



Gender Equality Plan
European Federation of Nurses Associations
March 2024

This Gender Equality Plan is made available on EFN website: www.efn.eu

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1. Background

Equality between women and men is one of the objectives of the European Union. Over the years, legislation, case-law and changes to the Treaties have helped supported this principle and its implementation in the EU. But a lot still needs to be done to make this objective attained.

The [Lisbon Reform Treaty](#) considers gender equality among its key values and objectives, but to date, health and social care ecosystems have been largely blind to the gender equality impact! Many Member States are introducing reforms of the health and social sector designed to improve the relevance, sustainability, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the current 'silo system', which is not sensitive enough towards gender. For nurses, this is particularly relevant both in terms of work-life balance measures to retain nurses/women in the profession and, to allow nurses/women being key players in the co-design of health and social policies, that will allow to build resilient health and social ecosystems in the EU.

Furthermore, women are, still nowadays, overrepresented in lower paid and informal care-giving roles and have been disproportionately affected by human resources' policies that fail to consider their professional needs in employment contracts, incentives and career advancement opportunities.

Therefore, and despite some progress made in the last few years, even at the leadership of the EU, the EU Member States still need to introduce many reforms to address the gender-gap existing across many European countries and sectors; and address the long-standing inequality between women and men. Gender mainstreaming is key for the design of new ecosystems driving change. EU policymakers and politicians have here a policy window opportunity to ensure a reform process.

As the largest healthcare profession, nurses are a [powerhouse](#) for change. The EFN represents 36 National Nurses Associations (professional associations-regulators-unions), 3 million nurses in the EU, and 6 million nurses across the whole of Europe – with the vast majority of the workforce (92%) composed of women. Taking this into account, the EFN has gender very high on its policy agenda at EU level, calling on the EU stakeholders and decision makers to tackle the gender gap and make policies and innovation work for women. Nurses/women are ideally positioned to both lead and support such developments.

In 2020, the EFN had the honour to be [awarded](#) with the [2020 Women of Europe Awards](#), in the 'Woman in Action' category. An award that recognised nurses' dedication and thanked them for the contribution that they make to Europe every day. The Women of Europe Awards, co-organised by the [European Movement International](#) and the [European Women's Lobby](#), aim to recognise, celebrate and inspire women of all backgrounds, who have made extraordinary contributions to promoting European issues and advancing women's rights and gender equality in Europe. In 2020, the Women of Europe Awards decided to nominate the women nurses of Europe who have been so instrumental in working on the frontlines and to celebrate their essential work during the COVID-crisis. This was seen as a very powerful opportunity, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. The EFN, was thus seen as the key player to be nominated for the prize, on behalf of all the women nurses it represents.

2. Horizon Europe Eligibility Criterion - Process-Related Requirements

➤ Publication:

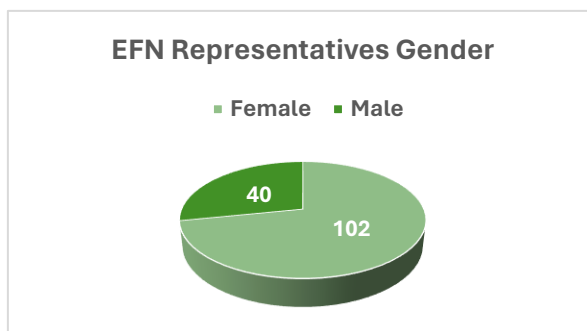
As set in Horizon Europe Eligibility Criterion for Gender equality plans and gender mainstreaming, the EFN Gender Equality Plan is publicly available on EFN website: www.efn.eu

➤ Dedicated resources: commitment of resources and gender expertise to implement it

The EFN represents over 35 EU countries and 36 National Nurses Associations from the EU-27 Member States + UK, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Albania which are in membership of the European Union and/or of the Council of Europe.



Even though the EFN has a very small team at the EFN Brussels Office (Secretary General & Secretary), on its daily work the EFN can count on its members from the 36 National Nurses Associations, and on a network of researchers from the 35 EU countries represented in EFN, bringing their expertise and best practices on gender to the EU debate and policy making, including the EU projects. This represents over 102 women and 40 men out of 142 national representatives and researchers (Number that may change according to the changes in the National Nurses Associations). All having expertise in gender equality approach at local, national & EU level.



- **Data collection and monitoring: sex/gender disaggregated data on personnel and students and annual reporting based on indicators**

With such a small office team, 2 people (1 man & 1 woman), the EFN is not undertaking any gender annual reporting at this stage. This may be put in place in the future if/when the team will grow or if/when deemed necessary.

- **Training: Awareness raising/trainings on gender equality and unconscious gender biases for staff and decision-makers**

In its daily work, having gender high on its EU policy agenda, and having nurses, mostly women in membership, the EFN is taking all the opportunities to raise awareness on this key policy topic, as EU meetings, articles, reports, EFN Website, etc. (See www.efn.eu). The EFN also follows closely the developments at national level (Belgium) – namely through Mensura (External Occupational Health Service – who provides regular updates on the ongoing developments in the field, and through the regular controls that it does); and through the EU – participating in key meetings, analysing new legislation, etc. The EFN also collaborates closely with some EU women organisations, as for example the European Institute of Women's Health (<https://eurohealth.ie/>), in the context of EU projects, meetings, etc.

3. Horizon Europe Eligibility Criterion - Content

- **Work-life balance and organisational culture**

The EFN makes it easy for the staff to work in a flexible way, which allows staff to combine work and family life. Teleworking is accepted and applied by the staff members.

The EFN stands for equality and avoids any form of discrimination, whether it be on the grounds of skin colour, national or ethnic origin, philosophical or religious beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation.

