



Local Governments  
for Sustainability  
EUROPE



# Gender Equality Plan

ICLEI EUROPEAN SECRETARIAT



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### Abbreviations

EC: European Commission  
 EU: European Union  
 GAP: Gender Action Plan  
 GEP: Gender Equality Plan  
 Human Resources: HR  
 LGBTIQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and others

# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Gender equity and mainstreaming in sustainability matters

*“The core challenges affecting the EU today – including the green and digital transitions and demographic change – all have a gender dimension. [...] Gender mainstreaming ensures that policies and programmes maximise the potential of all – women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity. The aim is to redistribute power, influence and resources in a fair and gender-equal way, tackling inequality, promoting fairness, and creating opportunity.”*

EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

The work in research and innovation conducted at the EU level in recent years highlights that inequalities in power distribution as well as access to services and opportunities between people of different sexes and/or gender identities, and other types of identities, still exist and are persistently reproduced on our continent. Gender-based discrimination (combined with other factors such as abuse of power) historically led to the exclusion of women and other genders from key social (including political), cultural and economic (including business) areas. This exclusion process has shaped a society where access to certain opportunities and resources is limited depending on sex and gender attributes.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, an approach that recognises gender-based discrimination and acts to empower all people to achieve equal opportunities and goals is needed for a fairer and just society.

Gender equality and gender equity are related but distinct concepts. Gender equality refers to the state in which individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It emphasises treating everyone the same, regardless of gender. On the other hand, gender equity recognises the different needs, experiences, and circumstances of individuals and provides the resources and opportunities necessary to achieve an equal outcome. Gender equity focuses on fairness and justice, ensuring that everyone has what they need to succeed, even if that means providing different levels of support based on individual needs.

We, at ICLEI Europe, adopt the definition of “gender equity” as the “provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men”<sup>2</sup> as well as other gender identities, including non-binary, genderqueer, and gender-fluid people. Thus, including gender equity as a goal for private and public institutions and companies enables dynamic and stimulating environments where the inclusion of diverse perspectives and needs unlocks experimentation, innovation and a deeper understanding of reality.

Looking more closely at urban sustainability, European cities have generally been designed and constructed by and for caucasian, healthy, heterosexual, cisgender<sup>3</sup>, able-bodied men with privileged access to economic resources and political power. As a result, the right to the city hasn't been granted to certain parts of the population because of those gender-based economic, social and cultural limitations mentioned above<sup>4</sup>.

Women and other gender identities are still significantly under-represented in decision-making positions at all levels of governance in Europe. On average across the EU, women account for only 33% of members of national parliaments, 33% of senior ministers in Member State governments,

<sup>1</sup> “Economic, social and cultural rights of women” [2018] in “Circle of rights: economic, social and cultural rights activism: a training resource”. Human rights library. University of Minnesota.

<sup>2</sup> **Gender equity** in “Glossary and Thesaurus”. EIGE. Consulted on 21.12.2023.

<sup>3</sup> Someone who is cisgender has a gender identity which fully corresponds to the sex assigned to them at birth (**Collins Dictionary**), consulted on 04.06.2025.

<sup>4</sup> Gender keys 01: “Do metropolises have a gender?” (2019). Metropolis.



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and only 5 Member States have a woman prime minister.<sup>5</sup> According to a Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) study of 41 European countries, only 15.4 % of mayors are female.<sup>6</sup> Increasing representation of women and other gender identities in decision-making can lead to more comprehensive and effective sustainability strategies, as well as drive local resilient economies. More equitable representation ensures that the needs and priorities of most, if not all, community members are considered.

As demonstrated in literature<sup>7</sup> and advocated in the European and international arenas,<sup>8</sup> gender influences the understanding and perception of sustainability and climate change dynamics and effects. Women and men, but also people in the LGBTQI+ community, are in fact differently affected by accelerating climate change and by the challenges of a sustainable and resilient transition<sup>9,10</sup>. Ultimately, only by taking into consideration visions from diverse genders can scientific research reach meaningful conclusions that properly inform future action. Including diverse perspectives in decision-making processes further strengthens local democratic governance, as well as helping combat climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution in urban areas.

