

ecdpm

Gender equality plan



Approved by ECDPM management
September 2025

1. Our commitment

ECDPM is dedicated to advancing gender equality. We see gender equality as the backbone of an inclusive and equitable work environment. In addition, we believe that a gender-sensitive approach to our policy research, dialogue and strategic engagement is not only a matter of rights, but also leads to more thorough research and analysis for sustainable and inclusive international cooperation.

Building on our [diversity and inclusion \(D&I\) strategy](#) and our gender marker (see Figure 1 on page 3) – developed and implemented by our D&I group and gender task force – this gender equality plan formalises our commitment to fostering an equitable workplace and delivering gender-sensitive policy research, dialogue and strategic engagement.

"Gender equality is not an add-on – it is central to our mission of an inclusive workplace and delivering gender-sensitive policy research, facilitating dialogue and fostering strategic engagement. This plan ensures we lead by example."

San Bilal, ECDPM executive director

ECDPM's work is guided by our [2022-2026 strategy](#), in which we dedicate particular attention to applying a gender lens to our workplace and work areas. ECDPM is currently drafting a new strategy (2027-2031) to ensure it remains fit for purpose in a rapidly evolving global context. The growing backlash against gender equality and women's rights, driven by the rise of authoritarian and nationalist agendas, has contributed to a weakening of political support for feminist foreign policies and a decline in funding for gender equality initiatives. These concerning trends will be considered in the development of our next strategy, which will reaffirm ECDPM's commitment to upholding and promoting gender equality as a core principle in our work and workplace.

2. Our structure

ECDPM is committed to being an equal opportunity employer and to promoting diversity and inclusion among our staff – irrespective of gender, age, nationality, race, culture, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or disability. We believe that a diverse, gender-balanced group of staff from Europe, Africa and beyond brings fresh perspectives, drives innovation and supports our mission to promote effective international cooperation through inclusive and sustainable solutions. To reflect this commitment, we strive to ensure that our staff, senior management and Supervisory Board reflect this diversity.

Our demographic data highlight the diversity of our staff. As of September 2024, 37 out of 59 staff members are women, and 22 are men. Among our staff, 4 are under 30, 36 are between 30 and 49, and 19 are over 50. Staff members from Europe total 50, while 9 staff members come from non-European countries. For an overview of how these numbers have developed over time, see Table 1.

Table 1. Staff demographics over time

Gender (# of all staff)	1 Jan 2022	30 Jun 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
Female	45	45	44	45	37
Male	19	21	22	24	22
Total	64	66	66	69	59

Generation (# of all staff)	1 Jan 2022	30 Jun 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
Age <30	11	10	10	11	4
Age 30–39	21	24	24	26	20
Age 40–49	15	14	14	13	16
Age 50–59	10	11	10	11	12
Age 60–65	7	7	8	8	7
Total	64	66	66	69	59

Geography (# of all staff)	1 Jan 2022	30 Jun 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
European	55	57	56	57	50
Non-European	9	9	10	12	9
Total	64	66	66	69	59

At ECDPM, we focus on:

1. Gender equality within our organisational structure. The D&I strategy guides this and falls under the leadership of our D&I group and our human resources (HR) department. The D&I group and HR department meet regularly and have adopted an internal action plan with practical steps to strengthen inclusivity within our workplace.

2. Gender equality within our work areas. ECDPM's gender marker, introduced in 2022, guides staff to improve the extent to which gender is addressed throughout their work. It promotes the use of a gender lens and helps staff rank their research according to five levels, from 'gender blind' to 'gender transformative' (see Figure 1). Our target is for all our work to rank at least 'gender sensitive'. We also integrate gender in our annual work plan and report on it in our [annual report](#).

