

National Center of Gene Therapy and Drugs Based on RNA Technology

GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

Approved by the Board of Management (Resolution adopted on March 31, 2026)

GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

NATIONAL CENTER FOR GENE THERAPY AND DRUGS BASED ON RNA TECHNOLOGY

Summary

1.	The Institutional Context, Objectives, and Pillars of the GEP	3
2.	The CNR RNA Foundation's Gender Equality Plan	3
2.1	<i>Methodology</i>	4
2.2	<i>Dedicated Resources</i>	5
2.3	<i>The Gender Equality Team</i>	5
2.4	<i>Training</i>	6
3.	Analysis of the Gender Situation and Context	7
3.1	<i>Foundation Metrics</i>	7
3.2	<i>Staff</i>	8
3.3	<i>Hub Metrics</i>	10
3.4	<i>Thematic Areas, Objectives, and Actions</i>	11
4.	Publicity and Sharing	16

1. The Institutional Context, Objectives, and Pillars of the GEP

At the national level, Italy has made a decisive shift by incorporating gender equality as a cross-cutting priority in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). Recognizing equality as a pillar of sustainable growth, the 2021–2026 National Strategy for Gender Equality outlines a clear path to remove barriers that limit equal opportunities, promote work-life balance, and encourage women's participation in the labor market.

It is within this context that the National Research Center Foundation "Development of Gene Therapy and Drugs Using RNA Technology" was established on June 8 at the University of Padua. Funded by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR) under the PNRR, the Foundation serves as *the hub* of a network of excellence uniting 46 partners, including universities, research institutions, foundations, and companies.

Firmly convinced that an equitable work environment is the cornerstone of scientific excellence, the Foundation has fully embraced the European Commission's vision, which identifies gender equality as a strategic factor for the quality of research. In order to translate these principles into operational measures, and in line with the European Commission's directives and the requirements for accessing Horizon Europe program funds, the Foundation is adopting its **first Gender Equality Plan (GEP) for 2026–2027**.

With this GEP, the Foundation adopts a **concrete action plan to promote gender equality and trigger a profound cultural transformation within the research system it coordinates**. More than an administrative obligation, the Plan represents the practical tool through which the Foundation aims to promote equity in research and equal career opportunities for all, via a structural approach and the involvement of the entire system in which it plays a coordinating role.

2. The CNR RNA Foundation's Gender Equality Plan

This GEP was brought to the attention of the Foundation's governing bodies and approved by the Management Board on March 31, 2026. The Plan was developed by a dedicated *team*, based on the European Commission's recommendations and the Horizon Europe guidelines, and aims to provide a snapshot of the current gender situation within the Foundation itself and a vision of how gender

equality is addressed within the coordinated research system—comprising *Spokes* and affiliates—toward which it serves as *an* institutional *hub*.

2.1 Methodology

The Plan meets the four mandatory eligibility requirements defined by the European Commission¹:

1. **Publicity:** transparency and dissemination of the document;
2. **Dedicated resources:** funds and personnel allocated for the implementation of the Plan;
3. **Data collection and monitoring:** ongoing analysis disaggregated by gender;
4. **Training:** raising awareness throughout the organization.

The GEP focuses its actions on the five thematic areas identified at the European level:

- work-life balance and organizational culture;
- gender balance in leadership and decision-making;
- gender equality in hiring and career advancement;
- integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content;
- measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

The methodological approach adopted by the Foundation for drafting the Plan consists of four phases:

- 1) **Analysis of the context and initial gender situation (*Baseline*).** This phase consists of a preliminary analysis through which the Foundation has defined its current position regarding gender equality, in order to establish a baseline against which to measure future progress. The initial analysis also allows for the identification of strengths and weaknesses, based on which priorities and targeted actions can be defined.
- 2) **Definition of indicators and data collection.** The Foundation has structured a measurement system based on a **set of selected indicators and has identified** specific

¹ These requirements are essential conditions for the GEP to be considered valid for accessing Horizon Europe funding.

metrics for gender diversity within its internal context (employees) and external context (Spokes and affiliates). For data collection, it used an approach aimed at gathering as much relevant data as possible.

- 3) **Monitoring and Continuous Review.** Since the GEP is a dynamic process that requires constant oversight through regular monitoring of selected indicators and metrics and review by *leadership*, the Foundation has established a project *team* tasked with reporting to management on the progress of data related to the monitoring of the actions defined in this plan, in order to assess the progress of the planned activities.
- 4) **Communication and Transparency.** In this phase, the Foundation shares this Plan both internally and externally, publicizing the milestones achieved and the strategies adopted. This activity is not a final act, but an integral part of a cycle of continuous improvement: through the publication of future GEPs, the Foundation will continue to document the progress made and renew its objectives. This ongoing dialogue allows the Foundation to transparently communicate to staff, stakeholders, and the public its ongoing commitment to promoting true gender equality.