This brings us to the definition of gender mainstreaming as the “systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all policies and actions”.<sup>11</sup> The previous reflections explain why mainstreaming gender into sustainability is of primary importance in driving research and innovation towards a just, green and resilient transition, and by extension, ICLEI Europe needs to consider this as a transversal element across its activities.

## 1.2 ICLEI Europe

This document is the first Gender Equality Plan (GEP) co-developed in a participatory process for ICLEI Europe by its staff representatives. Building on the monitoring, evaluation and learning from the gender work at ICLEI Europe, this GEP will be updated as needed to include new developments, actions and knowledge.

This chapter provides basic information about ICLEI Europe, its aim and staff composition, to better frame the ambitions and limitations of its GEP.

ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of more than 2500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development and is active in 125+ countries. ICLEI Europe supports local governments in implementing the European Green Deal, the overarching

EU strategy for climate neutrality, to build more resilient and equitable communities.

To pursue its goal in advancing urban sustainable development across Europe, ICLEI embraces a 5-pathway approach which aims to integrate low emissions, nature-based, equitable and people-centred, resilient, and circular considerations. In line with this concept, ICLEI Europe delivers support and services to local and regional governments through 11 expert teams focusing on the following subjects:

- ✦ Biodiversity and Nature-based Solutions
- ✦ Circular Economy
- ✦ Climate Neutral Cities
- ✦ Governance Innovation
- ✦ Green Digital Transition
- ✦ Resilience and Climate Adaptation
- ✦ Socio-Cultural Transformations
- ✦ Sustainable and Innovation Procurement
- ✦ Sustainable Energy Systems
- ✦ Sustainable Food Systems
- ✦ Sustainable Mobility

<sup>5</sup> European Commission. (2024). Achieving gender balance in decision-making. European Commission. Retrieved May 31, 2024, from [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equality-between-women-and-men-decision-making/achieving-gender-balance-decision-making\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equality-between-women-and-men-decision-making/achieving-gender-balance-decision-making_en)

<sup>6</sup> Council of European Municipalities and Regions. (2019). Women in politics: Local and European trends. Retrieved from [https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_Study\\_Women\\_in\\_politics\\_EN.pdf](https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_Study_Women_in_politics_EN.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Peng, S.-Y., Fu Y.-H., Zou X.-Y. (2023). Gender equality and green development: a qualitative survey. *Innovation and Green Development*, 1(3); Senja, O. (2021). Gender and Climate Change: Challenges and Opportunities. HAPSc Policy Briefs Series, 2(2); Pearse, R. (2017). Gender and climate change. *WIREs Clim Change*, 8; Sánchez de Madariaga, I., Neuman, M. (2016). Mainstreaming gender in the city. *Town Planning Review*, 87(5); Ed. By Irene Dankelman (2010), *Gender and Climate Change: an introduction.*; Valerie Nelson, Kate Meadows, Terry Cannon, John Morton & Adrienne Martin (2002), *Uncertain predictions, invisible impacts, and the need to mainstream gender in climate change adaptations*, *Gender & Development*, 10:2.

<sup>8</sup> European Committee of the Regions (2021), *Gender equality and Climate change: towards mainstreaming the gender perspective in the European Green Deal*; European Commission (2020), *A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*; UN Women (2022), *Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected*; UNFCCC (2022), *Gender & Climate Change: an important connection*.

<sup>9</sup> Mann S., McKay T., Gonzales G. (2024). *Climate change-related disasters & the health of LGBTQ+ populations*.

<sup>10</sup> Anjum G., Aziz M. (2025). *Climate change and gendered vulnerability: a systematic review of women’s health*.

<sup>11</sup> **Gender mainstreaming** in “Glossary and Thesaurus”. EIGE. Consulted on 21.12.2023.

Looking at its structure, ICLEI Europe currently counts 179<sup>12</sup> members of staff spread across 3 locations: the headquarters in Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany) and two offices in Berlin (Germany) and Brussels (Belgium). Below is a breakdown of staff according to their sex (indicative only).

