



GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

2023-2026

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AviSense

GENDER EQUALITY (GE) PLAN

1. Introduction

This action plan outlines AviSense's strategy for advancing gender equality, detailing specific activities and monitoring initiatives. Ensuring equal opportunities is fundamental to our organizational mission, and achieving gender balance is crucial for fostering fair access and equity across our research, managerial, technical, administrative, and support roles. Aligned with international, community, and internal standards, AviSense is dedicated to championing the promotion of equal opportunities between women and men as a core principle and priority.

2. Regulatory framework

This Gender Equality Plan (GE Plan) serves as the official framework endorsing and safeguarding all strategies aimed at fostering gender equality at AviSense. The plan is crafted in accordance with national and European laws and is in alignment with various national initiatives addressing equality between women and men, rights, discrimination prevention, equal treatment, workplace harassment, and the social responsibility of organizations, among other aspects. Detailed information on specific articles, policies, and directives can be found below.

2.1. Greek Law

In recent years, Greek policy documents concerning research, innovation, technology, and higher education, including the latest National Strategy for the European Research Area (2016-2020), have integrated EU principles on gender equality. Public research bodies are specifically directed to establish Gender Equality Plans and include relevant provisions in their internal regulations and strategic plans. The Greek Constitution safeguards equality between the sexes (Art. 2, §4) and the right to equal pay for work of equal value regardless of gender or other differences (Art. 22, §1). Moreover, Greece's constitution recognizes substantive equality between the sexes. The constitutional revision process in 2001 foresaw that positive measures for promoting equality between men and women do not constitute discrimination on grounds of sex and mandated the state to take measures to eliminate practical inequalities to the detriment of women (Art. 116(2)).

This amendment paved the way for positive measures in various domains, such as the adoption of gender quotas for local, national, and European Parliament elections, as well as the inclusion of a gender provision for advisory bodies and scientific councils. Consequently, several new laws and provisions were formulated for research and private organizations. Law 4604/2019, titled "Promoting substantive equality between the sexes and combating gender-based violence," encourages universities and research organizations to integrate gender into their study programs (Art. 17). The same law also encourages private and commercial enterprises to adopt equal opportunity policies through the development of Gender Equality Plans. Companies that adhere to these guidelines are eligible for an official distinction called the "Equality Badge" (Sima Isotitas) (Art. 21), as outlined in the Government Gazette, No. 50/1, March 2019.

2.2. European Law

Equality between women and men and the principle of non-discrimination are fundamental values upon which the EU is built, deeply enshrined in the Treaties of the European Union, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and secondary legislation. In formulating the GE Plan, AviSense takes into account:

- a) The “Recast” Directive (2006/54/EC) on equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men in employment and occupation. This directive mandates the implementation of prohibitions against direct and indirect sex discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment in pay and access to employment.
- b) Directive 2010/41/EU on the prohibition of direct and indirect (sex) discrimination in self-employment.
- c) The Directive on Pregnancy (92/85/EEC), which prohibits discrimination related to pregnancy.
- d) The Parental Leave Directive (2010/18/EU).
- e) The Part-time Work Directive (97/81/EC).
- f) Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin in employment.
- g) Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC), covering the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation.

2.3. Initiatives

AviSense is a spin off company of ATHENA Research Center (RC), which is a founding member of the Greek Innovation Lab for Women (The Innovation Centre for Women) #GIL4W, and a key contributor in Women in AI Labs (the research initiative of Women in AI) #WAI and the Greek chapter of ACM Women in Computing. It is a member of Eurogender and IEEE Women in Engineering. ATHENA RC participates also in the COST Networking action VOICES ‘Making Early Career Investigators’ Voices Heard for Gender Equality (CA20137) in the Management committee.

3. The Digital Gender Divide

The aforementioned regulatory framework addresses the urgent national and European imperative for a digital future grounded in the equal participation of both men and women. The involvement of women is pivotal for the development of a sustainable, just, and equitable digital economy and society. Unfortunately, in the European digital economy, women are underrepresented. Statistics reveal that only 1 in 6 ICT specialists is a woman, and merely 1 in 5 becomes an ICT entrepreneur. Overall, Europe faces a demand for over 1 million digital experts, regardless of gender, with more than 53% of European companies reporting difficulties in finding such experts.

In Greece, the Ministry of Digital Governance has formulated the Digital Transformation Strategy for 2020-2025 to address these inequalities. Developed in collaboration with stakeholders from the public and private sectors, the academic community, and civil society, this strategy outlines priorities for the country's digital transformation and sets goals for enhancing the digital skills of the Greek society, irrespective of gender, across all levels and age groups.

AviSense's vision aligns with the objectives of this strategy. Through its research and training initiatives, AviSense aims to contribute to national and European needs in ICT reskilling and upskilling. This plan establishes concrete, gender-oriented measures and interventions to address the Digital Gender Divide. It seeks to empower female colleagues and employees by providing them with the necessary resources to advance their careers. More specifically, AviSense:

- Offers an inclusive and welcoming work environment, ensuring pay equity, flexibility, and robust parental policies. We are committed to fostering an atmosphere of inclusion.
- Provides women with career advancement pipelines, continued professional development and leadership training.
- Assists researchers affected by career breaks and leaves in regaining research momentum as quickly as possible on return.
- Prioritizes the well-being of its colleagues and employees, and has robust anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies in place to ensure a safe and respectful working environment.