Figure 1. ECDPM gender marker

Gender marker 	
Category	Description
Gender-blind 	Gender (the differentiated and intersectional experiences of women, men, and gender diverse groups) is not considered in the research project; not even in its conceptualisation or its rationale.
Gender-aware 	Gender is considered in the research project's rationale, but is not an operative concept in the design and methodology.
Gender-sensitive 	Gender is considered in the research project's rationale, project design and methodology. Data is disaggregated by gender, and gender is also considered in the composition of the research team and reviewers. Gender-sensitive research does not (yet) extend to analysis and action to address gender inequalities.
Gender-responsive 	Gender is considered in the research project's rationale, design, and methodology and is rigorously analysed with a view to inform implementation, communication, and influencing strategies. Gender-responsive research does not (yet) address the underlying structural factors such as norms and power relations that contribute to gender inequalities.
Gender-transformative 	Examines, analyses, and builds an evidence base to inform long-term practical changes in structural gender power relations and norms, roles and inequalities. Gender-transformative research should lead to sustained change through action (e.g. partnerships, outreach, and interventions, particularly with women's rights organisations).

Gender equality in our work is also embedded in our organisation-wide monitoring as one of seven 'critical success factors' tracked through our 'balanced scorecard', our internal reporting tool. While the management team is responsible and accountable for the critical success factors, individual departments, teams and/or staff members act as *sponsors* to drive and monitor the necessary changes envisioned through the tool. The success factor on gender equality is currently sponsored by a member of management.

Key decisions and resources

Gender equality within our organisational structure

In 2018, ECDPM undertook a gender equality survey and an internal management composition review. Both processes highlighted that staff shared a broad consensus on the meaning and importance of inclusion and diversity in relation to gender and on the concrete steps ECDPM could take to strengthen gender balance at all levels of the organisation. These processes led to 1) a new management structure consisting of a more diverse and inclusive leadership; and 2) the endorsement of our D&I strategy and internal action plan, to ensure an inclusive

work environment and create development opportunities for everyone.

Since then, we have applied a diversity and inclusion lens to all talent management decisions, executed our D&I action plan and continuously checked if we follow through on the commitments made in our internal reporting tool. Today, the D&I group is made up of committed individuals with diverse backgrounds in age, ethnicity, nationality, seniority and workstream affiliation.

Gender equality within our work

Following organisation-wide consultations on how to strengthen the integration of gender across ECDPM's various areas of work, in 2022 the management team adopted the note 'Incorporating the gender lens', which outlines six concrete steps to mainstream gender across the organisation. These include:

1. Integrating realistic gender-related ambitions when formulating theories of change for each workstream;
2. Ensuring all new job descriptions – particularly for associate directors, heads of workstream and senior fellows – include a clear gender mandate;
3. Establishing an organisation-wide gender coordinator role and designating gender focal points within each cluster;
4. Promoting the use of ECDPM's gender marker to assess and improve the gender-responsiveness of projects;
5. Incentivising workstreams to articulate specific, measurable objectives for gender integration over the short, medium and long term;
6. Introducing an organisation-wide accountability and learning system to track and drive progress on gender across all workstreams.

We have since appointed a gender coordinator, as well as gender focal points within each cluster to help implement our gender equality commitments. Together, they make up the gender task force, which also includes representatives from management and learning and quality teams. The task force has played an active role in advancing gender equality across the organisation, supported by a gender associate with extensive experience across different themes and regions.

The task force has dedicated funding that allows it to carry out its key activities. This includes supporting colleagues in mainstreaming gender throughout their work areas, monitoring commitments, networking and fundraising.

3. Our actions

3.1 Integrating gender into our organisation

Work-life balance and organisational culture

ECDPM is committed to fostering a working environment that supports the well-being of all staff by promoting a healthy work-life balance. We recognise that staff have diverse responsibilities and circumstances, and we seek to create conditions that enable all team members to thrive both professionally and personally.

ECDPM places great emphasis on supporting staff in maintaining a healthy work-life balance and in safeguarding their mental wellbeing. Staff have access to online resources, videos and in-person training on how to effectively balance their work and personal life. Staff members are also encouraged to participate in group and/or individual discussions with psychologists specialised in work culture, professional and personal development, mental wellbeing and work-life balance. Finally, supervisors are trained to proactively support staff in managing work-related stress, maintaining boundaries and ensuring their 'right to disconnect' is respected.

Table 2 below highlights our work-life balance measures.

