



against child poverty and social exclusion

Gender Equality Plan 2025-2027



Title

Gender Equality Plan

Institution:

ProChild CoLAB - Against Poverty and Social Exclusion

Year:

2025

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1. Framework

The integration of gender equality and non-discrimination, in an intersectional perspective¹, is one of the pillars to ensure fairer, more cohesive and sustainable social, institutional or family environments.

The implementation of a **Gender Equality Plan** at ProChild CoLAB is, in itself, a strategic milestone in line with our mission to intervene in the area of childhood and intentionally in the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. Our Equality Plan thus aligns with the main guidelines set out in the **National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination – Portugal + Igual (ENIND) 2018-2030**, which determines as a cross-cutting priority the elimination of structural inequalities and gender stereotypes, particularly those related to dominant areas such as education, research or civic participation. For ProChild CoLAB, whose ultimate objective is to contribute to the development of public policies with social impact, it is essential that gender equality is also an internal reality and that it is reflected in those who make up the Collaborative Laboratory.

At the same time, this plan aims to meet the criteria of **Horizon Europe**, which determines that all entities wishing to participate in European funding and collaboration channels must have developed and implemented their Gender Equality Plan. This requirement aims to promote structural and cultural actions within organizations to achieve equitable opportunities, the recognition of excellence regardless of gender, as well as the recognition and appreciation of the diversity of those engaged in research and development (R&D) activities. In this sense, this document meets the criteria of **publication, dedication of resources, data collection and monitoring, and training and development**. It also organizes its action plan according to the areas considered to be priorities² - **Leadership and decision-making, Recruitment, Selection and Career Progression, Gender mainstreaming in research and training, and Gender Biases and Stereotypes, Sexism and Harassment** -, articulating them with its axes of action in a transversal way.

¹ *Intersectionality* is a concept from feminist and anti-discrimination studies that recognizes that social inequalities result from the overlapping of factors such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation or disability. It is based on an inclusive gender vision, which contemplates all identities and expressions and goes beyond the man/woman binary, addressing different layers of exclusion and privilege in an integrated way.

² We highlight that the priority areas identified respond to the eligibility criteria of a gender equality plan of the Horizon Europe funding program identified by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) in its Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) action toolbox. In this sense, even though this plan has adopted an intersectional and diversity perspective, the names of the areas remain in accordance with these assumptions. Recommendations available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/horizon-europe-gep-criterion>

In short, the **ProChild CoLAB Gender Equality Plan** is an instrument of organizational transformation, providing a commitment to a culture that promotes inclusion, equity and well-being.

2. Characterization of the institution

ProChild CoLAB - Against Poverty and Social Exclusion is a collaborative laboratory, recognized by FCT since 2018, which aims to contribute to the fight against child poverty and social exclusion through the production of applied scientific knowledge and the development of evidence-based solutions to support professionals and influence public policies. It stands out for its holistic and transdisciplinary approach, combining social intervention with technological innovation.

It is thus a multidisciplinary research entity that integrates 2 strategic and articulated areas: (1) Social Intervention including 4 R&D&I Units: Health and Well-being; Development and Education; Social Participation, Citizenship and Gender Equality; Protection from Violence, Exploitation, Abuse and Neglect; and (2) Technological Development and Biology. It also articulates two areas of knowledge transfer: ProChild Academy® and the Childhood Observatory ProChild Data.

a. Mission, Vision and Objectives

The mission of ProChild CoLAB is to develop a strategy against child poverty and social exclusion, framed in a transdisciplinary scientific approach, articulating the public and private sectors, both at the economic and social interface, promoting children's development, well-being and contributing to public policies to stand upon their rights. Its main objectives include the need to implement, evaluate, and validate evidence-based intervention programs and models to break the cycle of poverty and promote the development, well-being, and rights of children, as well as to contribute to the formulation of science-based guidelines and recommendations for local and national public policies.

These objectives are articulated to respond to the ambition of ProChild CoLAB to be the national reference institution for the study and development of integrated and effective solutions to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and to promote children's development, well-being and rights.

b. Values

ProChild CoLAB advocates 7 transversal values that characterize its performance and its distinctive character as a collaborative laboratory and reference entity for R&D&I in the social area and intervention with the children's ecosystem:

People, qualifications and competence

We value the individual, their well-being, and their professional development, respecting their individuality. In this sense, we encourage each individual to become increasingly qualified and competent, promoting the talent of each one.

Ethical integrity and transparency

We commit to our ethical principles and strive to act with integrity. We promote an environment of openness and transparency, respecting diversity, through sharing and debating individual views to make the best decisions.