Since the Foundation is small in terms of staff size and is a young organization, established in June 2022, the absence or presence of signs of gender inequality cannot be considered structural but rather as aspects to be monitored. These same characteristics represent an opportunity for the Foundation, as they simplify any actions and changes necessary to achieve the Plan's objectives, reducing the difficulties and resistance found in large organizations and/or those with a long history.

To ensure the Plan's effectiveness, the Foundation has provided for:

- **Dedicated resources:** allocation of budget and personnel for the implementation of actions;
- **Constant monitoring:** collection of metrics and indicators used as a *baseline* to assess progress over the two-year period;
- **Training:** organization of training sessions to raise staff awareness on equity issues.

2.2 Dedicated Resources

The main resources allocated by the Foundation for the implementation of this Plan include:

- the creation of a dedicated **working group**;
- to set aside, within the 2026 *budget*:
 - a sum of €2,990 for methodological consulting and training for the working group;
 - a sum of €2,000 for training all employees on the GEP and gender equity issues.

2.3 The Gender Equality Team

To strengthen gender equality and define concrete strategies, the Foundation has established the **Gender Equality Team (GET)**. This dedicated working group is responsible for implementing and monitoring all actions outlined in the Plan.

The *team* consists of **four members**: a *senior* member with executive authority, a senior member with a coordinating role, and two operational staff members with diverse expertise.

Representing all areas of the Foundation: *leadership*, management and human resources, research, and communication; the group maintains strong connections with governing bodies, bringing the GEP to the highest level of *governance*.

Gender Equality Team	Role
Dr. Elena Quagliato	General Director
Dr. Antonio Piscitelli	Financial Manager
Dr. Chiara Mariagrazia Merlo	Data Project Manager
Luca Cunial, Ph.D.	Operations Manager

2.4 Training

During 2025, the Foundation provided a total of **274 hours of training** to develop specialist and managerial skills, with an **average** of approximately **23 hours per employee**.

Below is the breakdown of training by gender, calculated based on the average number of employees during the year.

Training by gender	Training hours 2025	Average number of employee 2025	Training by employee 2025
Female employees	232	10	23
Male employees	42	2	21
Totale	274	12	23

Additionally, in early 2026, the *team* involved in the Plan benefited from targeted training and consulting sessions for drafting the Plan. Concurrently, a training program was planned for all Foundation staff on the GEP itself and on key topics, such as gender equity, overcoming *bias* and stereotypes, female representation in STEM disciplines, and inclusive language.

Finally, in its role as a *Hub*, the Foundation will promote gender equity and raise awareness within scheduled events, highlighting the involvement of women.

3. Analysis of the Gender Situation and Context

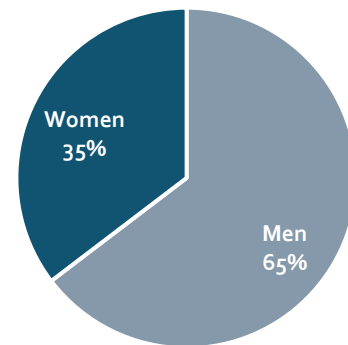
Below is an overview of the current situation regarding gender balance at the Foundation and among the *Spokes* and affiliates it coordinates.

3.1 Foundation Metrics

Governing and supervisory bodies	Men	Women
President	1	0
General Manager	0	1
Management Board	6	6
Supervisory Board	11	8
Members' Meeting ²	29	12
Industrial Board	3	3
<i>International Scientific Advisory Board</i>	3	2
Financial Technical Committee	7	1
Technical and Scientific Committee	2	1

² The data refer to the last meeting held on July 21, 2025.

Board of Auditors	3	2
Total	64	35



3.2 Staff

The Foundation's workforce currently consists of 18 professionals, including 14 employees and 4 contractors. The table below shows the breakdown by gender and role.

The table shows a *governance* structure comprising **64 men** and **35 women**. While bodies such as the Management Board and the Industrial Board are numerically balanced, the greatest disparity is found in the Members' Assembly and the Technical and Financial Committee. Overall, women account for approximately **35%** of the total membership.

