D1.4 Gender Equality Strategy

5G-DiGITs

Cross-sectorial education and talent development for beyond 5G Digital and Green Industrial Technologies.

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Reviewer 1:	Monica Tarazona, Salazar Cardero (Finnova)
Reviewer 2:	Gonca Kara (A8)
Contributors:	Eirini Papadopoulou, Christina Skoubridou, Eirini Ozouni (Envolve)

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Abbreviations

CA: Consortium Agreement

DoA: Description of Action

Dx.y: Deliverable No y of Work Package x

D&C: Dissemination & Communication

EACEA: European Education and Culture Executive Agency

EC: European Commission

EU: European Union

GA: Grant Agreement

GE: Gender Equality

GEC: Gender Equality Committee

GEO: Gender Equality Officer

GEP: Gender Equality Plan

GES: Gender Equality Strategy

PC: Project Coordinator

SG: Steering Group

WP: Work Package

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Executive Summary

The 5G-DiGITs project aims to address gender equality in the tech sector, specifically in 5G industries, through a comprehensive Gender Equality Strategy (GES) that aligns with European Union policies and promotes diversity, equality, and inclusion. Although significant progress has been made in the EU in advancing gender equality, challenges persist, particularly in the labor market, where women are underrepresented in leadership roles and overrepresented in lower-paid sectors. In the tech industry, women continue to face barriers such as wage disparities, lower participation in decision-making positions, and high dropout rates, especially in digital careers.

The 5G-DiGITs project involves partners from various European countries, allowing for the exchange of best practices aimed at reducing gender disparities, particularly in countries with significant gaps in gender equality. By promoting equal representation and eliminating gender bias in recruitment, leadership, and decision-making, the project seeks to create a balanced and inclusive work environment in the 5G and deep tech sectors. The project will also incorporate gender perspectives into its research, curriculum, and knowledge transfer activities to ensure that women are equally represented in all aspects of the project.

A dedicated Gender Equality Officer (GEO) and a Gender Equality Committee (GEC) will oversee the implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP). This plan focuses on gender balance in leadership, recruitment, training, and decision-making processes. The project will adopt gender-sensitive data collection methods and monitoring systems, ensuring that progress is tracked and evaluated regularly. Disaggregated gender data will be collected for each activity to assess the effectiveness of the plan and inform future actions.

The communication and dissemination strategy aims to continuously promote gender balance throughout the project’s duration, with various activities. The GEP will be regularly updated based on the collected data and feedback from stakeholders, ensuring the project's ongoing commitment to achieving gender equality in the tech and 5G sector.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the deliverable

This deliverable aims to enhance the overall quality assessment and added value of the 5G-DiGITs project. Recognizing that gender equality is a fundamental priority for the European Union, the 5G-DiGITs project is committed to fostering equal opportunities and ensuring access to scientific outcomes and training programs for all, regardless of gender.

Within this deliverable, the consortium outlines a comprehensive strategy to advance equality, inclusion, and diversity. This strategy will be accompanied by a detailed action plan that identifies key focus areas, implements targeted measures, and establishes methods to monitor its progress and outcomes. To ensure its effectiveness, the strategy will undergo regular reviews and updates as the project progresses.

1.2. Structure of the deliverable

D1.4 is organized into the following main sections:

1. **Introduction**: Outlines the purpose and structure of the deliverable
2. **Gender Equality Analysis**: Examines and maps existing policies and the current state of gender equality in Europe, particularly within sectors relevant to 5G.
3. **5G-DiGITs Gender Equality Strategy**: Details the action plan for the project's Gender Equality Plan (GEP), including the key areas affected by this strategy.
4. **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Focuses on the measures to be tracked and assessed to ensure alignment with the objectives and goals of the project's GEP.
5. **Communication & Dissemination:** Describes activities aimed at publicly promoting the results and impact of the GEP.
6. **Conclusions:** Summarizes the key points and highlights of the document.

