles across all project activities. The measures included in this Plan were discussed, reviewed and approved by the Committee and reflect the shared commitment of the NeuroDev consortium to promoting equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion.

All partners are encouraged to consider gender equality principles when planning, implementing and evaluating project activities.

5. Monitoring

Progress in the implementation of the Plan may be reviewed periodically during project meetings and quality assurance activities.

Partners are encouraged to share relevant good practices, challenges and lessons learned related to gender equality and inclusion during project implementation.

6. Gender Equality Action Framework

Composition and Leadership

- **Balance in Governance:** Establish by statute that the decision-making bodies of the research center (management, scientific boards) maintain gender parity.
- **Research Recruitment:** Design selection processes for researchers with criteria aimed at correcting gender imbalance in the field of neuroscience.

Research Design (Content)

- **The "Sex" Variable in Science:** Mandate that all research involving human or animal samples includes sex-disaggregated analysis to avoid the "male-as-norm" bias.

- **Neurodevelopment and Context:** Prioritize research lines that study how social determinants of gender affect mental and biological health.

Work Environment and Resources

- **Inclusive Infrastructure:** Physical spaces that account for work-life balance (lactation rooms, flexibility) and the safety of female researchers.
- **Earmarked Budget:** Reserve a specific portion of the center's budget to fund projects led by young women or to support those returning after care-related leave.

Communication and Scientific Visibility

- **Representation at Events:** Ensure that seminars, congresses, or panels organized by the center do not feature exclusively male speakers.
- **Authorship and Credit:** Conduct internal audits regarding authorship order in publications to ensure that the work of female researchers is recognized equitably.

Ethics and Prevention

- **Harassment Protocols:** Implement internal reporting mechanisms specifically designed for the research environment, where hierarchies are highly pronounced and can facilitate abuses of power.

Gender Impact Assessment in Institutional Decisions

Ensure major institutional decisions are reviewed through a gender lens

- Add a short “Gender Impact” section in governance decisions
- Assess whether policies (meeting hours, mobility requirements, workload expectations) disproportionately affect women

Capacity Building on Gender Bias

Continuous awareness of implicit bias in research, leadership, and evaluation processes

- Annual workshops on gender bias in recruitment, authorship, leadership
- Case-based discussions relevant to academic hierarchies

Inclusive Supervision Practices

Promote equitable supervision and reduce power asymmetries

- Short annual training for supervisors on fair feedback, avoiding gendered assumptions and managing maternity/care leave transitions

Structured Mentorship for Women Researchers

Support career progression and leadership pipeline for women

- Voluntary mentorship pairing junior women researchers with senior faculty (local or international)

Gender-Sensitive Workload Review

Prevent disproportionate assignment of "invisible" tasks to women

- Internal review of administrative and teaching distribution
- Transparent allocation of non-promotable tasks

Gender-Sensitive Participant Recruitment

Ensure equitable inclusion of women in research studies

- Balanced recruitment strategies
- Female researchers conducting interviews in sensitive contexts
- Flexible scheduling for participants with care duties

Protection Against Informal Decision-Making Exclusion

Prevent gendered exclusion through informal networks

- Formal documentation of strategic decisions
- Meeting minutes accessible to all members

Community Visibility of Women Scientists

Strengthen social legitimacy of women in science

- Highlight women researchers in public communications
- Outreach activities in schools promoting girls in STEM

7. Final Statement

NeuroDev recognizes that promoting gender equality is essential for ensuring excellence, inclusiveness and sustainability in higher education.

Through this Gender Equality Plan, the consortium reaffirms its commitment to fostering environments where all individuals have equal opportunities to participate, contribute and benefit from project activities.

This Plan reflects the collective work and agreement of the NeuroDev Gender Equality Committee, established at the beginning of the project, and represents the consortium's shared commitment to advancing gender equality and inclusion throughout all project activities.

The implementation of the measures outlined in this document will support the long-term development of inclusive institutional cultures within partner organizations and UCNs established under the project, contributing to the broader objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme and to sustainable social impact beyond the duration of the project.

The NeuroDev consortium remains committed to reviewing and promoting good practices in gender equality and inclusion throughout the project implementation period.

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