Collaboration and Mutual Assistance

We guide ourselves by a collaborative and transdisciplinary approach, aiming to find the best solutions with our Associates and Partners, whose objectives we value and respect. Mutual assistance, sharing, and individual support will enable us to excel. We learn from each other's skills, knowledge, and diverse perspectives to implement the best ideas.

Inclusion and Independence

In our actions, we do not distinguish nationalities, cultures, social conditions, age, genders, religious beliefs, or other characteristics. We guide our activity by scrupulously respecting human rights, ethical principles and norms, and the law. We are open to cooperating with other entities, seeking to contribute to the development of public policies, always in a position of independence from political parties and political power, both central and local.

Innovation and Scientific Excellence

Our actions are based on transdisciplinary research, development, and innovation (R&D+I) in the field of childhood poverty and social exclusion. We see science and innovation as differentiating factors and, therefore, anticipate the future by creating cutting-edge solutions with significant social impact.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

We seek to optimize the use of resources and maximize their return, avoiding any kind of waste. We focus our action on effectiveness and efficiency, as well as on the development and implementation of high-impact ideas and projects.

Ambition and Sustainability

Ambition arises from the continuous establishment of constructive goals that test the limits and stimulate the vitality of ProChild CoLAB. We aim to realize our vision and mission by building a collaborative network of people and entities, ideas and projects, in a constant challenge of continuous improvement and ensuring sustainability. We are proactive in seeking new ideas, projects, and creating social and economic value, aiming to ensure our sustainability, notably through the optimization of our products and services.

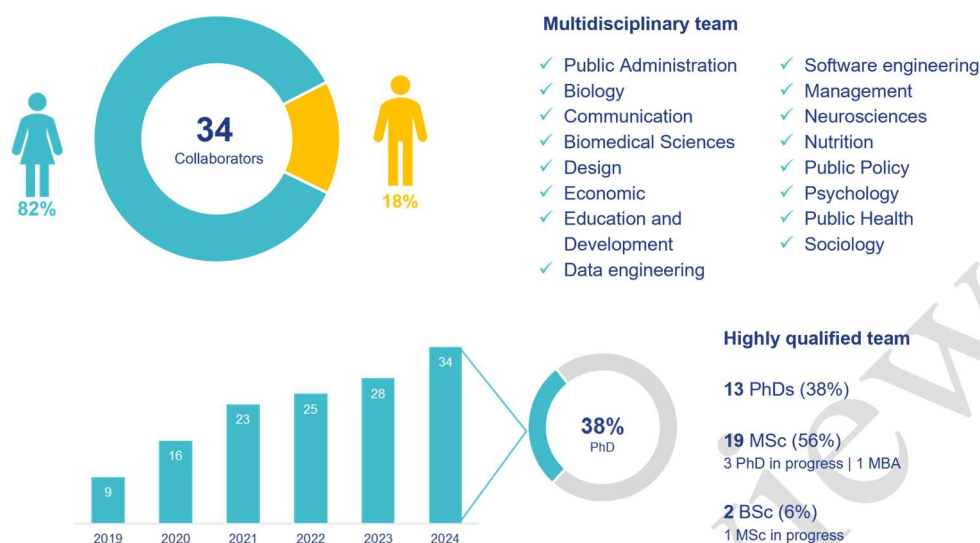
c. Indicators relating to staff

The ProChild CoLAB, in 2025, has a human resources structure that is guided by high qualification and renunciation of precariousness in science.

According to the 2024 activity report, ProChild CoLAB has 34 employees, with 82% of employees being women and 18% being men. Of these, 38% have PhDs, 56% have master's degrees (of which 6 are pursuing PhDs), and 6% have bachelor's degrees. The team is mostly young, with an average age of 36. Most employees are Portuguese nationals, with some being Brazilian or Belgian nationals. The team is mainly based in northern Portugal, but there are also employees living in the central and southern parts of the country. In 2024, ProChild CoLAB increased its staff structure by 21%, doing so under its own funding and various competitive funding mechanisms.

In addition to qualification, ProChild CoLAB is a structure with a diversity of backgrounds, although mostly within the Social Sciences and Humanities: Public Administration, Biology, Communication, Biomedical Sciences, Design, Economics, Education and Development, Data Engineering, Software Engineering, Social Entrepreneurship, Management, Neurosciences, Nutrition, Public Policy, Psychology, Public Health or Sociology.