In terms of the nursing profession, the EFN is looking at this crucial topic from an EU perspective, namely post-COVID, with the nurses leaving massively the profession, due to increasing levels of stress, burnout and physical exhaustion in nursing. This is now severely impacting the work-life balance of the nurses and impeding the functioning of healthcare systems in the EU, Europe and around the world. The EFN is therefore calling for safe staffing levels in the nursing profession across the EU and Europe and for concrete solutions for recruiting and retaining European nurses, vital for providing quality and safe patient care.

- **Gender balance in leadership and decision-making**

Since its establishment in 1971, the EFN has always made sure to have gender-balance in its leadership and decision-making. Over the last 50 years, for example, the EFN have had women as Presidents, and have had at least 2-3 other women in the Board (composed of 7 people), with an average of mandate length of 6 years. Mandates that they can extend if elected for another position in the Executive Committee, being the President post the top position in this structure. On the other hand, the EFN General Assembly - being the EFN governing body - counts more than 100 women, being the reflection of the reality of the nursing workforce.

In a more EU projects context, the participation and leadership of very strong women in the EFN EU Project [ENS4Care](#) (2013-2015), provided key input to the discussion and the project development, focusing on the gender issue. Their leadership of the several WPs have made ENS4Care a different EU project, leading to very concrete outcomes, which should inspire other consortiums to promote gender balance in policymaking.

➤ **Gender equality in recruitment and career progression**

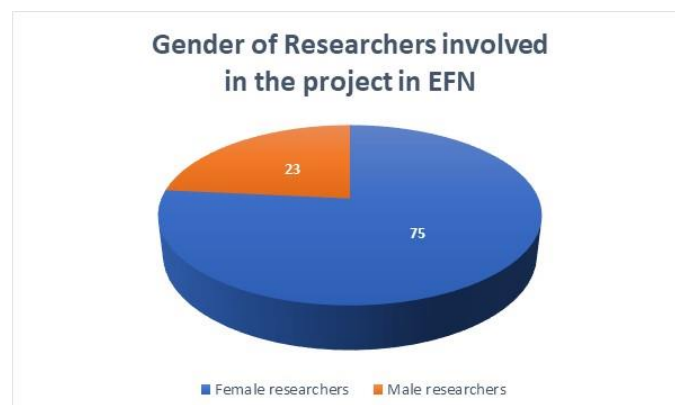
The EFN is committed to gender equality within its staff. As such, attention is paid to its composition. Over the years, the EFN has made sure to always have gender-balance within its staff, even though this can fluctuate a bit, knowing that the team is very small (currently with 2 people – 1 male/1 female). But the main rule is that women and men have the same equal opportunities within EFN.

➤ **Integration of the gender dimension into research and/or teaching content**

According to the recent data, the number of women with a career in research is slowly growing in Europe. Still, they remain significantly underrepresented, and their potential not fully recognised and valued. In the EU-27, women represent slightly over 33% of the total population of researchers, and in the majority of the countries, women researchers are concentrated in the higher education sector. We cannot ignore the need for change and the urgent need for a strategic vision for reform and more gender balanced policy. At all levels, women can play an influential role for positive change!

In the context of [Horizon 2020](#) and [Horizon Europe](#), which pay particular attention to gender, it is necessary that science includes more evidence from women than is currently the case. Research outcomes and opportunities can be biased towards women, which can be countered by including the nurses when designing calls and submitting proposal. End-user codesign is key for deployment and impact. Over the last years, the EFN have been pushing to ensure a higher participation of women/nurse researchers in co-design of health policies, and better access EU funding.

In terms of the gender dimension into research within EFN, the EFN represents over 142 representatives, including 98 researchers. Out of those 98 researchers 75 are females, here again representing the reality of the nursing workforce.



‣ **Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment**

The EFN has a zero tolerance towards any type of bullying, gender-based violence and sexual harassment (taking into account Mensura recommendations).

This is even more of a key concern for the EFN at policy level as its membership is constituted mainly by frontline nurses/women that face many forms of violence, as verbal, emotional or physical (including sexual) violence at their workplace. Violence against nurses has reached epidemic proportions, with anecdotal evidence during the COVID-19 pandemic pointing to a sharp increase across countries in Europe. It is imperative that nurses/women are protected and supported, through the development of policies, initiatives, and legislation at national and European level.

An [EFN study](#), done in 2021, and presenting the real-life evidence from the nursing frontline across 26 countries, highlights that nurses take the brunt of the public's aggression since they are frequently the first point of contact. On the other hand, violence against nurses implies a lack of awareness, respect and appreciation for nurses by the general public.

The EFN position is clear on this: Violence against nurses/women are totally unacceptable, as it has an enormous negative impact on their psychological and physical well-being and on their job motivation, with nurses' leaving the profession. This puts the quality of care and patients' safety at risk. Nurses/women need to be protected from any kinds of gender related violence and discrimination. (Ref. [EFN Position Statement on Violence and Harassment Against Nurses](#) (April 2021)).

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) was established in 1971. The EFN represents over 36 National Nurses Associations and its work has an effect on the daily work of 3 million nurses throughout the European Union and 6 million in Europe. The EFN is the independent voice of the nursing profession, and its mission is to strengthen the status and practice of the profession of nursing for the benefit of the health of the citizens and the interests of nurses in the EU and Europe.

Contact Details:

Address: Clos du Parnasse, 11A - 1050 Brussels - Belgium

Tel.: +32 2 512 74 19 - Email: efn@efn.eu

Web: www.efn.eu

Contact Person: Dr Paul De Raeve, EFN Secretary General

Registration Number: 476.356.013

Transparency Register: 87872442953-08

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