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Gender Equality Plan

2026 - 2030

ProChild CoLAB

AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Placing children
first, building
stronger families
and a more equal
society

Prochild
laboratório colaborativo

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1. SCOPE

The regime established by this regulation applies to all employees working at ProChild CoLAB, with an employment relationship, regardless of the place of work where they perform their duties, whatever their nature, and who travel on duty on behalf of ProChild CoLAB, outside their usual place of work.

The provisions contained in this regulation shall also apply to all associate and partner members, and their employees, inserted in ProChild CoLAB, under the terms previously authorized in writing by the ProChild CoLAB Board.

2. 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

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.

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.

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.

3. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE INSTITUTION

ProChild CoLAB – Against Poverty and Social Exclusion is a collaborative laboratory, recognised by the FCT since 2018, whose mission is to promote child development and well-being through a collaborative, transdisciplinary scientific approach involving the public, private and social sectors, creating innovative solutions with high added value and a high level of technological integration, and promoting the capacity-building and coordination of institutions, services and responses. Our mission aims to strengthen the social and economic fabric and contribute to public policies geared towards promoting children's rights and eradicating poverty and social exclusion in childhood.

The ProChild CoLAB seeks to promote effective social change in the country by placing the early years at the heart of research and innovation, and by identifying three complementary areas of action as strategic priorities:

- Family and educational contexts, encompassing nurseries, childminders and pre-schools, and their links with the family, with an emphasis on the training of professionals and the holistic development of the child;
- Health and wellbeing contexts, promoting children's development and growth, with a focus on mental health, public health, the effects of bio-psycho-social adversity, and the creation of cross-sectoral responses for early childhood;

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>

- Promotion and protection contexts, with a focus on foster care and integrated responses in the areas of transition to adoption, family reunification, family preservation and parenting.

In all these contexts, the incorporation of technology and digitalisation are cross-cutting drivers of action, fostering innovation in responses, data collection and analysis, and the development of scalable solutions.

The ProChild CoLAB also comprises two knowledge transfer units, the ProChild Academy® and the ProChild Data Observatory – key structures designed to ensure the promotion, dissemination and application of the scientific knowledge produced by ProChild CoLAB.

a) Mission, Vision and Objectives

ProChild CoLAB's mission is to promote childhood development and well-being through a collaborative, transdisciplinary scientific approach involving the public, private, and social sectors, creating innovative solutions with high added value and fostering the capacity-building and coordination of institutions, services, and responses. Our mission aims to strengthen the social and economic fabric and contribute to public policies focused on promoting children's rights and eradicating poverty and social exclusion in childhood. 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 2025 activity report, ProChild CoLAB has 36 employees, with 83% of employees being women and 17% being men. Of these, 30,5% have PhDs, 64% have master's degrees (of which 10 are pursuing PhDs), and 5,5% 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 6%, 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, Psychomotor Rehabilitation, Public Health or Sociology.

Figure 1: ProChild CoLAB Human Resources Characterization in 2025



In addition, in 2025 alone, Prochild CoLAB, through the ProChild Academy® and in collaboration with senior lecturers and researchers, supervised 33 students, including 12 master's students (11 women, 1 men), 11 doctoral students (10W, 1M), 3 professional interns (3W, 0M), and 7 curricular interns (5W, 2M). 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.

4. 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.

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 2025 Activity Report.

This second element included two focus groups and an interview with the ProChild CoLAB coordination³. 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 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)

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.

³ 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.

"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.

5. 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 2030.

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 intervention⁴, 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.

⁴ 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 | 2026 |
| 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 | 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 | 2026 |
| | | Nomination of the Equality WG | 2026 |
| | | Publication of monitoring reports on the evolution of diversity indicators (disaggregated) | Annually |
| | | Publication of the final evaluation report of the Plan | 2030 |
| To develop internal awareness actions on inclusive leadership and combating unconscious bias | Equality WG Coordination HR/Administrative | Percentage of participation Satisfaction rating | 2027 |
| 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 | 2027 |
| To collect and publish data disaggregated by gender and other diversity indicators in hiring | Coordination HR/Administrative | Report with gender indicators | Annually |
| To 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 | 2028 |

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 2027 |
| 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 | 2028 |
| 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 | 2028 |
| 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 | 2028 |

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| To conduct training on ethics, diversity and inclusion, focusing on leadership, existing policies and procedures. | Equality WG Ethics Council | Percentage of participation | 2028 - 2029 (after availability of internal policy and procedure) |
| | | Satisfaction rating | |
| To promote regular awareness-raising and training actions on gender-based violence and harassment. | Equality WG Coordination | Percentage of participation | Annually |
| | | Satisfaction rating | |

6. 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 (2030) 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 |

7. 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 2030, 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.

8. DOCUMENT HISTORY

| Version no. | Version review content | Date | Chapters | Author(s) | Approval |
|-------------|------------------------|------------|----------|---|----------|
| 0.0 | Initial Elaboration | 2026.04.10 | All | Sara Magalhães Review: Ana Mesquita Gabriela Trevisan Helena Grangeia | Board |