Breakdown of employees by job category and gender (headcount) as of 12/31/2025

	Women	Men	Total
Managers	1	-	1
Managers ³	2	1	3
Employees	8	2	10
Total number of employees	11	3	14

72% of the Foundation's staff are women, a predominant presence that is also reflected at the top: **75% of management and leadership positions** are held by women. The workforce includes three employees on secondment from the University of Padua, who also hold management and coordination roles.

³ The group includes individuals with management responsibilities equivalent to those of a contract manager

Breakdown of employees by age group (<i>headcount</i>) as of 12/31/2025	Women	Men	Total
Number of employees under 30 years of age	3	0	3
Percentage of employees under the age of 30	21%	0%	21%
Number of employees aged between 30 and 50	7	3	10
Percentage of employees aged 30 to 50	50%	21%	71%
Number of employees over the age of 50	1	0	1
Percentage of employees over the age of 50	7%	0%	7%

71% of the Foundation's staff are between the ages of 30 and 50.

Applications Received and Hires

From 2022 to the present, the Foundation has expanded its workforce by issuing 9 job postings. These recruitment efforts generated 119 applications, with a clear majority of female applicants (73.1% of the total). At the conclusion of the selection processes, 9 hires were made, with a conversion rate of 11.5% for female candidates and 9.4% for male candidates.

Number of candidates and hiring rate by gender	Candidates		Hires	
	No.	% of candidates	No.	% hired
Gender				
Women	87	73.1%	10	11.5%
Men	32	26.9%	3	9.4%
Total	119	100.0%	13	20.9%

Work-Life Balance

100% of the Foundation's employees are entitled to family leave, and to date, 75% of employees—all of whom are women—have taken a total of 80 days of such leave. 100% of employees who took parental leave have returned to work.

Family leave

Percentage of employees eligible for family leave 100%

Percentage of employees who have taken family leave	75%
Number of days of leave taken (average or total)	80
men	0
women	80

3.2 Hub Metrics

Gender issues are widely addressed within the organizations belonging to *the hub*: out of a total of 46 entities, including 10 Spoke *leaders*, 95.7% have a public report (GEP or sustainability report) that addresses diversity metrics. In particular, 100% of Spoke *leaders*—comprising universities, research institutions, and foundations—have a public GEP; however, not all affiliated organizations disclose *information* on gender issues.

Gender Disclosure Among Funded Entities	Current Situation
Spokes and affiliates reporting on gender issues ⁴	44
Total Spokes and affiliates	46
% reporting on gender issues	95.7%

Since its launch in June 2022, the Foundation has coordinated research projects involving a total of approximately 2,000 people.

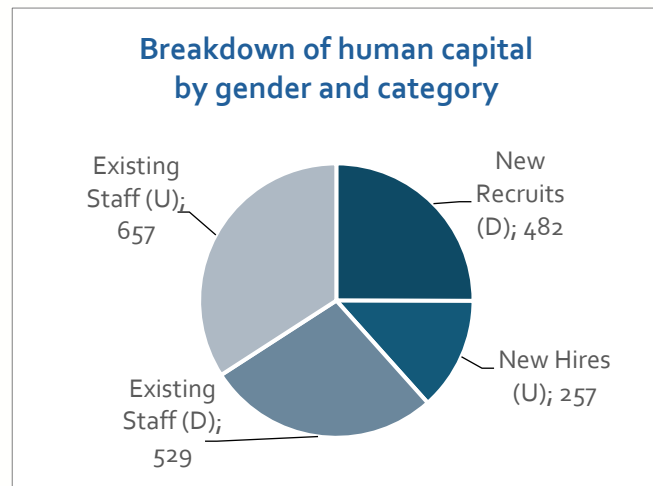
Below is the breakdown of projects based on the gender of the lead researcher.

Gender Equality Index of coordinated research projects	
No. of projects coordinated under the PNRR	10
projects led by female researchers	1
% of projects led by female researchers	10%
projects led by male researchers	9
% of projects led by male researchers	90%

⁴ Data updated as of March 23, 2026.

The analysis reveals a clear gender gap, with a prevalence of male-led projects. This data confirms the persistence of **the gender gap in leadership roles**, where female talent still struggles to translate into actual project leadership positions.

Resources involved in funded projects	No.	%
Total Human Capital (D)	1011	52.5%
Total Human Capital (U)	914	47.5%
Total Human Capital	1925	100%
New Hires (D)	482	25.0%
New Recruits (U)	257	13.4%
Total New Recruits	739	38.4%
Existing Staff (D)	529	27.5%
Existing Staff (U)	657	34.1%
Total Existing Staff	1,186	61.6



Unlike the coordinators, the composition of the workforce shows a female majority, driven in particular by the percentages of staff recruited specifically for the projects, as shown by the data in the table above.