Figure 1 : ProChild CoLAB Human Resources Characterization in 2024



In addition, in 2024 alone, Prochild CoLAB, through the ProChild® Academy and in collaboration with senior lecturers and researchers, supervised 38 students, including 18 master's students (18 women, 0 men), 10 doctoral students (9W, 1M), 3 professional interns (2W, 1M), 6 curricular interns (4W, 2M), and 1 research contract (1W)³. It also maintained its partnership with Avans University of Applied Sciences to facilitate internships under the ERASMUS+ Program. These students and interns are essential to ProChild CoLAB's R&D Agenda, providing a unique environment for learning and practical development.

3. Diagnosis of practices implemented in the ProChild CoLAB that promotes gender equality

The diagnosis phase is essential for the elaboration of a plan for equality that is coherent and consistent with the dynamics of the organization, while effectively responding to the concerns and needs of the people who compose it.

In this sense, we carry out two main types of data collection:

1. Analysis of key internal documents and procedures.
2. Privileged data collection.

³ It was not possible to break down this data further as the information was not available.

Among the main documents, the Ethics Charter, the Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Internal Regulations of the Ethics Council of ProChild CoLAB stand out. But also, more operational documents such as the Policy for the Promotion of Children's Rights and the 2024 Activity Report⁴.

This second element included two focus groups and an interview with the ProChild CoLAB coordination⁵. Both moments were focused around the main topics of reference in the preparation of this type of plans. In particular, a) reconciliation between work and family life and organisational culture; b) gender balance in leadership and decision-making; c) gender equality in recruitment and career progression; d) gender mainstreaming in research and training; and (e) measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

The focus groups took place online, lasted around 75 minutes, and had between six and eight participants, respectively. In total, 40% of the ProChild CoLAB team took part, with almost all areas of Social Intervention, Technological Development, and Biology represented. Approximately 93% of the people who participated in these groups identified themselves as female, all of whom were highly qualified. Among them were people of various age groups, with a predominance of people between 25 and 34 years of age. For reasons of confidentiality, given the total size of the team, no other characteristics or membership details will be provided. Finally, it is worth noting the good level of adherence to the coordination of the Axes, which is a very positive sign for the whole process.

In general, the discussions articulated the concern with the importance that the organizational culture and the social context have in the maintenance and reification of some asymmetries and binarisms, namely in terms of social roles that are still very traditional and penalizing for women.

“In matters (...) related to work. I think there is still a big discrepancy in terms of what is expected of each gender, even though there may be understanding within family and couple life; when we move on to other dimensions. I think there is still a significant bias in the attribution of certain roles, mainly to women. And not to men, and I think that this can then translate into inequality... that both are expected to do the same things, when in fact there is an overload here that I think still penalizes women, even though there may already be an understanding...” (Woman)

⁴ The 2024 Activity Report was consulted as this is the last report prior to the existence of this Gender Equality Plan.

⁵ Both the interview and the focus groups took place after the clarification of any doubts and the signing of the free and informed consent of all people.

Another common theme was the idea that initiatives to reflect on issues of equity are positive, but should be guided by the principle of *'fix the culture'* rather than *'fix the individuals'*, which tends to hold each person individually responsible for change rather than promoting structural and effectively transformative changes.

"It refers to very specific issues, which is the organizational responsibility, of organizations to put strategies and processes into action that guarantee this equality, doesn't it?" (Woman)

More specifically, they also referred to the gender bias inherent in the fact that there are more female professionals in the social sciences and humanities and more male professionals in technology, a situation that is reflected in human resources.

"I think this also stems from initial training, doesn't it? Our fields are more naturally... I mean, that's how it is, isn't it? And many more women than men are trained in these fields. And then, obviously, this is also reflected in the job market." (Woman)

Another element that stands out is the importance of reinforcing equity and not necessarily equality or similarity between all people. The importance of providing adequate means for equal opportunities and rights was reflected, rather than an agnostic typology of procedures that do not always meet the needs felt.

"The very concept of gender equality may be permeable to some discussion here: equality, by itself, is not... Isn't more equity that we seek? The word gender itself, is it really gender that we are talking about? In this logic of roles or if we are talking about sex... We tend to be here talking about men and women." (Woman)

Another nuance of this topic brought the importance of going beyond the male/female binary and integrating an intersectional perspective and valuing diversity. To this end, it is suggested the integration of these principles into future internal policies and special attention to issues of language and inclusive and diverse communication (internal and external).

"(...) 20 years ago, I think it would have a more immediate response, because talking about gender equality... Today it is questioning what are the roles assigned to gender in the first place? Before talking about equality, isn't it? And think: What is expected today in relation to gender roles? (...) I think this is more complex" (Woman)

Finally, the need to prevent possible situations of violence or harassment and the establishment of a zero-tolerance policy that can safeguard the maintenance of the quality of current relationships in the face of the expansion of the team was unanimous.