Table 2: Pillars of our work-life balance measures

Pillar	Description	Indicators and measures
Parental leave policies	ECDPM offers parental leave in line with national legislation and strives to ensure that staff on fixed-term contracts are not disadvantaged as a result. Parental leave is discussed with the staff member's supervisor and the HR department. Management approves parental leave requests. ECDPM also provides 'special leave' and 'emergency leave' in specific cases, as well as 'care leave' to take care of a family member.	• All parental leave requests are granted in accordance with ECDPM policy and national law. • ECDPM tracks parental leave uptake by gender and contract type annually.
Flexible working hours	ECDPM supports flexible work arrangements, including part-time work, and hybrid or remote working options. Most staff members are based at our offices in Maastricht (the Netherlands) and Brussels (Belgium). However, we also have employees living in Italy, Germany and Luxembourg. Departmental procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure they do not disadvantage staff with caregiving responsibilities. Staff members are asked to come to the office twice a week (when possible), to foster team spirit and cohesion.	• Annual review of departmental procedures to assess inclusivity. • Staff survey results on satisfaction with flexibility options.

Workload management	ECDPM aims for a fair and transparent distribution of tasks across teams. Supervisors monitor workloads with programmed check-ins to avoid overburdening individuals, particularly those working part-time or with additional caregiving responsibilities. Check-ins are carried out at individual and team level. The role of the associate directors is to make sure that staff members' time is allocated fairly and individuals are not overloaded with tasks.	• Regular workload assessments as part of team planning processes. • Inclusion of workload discussions in biannual performance reviews. • Feedback mechanism for staff to raise workload concerns anonymously.
Reintegration after career breaks	Staff members returning from extended leave (for example, parental leave, sabbatical, or illness) are supported through tailored reintegration plans created by the supervisor and the HR department. These may include mentoring, phased returns and role redefinition where needed.	• All returning staff members are provided with reintegration support plans. • Monitoring of retention and career progression of staff post-leave. • Evaluation of reintegration satisfaction through follow-up check-ins.

Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

In 2021, ECDPM undertook a significant organisational restructuring aimed at enhancing our strategic orientation and decision-making capacity. This restructuring, which includes revised roles, responsibilities and positions, was designed to support our 2022–2026 strategy and introduced a new working framework. It also introduced clearer growth opportunities across different levels and embedded incentives to encourage staff development, performance and collaboration. As part of this transformation, we updated job descriptions and aligned salary levels accordingly, providing a more transparent and structured framework for talent management.

To implement our 2022–2026 strategy, we structured our work into nine thematic workstreams, organised under two clusters led by associate directors – one female and one male – ensuring gender balance at this strategic level. Of the nine workstreams, four are headed by women, four by men, and one has joint leadership by one female and one male colleague. Our management team comprises seven members – three women and four men – while our Supervisory Board includes two women (from Cameroon and Namibia) and four men (from Nigeria, Algeria and the Netherlands). These figures reflect our ongoing efforts to promote gender balance in leadership and decision-making roles across the organisation.

Table 3. ECDPM's organisational structure with decision-making roles: trends

Management team demographics

The tables below list the demographic statistics of the management team pre-fit for future – 31 December 2021 structure and post-fit for future – 1 January 2022 to 1 September 2024:

Gender (# of management staff)	31 Dec 2021	1 Jan 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
Female	3	5	5	4	4
Male	3	3	3	4	4
Total	6	8	8	8	8

Generation (# of management staff)	31 Dec 2021	1 Jan 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
Age 30-39	1	2	2	2	1
Age 40-49	2	3	2	1	2
Age 50-59	1	2	2	3	3
Age 60-65	2	1	2	2	2
Total	6	8	8	8	8

Geography (# of management staff)	31 Dec 2021	1 Jan 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
European	5	6	6	6	7
Non-European	1	2	2	2	1
Total	6	8	8	8	8

Head of programme / workstream head demographics

The tables below list the demographics of the programme heads management structure pre-fit for future – 31 December 2021, and the workstream heads structure post-fit for future – 1 January 2022 to 1 September 2024:

Gender (# of management staff)	31 Dec 2021	1 Jan 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
Female	2	5	5	5	6
Male	7	6	6	6	5
Total	9	11	11	11	11