3.3 Thematic Areas, Objectives, and Actions

The Foundation, thanks in part to the use of the indicators and metrics outlined above, has identified the obstacles to achieving the goals represented by each of the five thematic areas of intervention and the actions to be taken to help reduce the gender gap within the Foundation and within the scope of the coordinated research projects.

The Plan therefore identifies **9 objectives** related to the thematic areas, which the Foundation aims to achieve in the **2026–2027** biennium through the implementation of **14 strategic actions**.

Actions	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Responsible Parties	Evaluation indicators	Time
Area 1. Work-life balance, organizational culture, and combating stereotypes					
Objective 1 - Facilitate work-life balance					
Action 1 - Provide flexible work schedules while establishing mandatory time slots (<i>core hours</i>)	employees	employees' families	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Permanent adoption of flexible hours for all employees.	2026
Action 2 - Establish regulations for remote work for all employees	employees	employees' families	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Introduction of remote work for all employees	2026
Action 3 - Implement tailored policies designed to help employees achieve a balance between work commitments and personal responsibilities	employees	employees' families	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Permanent adoption of flexible working hours for all employees and personalized policies	2027
Action 4 - Promote current work-life balance measures internally	employees	employees' families	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Monitoring of usage (%): <i>remote work, flexible hours, parental leave</i>	2027
Objective 2 - Increase the perception of well-being in the workplace					
Action 1 - Monitoring organizational well-being	Employees		Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Organization and conduct of individual interviews	2027

Actions	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Responsible Parties	Evaluation indicators	Time
Area 2. Gender balance in committees and senior leadership positions					
Objective 1 - Strengthen governance on equal opportunity issues in leadership					
Action 1 - Implement the gender equality management system in accordance with UNI PdR 125:2022	Management and staff	Institutional	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Obtaining UNI PdR 125:2022 certification	2027
Action 2 - Monitoring gender balance in leadership roles, commissions, and committees. The foundation aims to implement corrective measures in accordance with renewal deadlines	Management and staff	Staff	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Minimum 40% representation of the underrepresented gender on committees.	2027
Area 3. Gender balance in staff recruitment and career progression					
Objective 1 - Promote equal opportunities in the recruitment process					

Actions	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Responsible Parties	Evaluation indicators	Time
Action 1 - Train recruitment staff and selection committees on gender equality	Recruitment staff, evaluation committees	Job applicants	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Training provided Budget: €2,000	2026
Objective 2 - Reducing gender disparities in recruitment and career advancement					
Action 1 - Update the mapping of professional competencies to define profiles, duties, and enhance employees' skills (<i>job profiles and job descriptions</i>).	Managers and HR	Candidates employees	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Update of the professional competency matrix	2027
Objective 3 - Promote equal opportunity in career development phases					
Action 1 - Training on GEP and gender equality	Staff and Executives		Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director	Training provided Budget: €2,000	2026
Area 4. Integration of the gender dimension into research content					
Objective 1 - Raise awareness of gender issues					
Action 1 - Raising awareness at scheduled events and increasing	Researchers and the general public		Institutional: Management Board	Number of events. At least	2026 2027

Actions	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Responsible Parties	Evaluation indicators	Time
the involvement of female researchers			Operational: Director, Head of Communications, GET	one event per year	
Action 2 - Training on the foundation's first GEP	Foundation governing bodies and staff	Funded projects	Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director, Communications Manager, GET	Training: budget €2,000	2026
Area 5. Combating gender-based violence, including sexual harassment					
Objective 1 - Raising awareness about gender-based violence					
Action 1 - Promote awareness-raising initiatives on the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence	Staff Staff		Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director, Head of Communications		2027
Objective 2 - Addressing situations of harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace					
Action 1 - Train employees on measures against harassment and discrimination in the workplace, including gender stereotypes,	Employees and collaborators		Institutional: Management Board Operational: Director, GET	Training: budget €2,000	2026

Actions	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Responsible Parties	Evaluation indicators	Time
ethnicity, or minority groups					

4. Publicity and Sharing

This Gender Equality Plan is approved by the Management Board, shared with all employees, and made public on the organization's institutional website (<https://www.unipd.it/fondazione-centro-nazionale-terapia-genica>) with the aim of communicating to the organization's staff, other key stakeholders, and the general public the organization's commitment to gender equality and the progress made.

Future GEPs will be made public in the same manner, maintaining the history of all previously published plans, in order to demonstrate the progress made over time.