"(...) it is not that it is a priority, but ... It is always a priority because it is a very delicate situation. When it happens, it is good that there are clear measures on what to do" (Woman)

It is worth noting the atmosphere of trust and comfort that characterised the discussions in both sessions and which allowed for the breadth and richness of the exchanges.

The conclusions drawn informed the proposals included in the action plan below.

4. Gender Equality Action Plan

In response to the diagnosis made and the priorities outlined, we present the Gender Equality Action Plan. This plan sets out a path of concrete measures that we propose to implement by the end of 2027.

Our goal is clear: to promote equity among employees, eradicate all forms of discrimination, and cultivate an organizational culture that values inclusion and respects diversity in all its forms.

The proposed initiatives are structured according to priority areas of intervention⁶, setting specific deadlines and identifying those responsible for implementing the actions, the resources to be involved, and indicators to monitor their effective implementation. This action plan thus translates the guidelines for transformation into tangible results. It will enable continuous monitoring of progress and allow for the necessary adjustments to be made to ensure consistent integration of the gender perspective in all areas of ProChild CoLAB's work.

⁶ As mentioned in footnote 2, we have kept the names proposed in the eligibility criteria for a gender equality plan by the Horizon Europe funding program.

a. Work-life balance and organisational culture

ACTIONS	RESPONSABILITIES	ASSESSMENT INDICATOR(S)	TIMELINE
To publicly commit to promoting gender equality	Coordination Communication	Dissemination, in the main communication channels, of the Gender Equality Plan Availability on the website	2025
To review the guidelines for the implementation of work flexibility measures (e.g., mandatory fixed face-to-face days equal and in a row)	Coordination Board of Directors	Report published	Beginning 2026
To monitor and evaluate the implementation of flexible working hours and hybrid working arrangements	Coordination HR/Administrative	Percentage of workers with flexible hours and hybrid work arrangements Organization of at least one discussion session on the feasibility of other flexible working measures	Annually
To create an internal guide to good work-life balance practices, including work-life balance measures that respect various care needs (e.g. ascendants, descendants...) and accompaniment on returning to work after long-term leave	Coordination HR/Administrative Communication	Guide published and disseminated Integration into the onboarding process	2027
To implement an awareness-raising session on gender and work-life balance	Equality Working Group (WG) Coordination	Percentage of participation Satisfaction rating	2027
To implement an awareness-raising session/workshop on inclusive language	Equality Working Group (WG) Coordination	Percentage of participation Satisfaction rating	2026
To provide a reference document on the integration and use of inclusive language	Equality Working Group (WG) Coordination	Document published and disseminated	2026 (After 1st awareness-raising action/workshop)

b. Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

ACTIONS	RESPONSABILITIES	ASSESSMENT INDICATOR(S)	TIMELINE
To reinforce the commitment to diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organization	Coordination Equality Working Group (WG)	Formal presentation of the Gender Equality Plan to the ProChild Team	2025
		Nomination of the Equality WG	2025
		Publication of monitoring reports on the evolution of diversity indicators (disaggregated)	Annually
		Publication of the final evaluation report of the Plan	End of 2027
To develop internal awareness actions on inclusive leadership and combating unconscious bias	Equality WG Coordination HR/Administrative	Percentage of participation Satisfaction rating	2026
To monitor pay differences for the same roles and opportunities for advancement within the organization.	Coordination HR/Administrative	Publication of annual reports	Annually
To monitor gender and diversity indicators in decision-making structures	Equality WG	Infographic published with disaggregated data	Annually

c. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

ACTIONS	RESPONSABILITIES	ASSESSMENT INDICATOR(S)	TIMELINE
To review recruitment and progression processes through a gender lens	Equality WG Coordination HR/Administrative	Revised procedure disclosed	2026
To collect and publish data disaggregated by gender and other diversity indicators in hiring	Coordination HR/Administrative	Report with gender indicators	Annually
Create strategies to attract applications with greater gender diversity and other diversity indicators in certain areas, without discriminating—for example, by diversifying channels and formats for dissemination.	Equality WG Coordination Communication	Elaboration of a strategic action plan	2026