The need to mainstream a gender-sensitive perspective into ICLEI Europe’s work and activities to accelerate sustainable processes at the local level was explored for the first time in 2019. Recognising the complex gender dynamics that intersect with and influence sustainability goals in cities and towns, an informal group composed of ICLEI Europe staff decided to meet periodically outside working hours to discuss ideas for including gender as a cross-cutting dimension to be considered in the company’s activities. These discussions led to the conceptualisation of a white paper in 2021 entitled “*Gender Mainstreaming: The next steps on ICLEI’s progressive path*”, which incorporated not only state-of-the-art for gender mainstreaming in a business or organizational setting, but also provided evidence to inspire ICLEI Europe’s work (e.g. through a gender-focused survey) and laid the groundwork for gender mainstreaming at ICLEI Europe. This eventually led to the establishment of a 3-year mandated gender group with the intention to plan and implement gender mainstreaming work. The group has been responsible for drafting this Gender Equality Plan (GEP), in close cooperation with the Managing Director.

## 1.3 The Gender Equality Plan

A Gender Equality Plan is “*a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through a process of structural change*” (European Commission). It is a strategic document that influences diverse activities within the organization, and defines ambitions and concrete targets to integrate a gender-sensitive perspective into an organisation’s operations. The GEP defines ambitions and concrete targets to integrate a gender-sensitive perspective into an organisation’s operations. It provides an overview of how gender dynamics affect the firm’s activities and sets objectives, responsibilities and a timeline to advance gender mainstreaming. Therefore, the GEP must be based on an accurate analysis and assessment of the status quo of the organisation, to set expectations for future work.

With the introduction and initiation of Horizon Europe in 2021, the European Commission made Gender Equality Plans a basic requirement for participation in its research framework programme. Despite not being a compulsory requirement for all categories of Horizon Europe consortium participants, they must state whether or not they have a GEP in place.

This document supports an ongoing process - supported by the management of the company - for improving gender equality through evidence-based planning and gender-sensitive action. The drafting of this document is a key action of the gender group work for 2023, included in ICLEI’s Gender Action Plan (GAP), initially developed in 2023 and then periodically updated, as a milestone and guidance including concrete actions to translate the GEP into action. More specifically, actions are articulated in 4 streams of work (the gender pillars), namely: Organisational Actions, Communication, Training and Capacity-building, and Monitoring and Evaluation.

The full GAP 2025 is available in the Annex of this document.

**Table 1: ICLEI Europe staff by office location and sex (July 2025)**

	Freiburg	Berlin	Brussels
Female	100	6	14
Male	47	4	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>

**Table 2: ICLEI Europe staff by job position and sex (July 2025)**

\*As of January 2026

	Junior Expert / Officer	Expert / Officer	Senior Expert / Officer	Head of Team	Extended Directors’ Group	Directors’ Group
Female	25	61	25	9	1	0 (1*)
Male	4	25	16	7	2 (3*)	4 (3*)
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

<sup>12</sup> As of July 2025.

## 2. SETTING THE SCENE

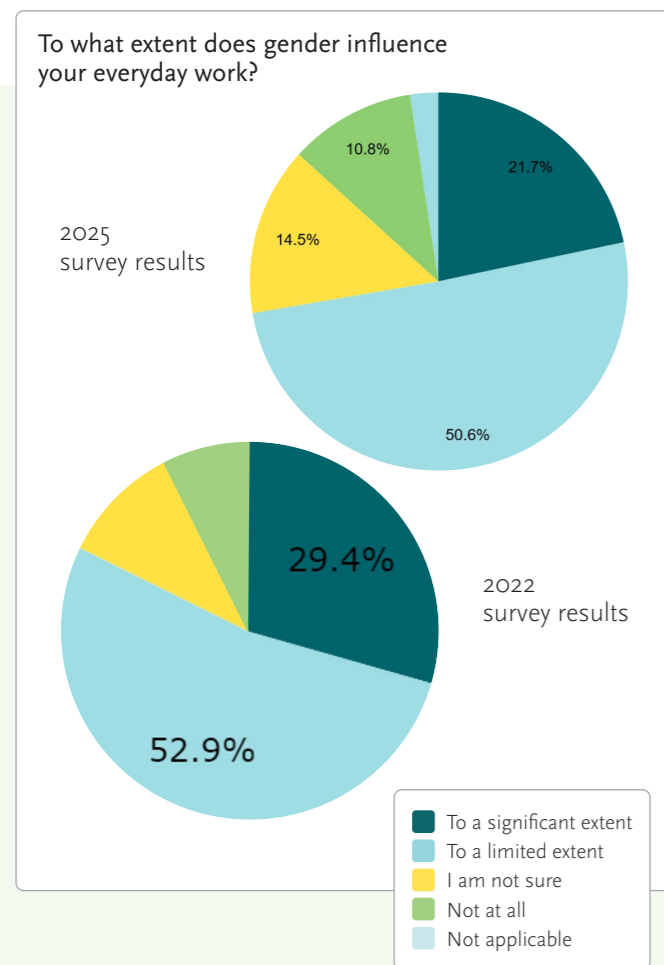
### 2.1 A gender baseline at ICLEI Europe