2. Gender Equality Analysis

2.1. EU policies and GE in member-states

Recent studies indicate that the European Union has made significant progress in advancing gender equality. This progress is evident through the adoption of legislation, the integration of gender equality into various policies, and the implementation of targeted measures to empower women. To name a few: i) The Pay Transparency Directive, adopted in May 2023 on equal pay for work of equal value, ii) the Directive on gender balance in corporate boards, which aims to improve the gender balance in decision-making positions in corporations among EU, iii) The Work-Life Balance Initiative which addresses the challenges faced by working parents. Of course, these are only a few among many more EU and national policies towards this direction. However, despite

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these advancements, a gender gap persists in the labor market. Women continue to be overrepresented in lower-paid sectors and underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles (European Commission, Gender Equality Strategy). According to the **Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025** *"The goal is a Union where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and can equally participate in and lead our European society".*

According to the European Commission's latest report from 2024, the gender gap in employment rates between men and women varies across countries. For example, Greece, Malta, Ireland, and Spain exhibit a wider gender gap in employment, while countries like Lithuania demonstrate the lowest gender employment gap. These disparities appear due to the different approaches and policies adopted by each country. One common reason for instance behind the differences in employment patterns between male and female is the gender division of care responsibilities especially for children. According to this report in 2022 in Italy and Greece just over half of women were employed (55.0 % and 55.9 %, respectively), compared with around three quarters of men (74.7 % and 76.9 % respectively). The **5G-DiGITs project** involves partners from Greece, Spain, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Malta, Lithuania, and Ireland. Through this project and the transnational collaboration among these partners, best practices and approaches for achieving gender balance will be shared, helping to reduce the gap in countries that continue to face significant challenges in mainstreaming gender equality.

2.2. Tech Sector and representation of genders

The 5G and Deep Tech sectors, as part of the broader tech industry, reflect the same gender representation patterns seen across the field. Despite ongoing national discussions about gender diversity in technology, women remain underrepresented, underpaid, and frequently face discrimination in these industries, as the data reveals.

A brief report by the European Parliament titled "Women in the Digital Sector" provides valuable insights into the status of women in the Tech and Digital industries. According to the 2022 Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), women remain significantly underrepresented in key digital fields. Only 20% of ICT specialists and 33% of STEM graduates are women. Moreover, the dropout rate from digital careers is higher among women compared to men, especially for those aged between 30 and 44 — a critical period in their professional lives when many are starting families or caring for young children. These caregiving responsibilities contribute to about 7% of women in the EU being out of the workforce, compared to only 0.5% of men.

In terms of leadership, women occupy a small fraction of top positions and represent just 14.8% of start-up founders. When it comes to salary, women in ICT earn nearly 20% less than their male counterparts. Europe is currently experiencing a severe shortage of ICT professionals, with 55% of EU companies struggling to recruit qualified specialists as of 2019. One of the key goals of the EU's Digital Decade programme is to increase the

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number of employed ICT specialists in the EU to 20 million by 2030, with a particular focus on boosting female participation (2023, European Parliament).

Increasing the representation of women in the technology (tech) sector could play a key role in addressing the talent shortage in the field. A McKinsey analysis suggests that if Europe were to raise the proportion of women in the tech workforce to around 45% by 2027, it could not only fill the talent gap but also boost GDP by an estimated €260 billion to €600 billion. Likewise, the European Institute for Gender Equality highlights that closing the gender gap in STEM careers could increase EU GDP per capita by 2.2% to 3.0% by 2050 (2023, European Parliament).

A recent European Commission report points out the significant gender pay gap, and the challenges women face in reaching managerial and decision-making roles in the digital sector (2023, European Parliament). In 2019, only 19% of ICT entrepreneurs in the EU were women, and 93% of capital invested in European companies went to all-male founding teams. Despite these figures, research shows that digital start-ups led by women are more likely to succeed than those founded by men. Additionally, investments in female-founded start-ups have been shown to perform 63% better than those in male-founded ventures (2023, European Parliament).

3. 5G-DiGITs Gender Equality Strategy

Gender Balance is a priority both in project management and the activities that will be carried out though the 5G-DiGITs project. As such below follows an analysis of the strategy that the consortium will design and eventually adopt to ensure equal representation of genders during this project.