AviSense acknowledges the diversity within its community, understanding that individuals may not strictly identify within the traditional male or female binary construct. We recognize and respect gender diversity, which includes individuals affirming a gender different from their assigned sex at birth, those born intersex or with indeterminate sex, as well as those identifying as transgender or non-binary.

4. Objectives

The AviSense GE Plan has seven tangible objectives, towards:

1. Embedding a **gender-aware culture** by shifting traditional perceptions.
2. Enhancing **research quality** through the formation of diverse and inclusive research groups.
3. Practicing **excellence at all levels** through female career development and training of researchers, managers and support staff.
4. Fostering inclusivity in **decision-making** by actively involving women in the process, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives.
5. Strengthening **links with industry** by encouraging females to collaborate with private entities and **innovating** by translating their research into tangible products.
6. Becoming an attractive company for female experts and talents from Greece and abroad, also assisting in **brain-gain**.
7. Addressing national and European needs for female experts in digital sciences.

To achieve those objectives, AviSense will focus on six key areas, following the guidelines of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) aiming to “identify and implement innovative strategies to promote cultural change and equal opportunities in Universities and Research Centers” (EIGE, <http://eige.europa.eu>). Through these Key Areas, AviSense contributes to reducing the Digital Gender Divide also at an institutional level:

Key Area 1: Governance and decision making

Key Area 2: Recruitment, selection procedures, and career progression

Key Area 3: Flexible and agile working

Key Area 4: Gender strategy in research

Key Area 5: Gender in events, courses and activities

Key Area 6: Gender in organisation culture

5. Methodology

To create the initial version of the GE Plan, various internal procedures and measures needed definition and establishment. The GEB adopted the GEAR toolkit (Gender Equality in Academia and Research), designed by EIGE, as the methodology for compiling the Plan. The development of the Plan revolves around three key axes: Understanding, Implementing, and Monitoring.

5.1. Understanding

As the first step in this direction, AviSense established the Gender Equality Board (GEB) in September. GEB members made decisions regarding the types of data to be collected, defined key performance indicators (KPIs), established data gathering procedures, and organized a series of online meetings with a focus group to gather feedback. The Plan is a dynamic document that the GE Board commits to updating at the end of each year. For the next version of the Plan, additional qualitative data will be collected through questionnaires and interviews, reflecting the responses of researchers and employees regarding their sense of belonging and safety in the workplace.

Concerning the list of KPIs, the GEB examined existing toolkits, methodologies, and available GE Plans from various universities, SMEs and institutes in Europe. While considering the available indicators, the GEB compiled custom lists of KPIs tailored to the specificities of AviSense and certain aspects of national law, such as procedures related to staff recruitment and job contracts. All the gathered information was processed by the GE Board members, who analyzed the state of affairs at AviSense with the aim of addressing observed imbalances.

5.2. Implementing

During the implementation of the GE Plan, AviSense aims to incorporate and institutionalize as many proposed actions as possible to ensure their long-term sustainability. The GEB will convene regularly to plan activities collaboratively, discuss progress, celebrate achievements, and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, training sessions and meetings with senior management, human resources staff, and the events and communications office will be organized to maximize the impact of the GE Plan's actions and offer insights into the measures being implemented.

Beyond these activities, various initiatives such as events, communication campaigns, and the use of digital platforms will maintain continuous visibility for the Plan. These efforts will promote its main areas of intervention and outline the timeframe for compliance purposes.

5.3. Monitoring

GEB is dedicated to providing annual reports on the progress toward gender equality and disseminating these findings within the organization. The monitoring process will rely on both qualitative and quantitative indicators, along with follow-up instruments tailored to the objectives of the proposed actions. An external advisor will play a crucial role in this process, responsively reviewing the measures put forth by the GE Board, collaboratively designing and evaluating monitoring instruments and channels, overseeing the implementation of proposed actions, and offering insights to ensure effective and consistent application across all sites.

6. References and Terminology

6.1 References

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6.2 Terminology

Binary construct (relating to gender) is a social construct that identifies an individual as either male/man or female/woman, and does not take account of other sex or gender identities or presentations.

Gender is part of a person’s social and personal identity. It is typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological, referring to the characteristics that a culture delineates as masculine/male or feminine/female (see definition for ‘gender diverse’).

Pay Gap means individuals receiving equal pay for work of equal or comparable value and there is no gender bias at any point in the --remuneration process (for example at commencement, base salary, out-of-cycle pay reviews, discretionary loadings and bonuses, and movement within the total remuneration range).

Sex means the characteristics associated with biological sex, generally assigned at birth usually described as being male or female. A person’s sex and gender identity or presentation may not necessarily be the same.

Transgender is a general term for a person whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. A transgender person may take steps to live permanently in their nominated sex, with or without medical treatment.

Gender diverse is a term used to recognise people who do not fall within the gender binary construct of male and female.

Intersex refers to people who have genetic, hormonal or physical characteristics that are not exclusively ‘male’ or ‘female’. A person who is intersex may identify as male, female, intersex or as being of indeterminate sex.