To establish a baseline for the work on gender equity and gender mainstreaming at ICLEI Europe, this GEP is based on information collected through surveys (in 2022 and 2025), tailored questions and other activities (such as thematic games) addressed to the whole ICLEI staff, regardless of their knowledge of the topic and position in the organisation. The information gathered was analysed and shared with all staff members.

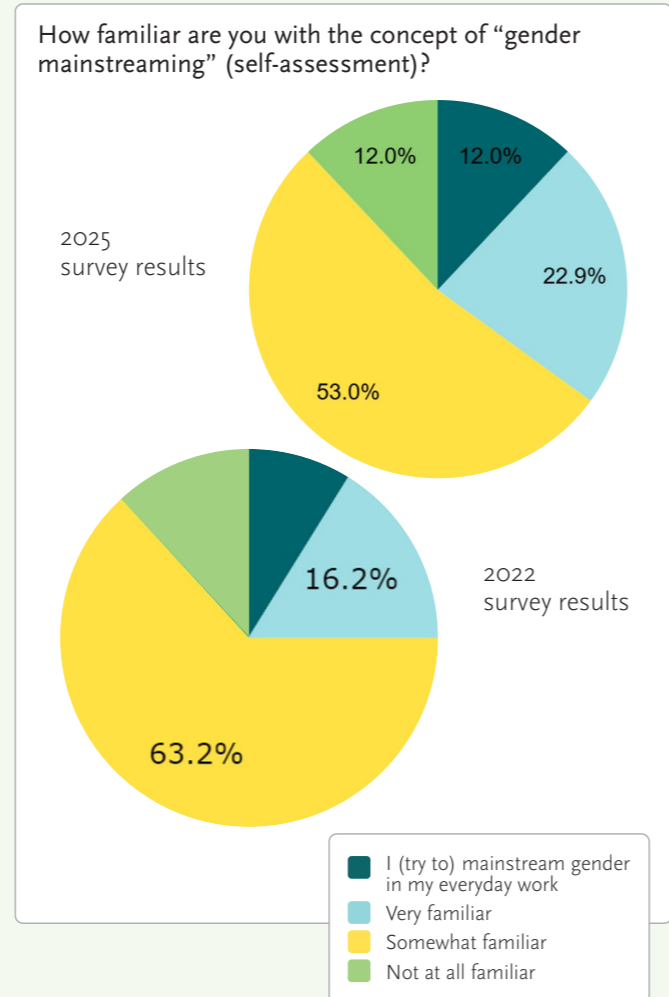
The survey was conducted again in 2025 (following the 2022 survey template) and completed by 46,4% of ICLEI Europe staff. Its results showed that:

- Most staff consider ICLEI a gender-inclusive employer, despite some concerns about the gender balance in senior positions.
- Gender remains a topic of interest for ICLEI staff.
- Training is needed to increase the staff's knowledge on gender, also for onboarding.
- Gender guidance for project work and acquisitions is a priority, along with publication of the GEP.

Some responses that are relevant to this GEP are presented below.