Generation (# of management staff)	31 Dec 2021	1 Jan 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
Age 30-39	1	6	6	7	6
Age 40-49	3	3	3	3	5
Age 50-59	2	1	1		
Age 60-65	3	1	1	1	
Total	9	11	11	11	11

Geography (# of management staff)	31 Dec 2021	1 Jan 2022	1 Jan 2023	1 Sep 2023	1 Sep 2024
European	9	10	10	10	9
Non-European		1	1	1	2
Total	9	11	11	11	11

Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

As part of ECDPM's new organisational structure, ECDPM is committed to ensuring that recruitment and career progression processes actively promote gender equality. This includes systematically reviewing job descriptions, salary scales and promotion criteria to identify and address potential gender biases, and ensuring equal access to advancement opportunities for all staff, regardless of gender.

When we decide which candidates to invite for job interviews, we ensure we invite the candidates with a diverse background in case of equal suitability (matching with the job specifications). We also ensure we have a 'mixed' (gender/geography/generation) selection panel in place.

Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

ECDPM has a zero-tolerance policy for gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in the workplace. ECDPM has an established code of conduct to ensure that all staff, and any other relevant party, acts with respect towards each other, as well as to ensure that all staff feel safe and valued in their working environment. The code of conduct sets out guiding principles that all staff members and other associated parties should apply when working in line with ECDPM's values, including integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

The code of conduct also defines various terms to assist in identifying (unacceptable) behaviours in the workplace, so that staff can recognise and prevent them. These terms include: inappropriate behaviour, harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, aggression, and violence and bullying.

Finally, the code of conduct outlines steps for reporting inappropriate behaviour, following our whistleblowing policy. Matters can be reported to an integrity advisor, the HR department, management or the Supervisory Board. ECDPM has also appointed two trust persons who function as confidential advisors to staff in all matters. A policy for the trust persons is in place, which ensures proper training of the appointed person and guidelines on reporting wrongdoings. The trust persons report at least once a year to management. Their report is also shared with the Board and ECDPM's works council, which represents staff on a variety of matters, especially personnel policy and employment conditions.

3.2 Integrating gender in our work

Integration of the gender dimension into research

Under the leadership of the gender task force, we have made steady progress in integrating gender into our research processes. Our work on gender is

cross-cutting, meaning we address gender across all our activities and thematic work areas. A key milestone was the adoption of the gender marker (see Figure 1 on page 4).

The gender marker and other resources

Our gender marker, launched in 2022, is part of a set of tools and resources that the gender task force has developed to support staff in operationalising gender integration. In 2022, the task force organised an internal training session, accompanied by case examples, to familiarise staff with the use of the gender marker.

The task force also created a repository of training opportunities, and the gender focal points completed an advanced four-month training course on gender mainstreaming. They subsequently shared key learnings with the rest of the Centre through internal documents, including a guidance note for the D&I group and a practical note on gender analysis. In March 2025, they organised an organisation-wide training on gender analysis.

The gender focal points and coordinator also started tracking all ECDPM publications between January and June of each year to assess how gender has been addressed in publications and provides constructive feedback to authors.

Cluster discussions on our gender publication tracker results provided space to explore additional ways to strengthen our gender commitments. The gender task force also reviews the theories of change for each workstream on an annual basis, and has noted improvements in terms of how gender is addressed.

Staff engagement and examples of progress

Gender mainstreaming among staff has grown. The gender marker is increasingly used in project design and implementation. Gender has become a more consistent topic in internal discussions, such as regular agenda items in cluster team meetings. Staff members – including the gender focal points – have also gained experience working on gender-specific components in projects.

In particular, in 2023 we saw a notable improvement in gender-sensitivity in our publications compared to 2022. Table 4 below shows a clear increase in gender aware, sensitive, responsive and transformative publications compared to the previous year. Our gender aware publications, in particular, doubled, reflecting a significant improvement in our experts' attention to gender in their research and in team meetings. This encouraging trend continued in 2024, with a corresponding decline in gender blind publications.

In 2024, we also created an [online gender dossier](#), which shows our public work on gender, and provides an overview of how we address gender internally. Gender-responsive and gender-transformative publications are also flagged as such on our website (see an example of [gender-responsive](#) and [gender-transformative](#) publications).