3.1. Gender Equality strategy Goals and Objectives

This GES (Gender Equality Strategy) stemmed from a general need to comply with the above-mentioned EU policies and strategies promoting and enhancing gender equality within research and the 5G, deep-tech sector in general. The objectives for implementing this strategy are:

i. to eliminate gender bias,
ii. to achieve equal representation and
iii. to enhance diversity.

3.2. Gender Equality Officer (GEO) and Committee (GEC)

The consortium has allocated specific resources to manage, implement and monitor the gender equality plan. First and foremost, a dedicated person has been appointed at a very early stage of the project as the Gender Equality Officer. The Project Coordinator Partner (Envolve) has appointed for this position a member of its team, Ms Agapi Kyriakopoulou, that she will be leading the Gender Equality Committee that will be

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established during the first months of the project. This committee will be composed of representatives from all partners who will be aware of all processes of implementing the Gender Equality Action Plan. The leader of this committee, the Gender Equality Officer (GEO), serves as the primary contact for any questions regarding the action plan, for gender equality matters, for diversity and inclusion actions in different activities of the project, and ultimately for reporting to them even possible incidents of sexual and gender-based harassment, as well as gender-based violence.

Specific requests and issues will be resolved through meetings among the members of the GEC. The members of the Gender Equality Committee are responsible for:

1. Overseeing and assessing the implementation of the gender equality plan.
2. Updating the gender equality plan with new action points and indicators as needed.
3. Advise and propose best practices according to each member's experience and their institutional GEP (if applicable).
4. Providing input for project progress reports.
5. Gathering gender-disaggregated data and producing annual reports based on key indicators.
6. Coordinating and delivering gender-focused training and capacity-building activities within the organization.
7. Convening regular meetings, at least once per semester.

3.3. Gender Equality Action Plan

The Gender Equality Action Plan aims to promote equal opportunities and gender balance in all aspects of the project. These measures adopted will ensure gender balance in project teams, encourage the participation of women in project activities and decision-making processes, and incorporate a gender perspective in the project's content and outputs. The consortium partners and more specifically the GEC will be responsible for implementing the gender equality strategy and monitoring its impact along with the progress of the project. The Gender Equality Plan of 5G-DiGITs will be based on six key priority areas analysed below.

Key Area 1: Gender equality in leadership and access to decision-making

Objective A: Gender balance in 5G-DiGITs leadership and management

Action: Designating senior leadership and management positions should be conducted with attention to tenure and a commitment to achieving gender balance. To uphold ongoing progress in attaining gender equilibrium within leadership and management roles, it is crucial to systematically monitor and evaluate the organization's trajectory. This strategy aids in identifying any potential areas needing additional focus, thereby guaranteeing that the organization remains aligned with its objectives.

Objective B: Gender balance in decision-making processes

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Action: Equal Gender Representation is not sufficient itself to consider gender balance in decision-making. Of course, it is imperative to guarantee representation of both women and men within project teams of 5G-DiGITs, however women should be further empowered to take an equal role in such processes. Both genders should contribute their distinct perspectives, fostering a comprehensive approach that considers diverse viewpoints in all project decisions and avoid any biases due to gender. Both technical and administrative decision-making should welcome and weigh on an equal basis the thoughts, ideas and considerations of all genders. The aim is to have a male-female percentage representation as close as possible to 50-50% in our voting and management committees namely the General Assembly and the Steering Group or at least male representatives not to outweigh vastly the female ones (i.e. 40-60%).

Key Area 2: Gender equality in recruitment of participants in the project's activities

Objective A: Promote gender balance in the different project activities

Action: The 5G-DiGITs project will aim to conduct a gender analysis of its activities and tasks. This analysis involves identifying potential areas exhibiting gender imbalances. Subsequently, the project can formulate targeted measures to rectify these imbalances and promote gender equity across all aspects of the project. Partners with more experience in resolving such imbalances will share insights and propose methods to be implemented throughout the project's life cycle.