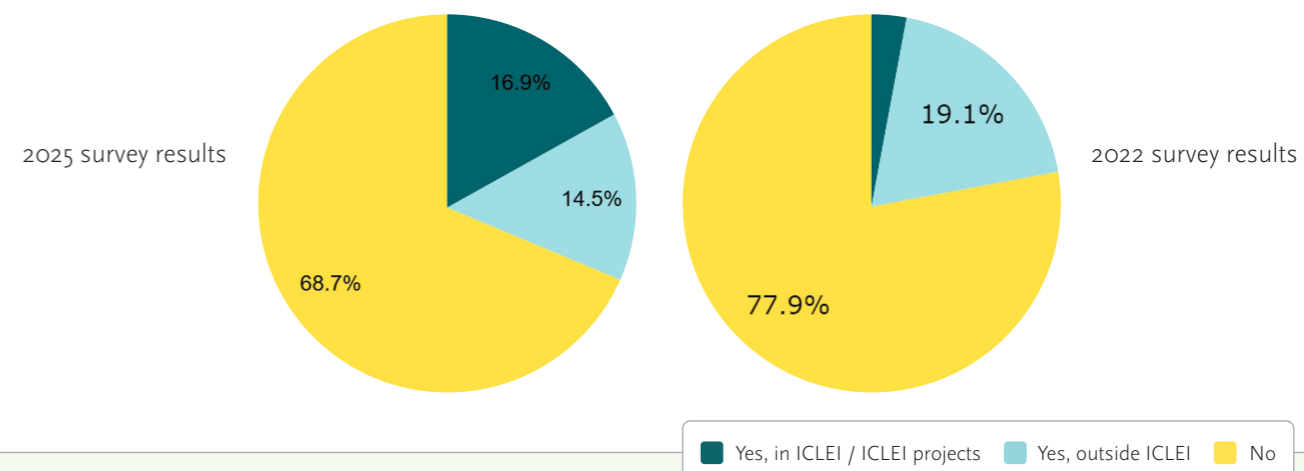


### On the perception of gender

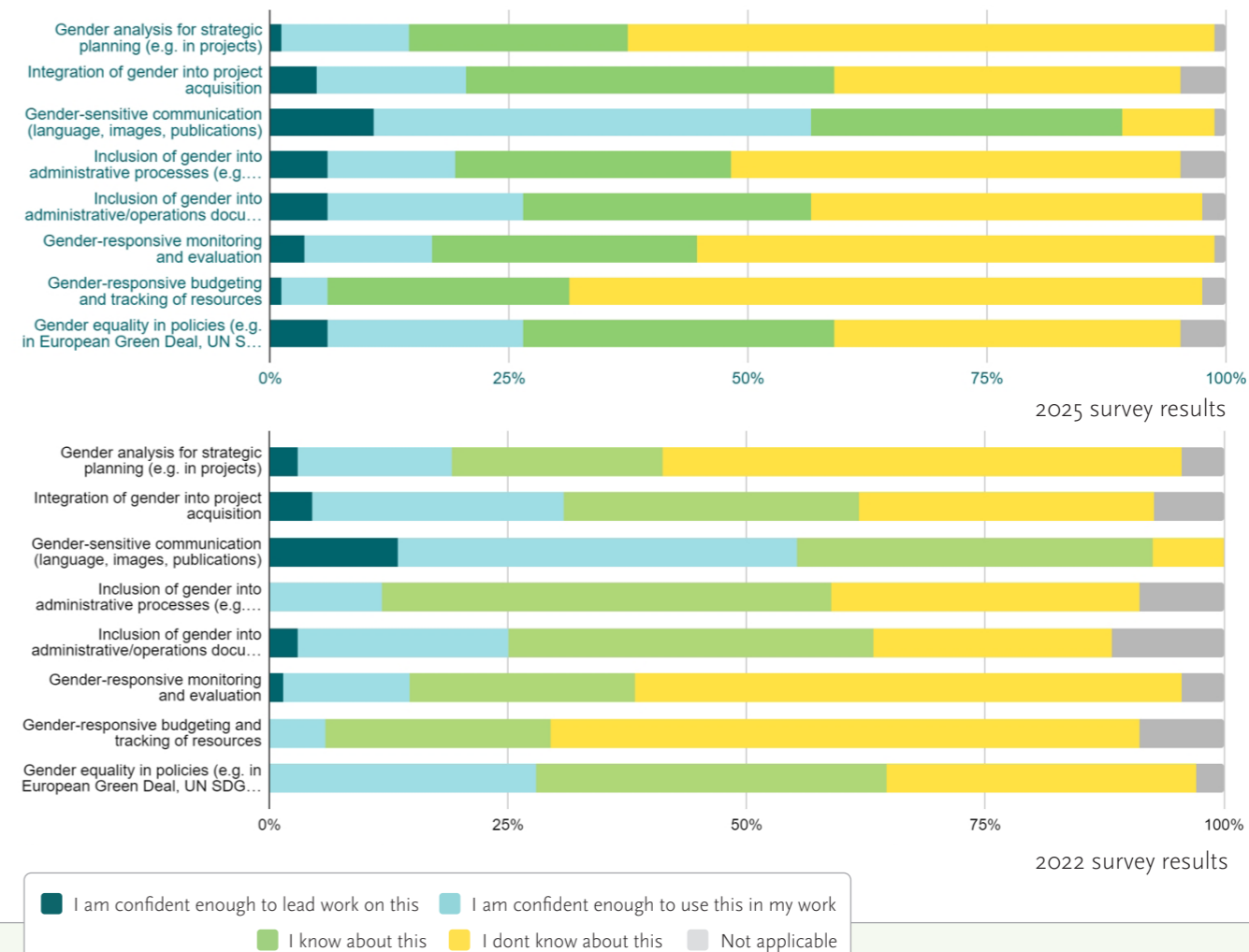


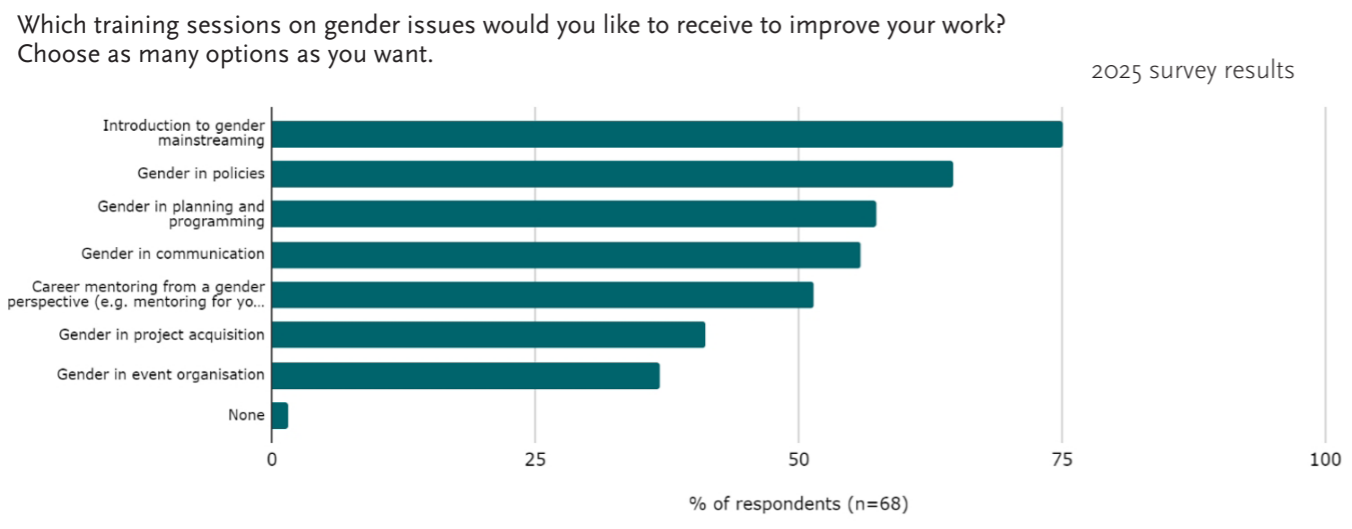
### On capacity-building and training

Have you received training on gender issues? Please include all training where gender was included as a topic.