d. Gender mainstreaming in research and training

ACTIONS	RESPONSABILITIES	ASSESSMENT INDICATOR(S)	TIMELINE
To create a gender mainstreaming <i>checklist</i> in research and intervention projects	Equality WG Coordination Axis Coordinators	Checklist finalized and distributed	By the end of the 1st Semester 2026
To provide technical support to incorporate gender analysis into projects	Equality WG Axis Coordinators	Number of projects with integrated gender analysis	Continuous
To promote a workshop on gender mainstreaming in research	Equality WG Coordination	Percentage of participation Satisfaction rating	2027
To monitor data on gender mainstreaming in research and intervention	Equality WG Coordination	Statistical reporting based on the use of the checklist	Annually (after checklist is available)
To ensure that the training content and initiatives of the ProChild Academy® respect the principles of equality	Equality WG Coordination Axis Coordinators	Analysis of the gender dimension in the annual activity report Availability of disaggregated data on ProChild Academy® <i>actions</i>	Annually
To make available, when possible, sex-disaggregated indicators and/or other relevant categories in the <i>ProChild Data Observatory</i>	Equality WG ProChild Data Coordination	Verification of the online availability of disaggregated indicators	Annually

e. Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

ACTIONS	RESPONSABILITIES	ASSESSMENT INDICATOR(S)	TIMELINE
To develop a specific policy and procedures - code of conduct - for preventing, reporting and following up on cases of harassment and discrimination	Equality WG Coordination Ethics Council Board of Directors Legal Support	Internal policy and procedures published and disseminated	2026
To provide a confidential reporting channel and response protocol	Equality WG Coordination Ethics Council Board of Directors Legal Support	Evidence of the existence of a Channel and response protocol	2026

To conduct training on ethics, diversity and inclusion, focusing on leadership, existing policies and procedures.	Equality WG Ethics Council	Percentage of participation Satisfaction rating	2026 - 2027 (after availability of internal policy and procedure)
To promote regular awareness-raising and training actions on gender-based violence and harassment.	Equality WG Coordination	Percentage of participation Satisfaction rating	Annually

5. Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

Constant monitoring and evaluation of this Plan are essential for its implementation, enabling progress to be verified and, if necessary, modifications to be made.

A Working Group (WG) will be set up with the objective of monitoring and reporting annually the progress indicators that are part of the plan, as well as preparing its update at the end of the period of validity. This WG is intended to be a dynamic mechanism that provides transparency, accountability and progressive adjustments of institutional practices in gender equality.

More generally, there will also be a more detailed evaluation at the end of the cycle (2027) where an analysis of the implementation will be carried out, but also of the effectiveness and progress of the measures and objectives outlined. This report will include, whenever possible, qualitative and quantitative data that will allow the review of the plan to be leveraged and the design of a new version for a new cycle of action.

Finally, with the objective of a successful implementation, we foresee some risks and impacts arising from the identified actions and present a proposal for their mitigation:

IDENTIFIED RISK	POTENTIAL IMPACT	MITIGATION MEASURES
Lack of commitment from institutional leadership	Blocking the implementation of strategic actions and loss of legitimacy of the plan	Continuous awareness of management and integration of equality into institutional objectives
Lack of human and financial resources	Delays or failures in the implementation of planned actions	Mobilize resources and mobilize external financing where possible

Resistance of the internal organizational culture to the proposed changes	Low team buy-in and poor effectiveness of actions	Training, clear communication of objectives and involvement of teams in the co-construction of actions
Incomplete or uncollected data	Difficulty in assessing and monitoring progress	Define clear data collection protocols and responsibilities
Low participation in training or awareness-raising activities	Reduced impact on organizational culture and team behaviour	Make actions mandatory for management positions and integrate them into the continuing training plan
Discontinuity due to organizational changes	Interruption of actions and loss of continuity	Formalize the plan and commitments in institutional documents and internal regulations

6. Final Remarks

Over the next two and a half years, ProChild CoLAB is committed, through this Gender Equality Plan, to review its procedures and to adjust, whenever necessary, to more equitable practices:

"We know that the sustainability and excellence of our impact depend on practices guided by integrity, equity and mutual respect. We reinforce, with a policy of gender equality, our commitment to create an inclusive environment, where everyone has fair opportunities for development and recognition." (Woman)

This commitment will mainly involve the adaptation and dissemination of informal practices and routines already underway in the Laboratory, but also the development and adaptation to specific mechanisms. Of note is the reinforcement in the disaggregation of data and indicators already collected, but also a commitment to transversal training and of all hierarchical levels that effectively enhances gender integration in internal and external activities.

By the end of 2027, with these 24 measures, it is expected, therefore, to strengthen coherent and sustainable work and cooperation bases, aiming to strengthen its role as a reference in terms of good integration and equity practices.

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against child poverty and social exclusion