Objective B: Make all phases of participants recruitment gender sensitive

Action: In order to promote gender neutrality in recruitment, it's important to use gender-inclusive language in recruitment materials, actively search for a diverse pool of candidates, and ensure that the recruitment process is fair and assessed based on skills and qualifications, not gender. Additionally, setting clear targets for the recruitment and retention of women, and providing training to recruiters to recognize and eliminate any unconscious biases that could impact their decisions can also be helpful. Collect and monitor the gender of applicants for the project activities in a digitalized, anonymous manner. Improve the gender balance of shortlisted participants. Develop and adopt gender-sensitive recruitment guidelines. To enhance the transparency of the selection process , the final results will be publicly disclosed on project's channels, always taking into account the GDPR compliance.

Efforts will be made to reach if possible, a 50% rate of female participants in all activities (students, educators, enterprises, speakers in events i.e. entrepreneurs). The same will be pursued for the student-led start-ups that will be benefited by the Accelerator programme. Gender balance will be a key factor in all 5G-DiGITs activities, by design.

Objective C: Make promotion activities of the 5G-DiGITs gender-sensitive

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Action: Make promotion and dissemination criteria of the project and the project activities gender sensitive. Improve transparency of promotion and dissemination procedures and activities.

Key Area 3: Gender dimension in knowledge transfer and research

Objective: Improve the presence of gender components in knowledge transfer and research activities of 5G-DiGITs.

Action: Make available and endorse internationally recognized guidelines for improving gender diversity in technology transfer and research activities, across different project activities, especially for the matchmaking sessions. 5G sector and Deep tech sector are both areas that females are underrepresented, thus Research Centers and Academia partners that have designed internal Gender Equality plans will add value to the project by transferring relevant best practices towards the consortium.

Key Area 4: Sexism, gender biases and stereotypes

Objective A: Improve gender balance in project events

Action: Revising and clarifying the scope and enforcement of the Gender Equity in Events Policy is important for creating an environment that is inclusive, open to diversity and to new ideas. Guest speakers, panelists, trainers and other external participants will be selected, taking under consideration gender representativeness.

Objective B: Make trainings/workshops interaction and supervision practices more gender sensitive.

Action: Outline some best practices for trainers/facilitators to incorporate gender sensitivity in their pedagogical practices, with a focus on supporting and validating gender non-conforming/non-binary individuals.

Objective C: Make participants selection processes more gender sensitive

Action: Introduce guidelines in participants selection processes to avoid gender biases.

Provide training to members of the train selection committee on how to evaluate candidates in a fair and unbiased manner. Additionally, implement a blind screening process to remove any potential unconscious biases during the selection process.

Key Area 4: Sexual harassment

Objective: Devise an efficient complaint mechanism

Action: Develop an institutional system with an additional outlet for grievances to give individuals a safe and confidential space to voice their concerns, without fear of retaliation, isolation or discrimination. Define guidelines for monitoring of number and severity of complaints, responsibility for statistical analysis and feedback into the procedure. The development of an institutional system with a dedicated outlet for grievances, a centralized digital recording system, and clear guidelines for monitoring

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and analysis creates a comprehensive approach to managing concerns while promoting a culture of transparency, fairness, and continuous improvement within the organization.

Key Area 5: Gender-sensitive data collection, access and processing

Objective A: Improve gender sensitive data collection

Action: Identify and share specifications of the gender-sensitive data to be collected. Improve the quality of any current collected data. Use gender-sensitive questions in surveys and forms.

Objective B: Make data management systems gender inclusive

Action: We can show our dedication to inclusivity and create a more accommodating and supportive setting for all participants, including those who identify as trans, non-binary, or gender non-conforming, by introducing a data-management system that includes gender marker and name preferences.

Key Area 6: Gender balance in Trainings and in the Acceleration Programme

Objective: Achieve a Gender balanced Portfolio

Action: Reach networks that promote gender representativeness in entrepreneurship, research and academia. Use specific percentages to select the programme's beneficiaries. Use specific percentages to select participants in the trainings.

The Gender Equality Committee can object if the selection of participants is not gender inclusive.

4. Monitoring & Evaluation of the plan

The consortium has identified various measures in key areas described below, that will be continuously tracked down to achieve gender balance, equality, and inclusion.