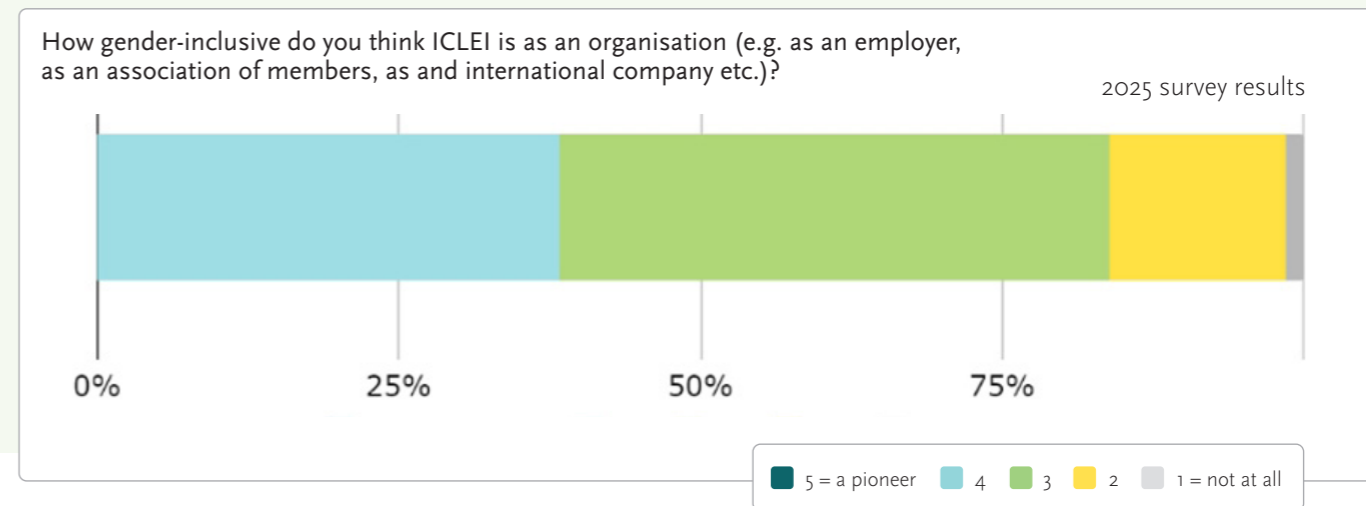


For the following skills and processes, please indicate your level of knowledge and proficiency.

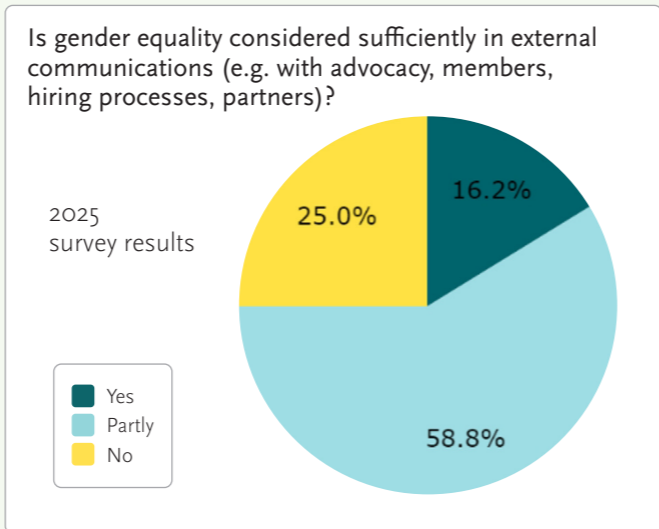
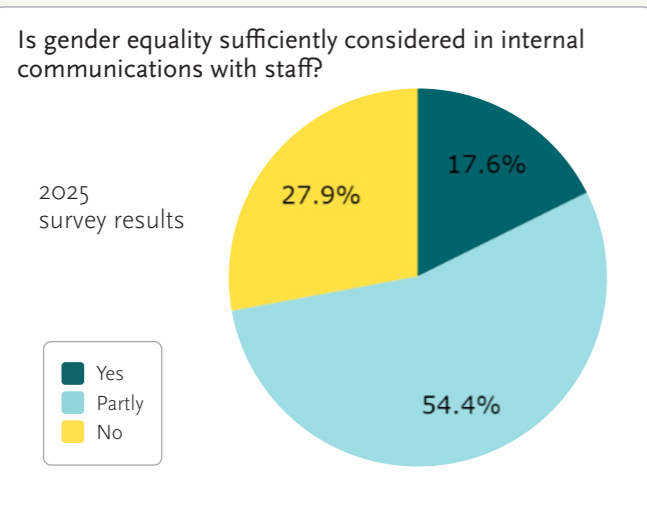