Finally, between 2023 and 2024 we released two seasons of our podcast series on gender, called '[Minding the gap: Conversations on gender](#)'. Using feminist and intersectional lenses, we spoke to researchers, activists and experts working in Europe, Africa and the MENA region. We touched on topics spanning gender in development, migration, climate action, food security, counter-terrorism and masculinities, with the purpose of learning from successful local lessons and pointing out gaps and obstacles still in place.

Table 4. Trends of publications tracked against our gender publication marker (2022–2024)

Gender marker category	Publications					
	Jan – Jun 2022		Jan – Jun 2023		Jan – Jun 2024	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender-blind: Gender is not addressed at all in the publication.	32	82	19	50	11	33%
Gender-aware: Gender is considered in a limited way in the publication, as part of context and data analysis; but does not contain rigorous analysis of the issues. Gender does not feature in the recommendations. There are several clear options to mainstream gender that were missed.	4	10%	9	24%	17	52%
Gender-sensitive: Gender is considered in the publication, as part of context and data analysis, and includes an analysis of gender relevant issues within the topic area. Gender is mainstreamed for example through dedicated chapters, boxes, or graphs and visual elements. Gender does not feature in the recommendations.	1	3%	3	8%	2	6%
Gender-responsive: Gender is one of the main topics of the publication, and gender is included as part of context and data analysis. The publication includes a more rigorous analysis of gender relevant dynamics within the topic area. Gender is included in the recommendations in a limited way.	0	0%	4	10%	3	9%
Gender-transformative: Gender is the main topic area considered in the publication. Gender is mainstreamed through the publication, from analysis to recommendations. The publication analyses the underlying dynamics and structural factors around gender in the selected topic area.	2	5%	3	8%	0	0%
Total	39	100%	38	100%	33	100%

4. Our actions for the near future

While we have taken important steps to advance gender equality in our organisational culture and ways of working, challenges remain, particularly in fully

embedding gender equality into our research processes.

In practice, gender focal points continue to support colleagues in applying a gender lens to their work, while also managing their primary responsibilities. However, limited time, resources and in-house expertise – combined with a lack of structured incentives – pose challenges to the consistent and meaningful integration of gender across our research. As a result, gender considerations are sometimes treated as secondary, and research outputs may not adequately reflect gender dynamics or inequalities.

Without sufficient investment in staff training – ranging from basic gender mainstreaming to more advanced practices such as feminist evaluation – progress may depend too heavily on the motivation of a few individuals, rather than being embedded as a shared institutional responsibility.

To overcome these challenges and strengthen our commitment to gender equality in both our research and organisational practices, ECDPM will:

1. Maintain institutional leadership and ensure accountability

In practice, this means ensuring consistent management-level communication on gender equality commitments and progress, in particular in light of the development of our next strategy. We will also continue stressing that gender integration is a shared responsibility across all staff and leadership levels, not only of gender focal points. Finally, we will develop mechanisms for accountability, such as feedback loops or follow-up procedures when gender integration is weak or absent in our research publications.

2. Continue identifying incentives for gender integration

We will introduce concrete incentives for staff to apply a gender lens to their work. This could include recognising and highlighting good practices in organisation-wide monitoring, meetings and communication; creating space for staff to consistently share experiences on applying a gender lens to foster a sense of community and support; incentivising staff to undertake gender-related trainings; and creating opportunities for hands-on learning through involvement in gender-specific projects or partnerships. We will also ensure adequate time and resource allocation for gender focal points to fulfil their roles, including more explicitly budgeting for gender-related activities throughout the research implementation.

3. Enhance the use and uptake of our gender tools

We will continue to promote consistent use of the gender marker and related tools across all phases of the research process, potentially organising refreshers and

practical sessions using real cases to demonstrate how to apply the marker effectively. We will also encourage staff to consult gender focal points early on in project cycles and integrate their feedback meaningfully.

4. Continue fostering cultural change and wider engagement

We will continue to facilitate open conversations on gender equality and its relevance to ECDPM's work and improve our qualitative reporting on gender integration in workstream theories of change to inform both internal learning and external visibility. We will also continue reporting on our achievements, challenges and goals in our 'balanced scorecard', which also serves as a repository and tracking tool.