Stakeholder identification and engagement: The project team will make a conscious effort to identify and engage with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, including different genders, age groups, ethnicities, and professional sectors. This will ensure that the project's activities are informed by a wide range of perspectives and experiences, promoting greater inclusivity and diversity in the project's outcomes.

Needs assessment and skills identification: During the needs assessment phase, the project will seek input from a diverse group of stakeholders, ensuring that the identified skills gaps and requirements accurately reflect the needs of different groups. This includes ensuring gender balance and representation of marginalized and underrepresented groups in the data collection and analysis process.

Curriculum development and course design: The project will prioritize the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences in the curriculum and course materials. This

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includes incorporating case studies, examples, and research from various contexts, ensuring that the content is relevant and accessible to a broad range of learners. Additionally, the project will work to develop gender-sensitive curricula that address the unique needs and experiences of different genders within the advanced 5G and green technology sectors.

Recruitment of participants and educators: The project team will implement targeted recruitment strategies to ensure gender balance, inclusion, and diversity among participants and educators. This includes promoting the project and its activities to underrepresented groups and designing recruitment materials that appeal to a diverse audience.

Continuous improvement: Throughout the project's implementation, the team will monitor and evaluate the project's performance in terms of gender balance, inclusion, diversity, and representativeness. This will be done through the collection of disaggregated data, regular reviews of project activities, and the incorporation of feedback from diverse stakeholders. Based on this information, the project team will make any necessary adjustments to the project's design and implementation, ensuring that the project remains inclusive and representative of its target audience.

Dissemination and exploitation: The project will develop and implement communication strategies (collaboration between WP1 and WP6), that are tailored to diverse audiences, ensuring that the project's outputs are accessible and relevant to abroad range of stakeholders. This includes creating promotional materials in multiple languages if necessary, utilizing diverse communication channels, and targeting specific stakeholder groups to promote the project's activities and achievements.

Gender representation statistics and infographics will be reported for each activity, enhancing the assessment of the GEP implementation outcomes. Additionally, the data collected after each activity will assist the Committee in updating the plan, introducing new practices, and discontinuing actions that did not yield the desired results.

5. Communication and Dissemination

As a last step of the Gender equality plan the consortium has mapped a number of activities in regard to the communication and dissemination of this GE plan. The aim is to make sure our plan is regularly updated, effective, and brings the desired results for all stakeholders participating in the 5G-DiGITs project. Close collaboration will be pursued between all WPs and WP6 which is dedicated to the Dissemination and Exploitation strategy and activities of the project overall.

The D&C Strategy of the plan focuses on the activities as presented in the table below.

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GEP D&C Strategy		
Activity	**Objective**	**Timeplan**
Publish the GEP on the 5G-DiGITs website	Get publicly aligned with the EU suggestion. Communicate our Gender Equality Plan	Publication of the Website (M4)
Include the GEP in the Call for Expression of Interest for the 5G-DiGITs Accelerator Programme	Attract as many female-led applications as possible. Attract as many female students as possible, trainees and trainers for the educational courses.	Publication of the Call (M21) Workshop and Training activities (M3-M36)
Infographics and other material on Gender balance achievements	Promoting on an ongoing basis the project's ambition for a Gender Balanced 5G sector. For instance, featuring female role models and success stories from within the project in promotional materials, so as to inspiring broader participation.	Throughout the full cycle of the project
D&C WP6 to advise the GEC regularly including the progress and results of the GEP	Communication Experts of the project to be fully aligned with the GE activities of the project.	Final Reporting of Dissemination and Communication Activities (M36)

Table 1 GEP Dissemination Strategy

6. Conclusions

The 5G-DiGITs project will prioritize gender balance in all activities, recognizing the importance of increasing women's participation in the tech sector. Studies show that closing the gender gap in fields like ICT, STEM , 5G, Deep Tech, could significantly help address the ongoing talent shortage. Despite progress, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, and digital start-ups led by women face barriers to investment. However, research indicates that female-founded start-ups often outperform male-founded ones in terms of success and investment returns. Through cross-border collaboration in designing and adopting a flexible yet solid Gender Equality strategy the 5G-DiGITs project aims to share best practices and strategies to reduce the gender gap and promote equality in tech.

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7. References

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