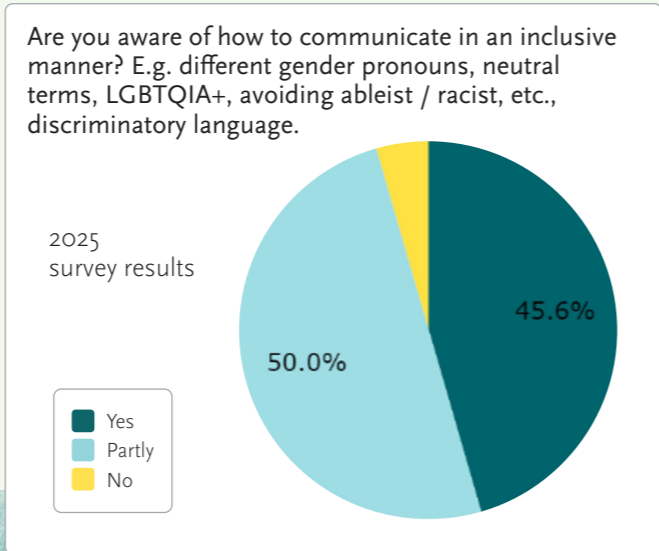
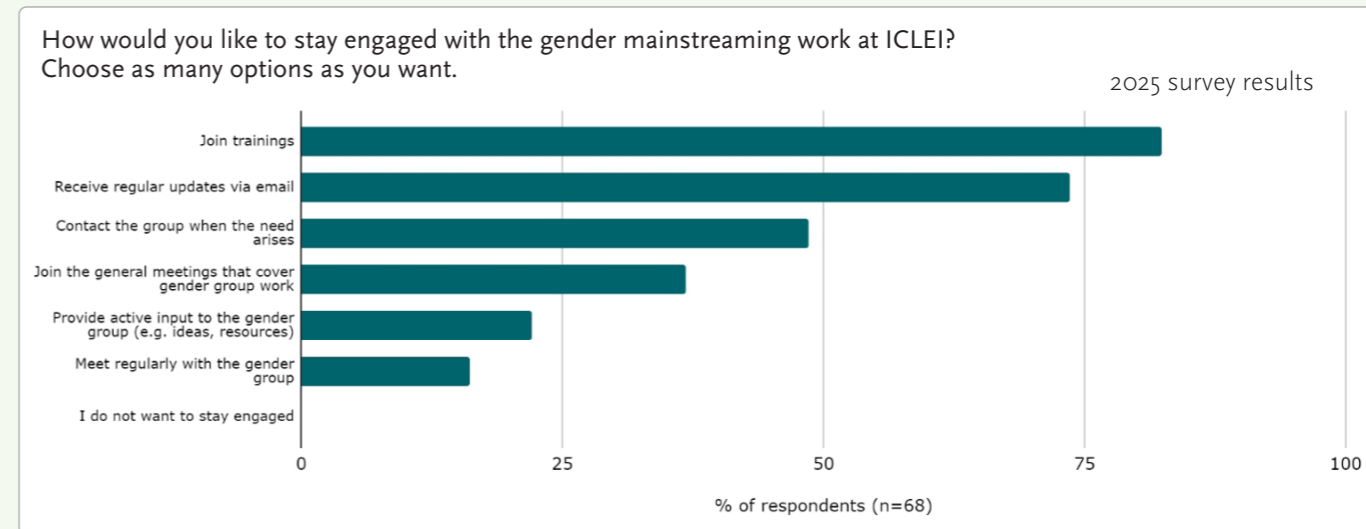
**On ICLEI Europe as an employer**



**On internal and external communication**



**About staff engagement in gender mainstreaming**



## 2.2 Objectives of this Gender Equality Plan

This first version of ICLEI Europe's Gender Equality Plan aims to introduce gender equality as a key cross-cutting dimension to be considered and included in the company's operations, while Gender Equity remains the long-term goal. More specifically, its objectives are:

1. To **conceptualise** and provide a better understanding of gender mainstreaming opportunities for ICLEI Europe.
2. To **raise awareness** among ICLEI staff, including at the management levels, about gender issues and opportunities for gender mainstreaming in different types of work and activities.
3. To **identify responsibilities** to plan for and implement gender mainstreaming.
4. To provide an **overview of activities** aiming to correct any gender bias in the planning and development of project work and in relation to ICLEI's members (i.e. the ICLEI Gender Action Plan - GAP).

5. To **set targets** to assess the impact of ICLEI work and gender equality practices.
6. To **align with European standards** and recommendations.
7. To **communicate ICLEI Europe's position** on gender in the urban and regional sustainability context.
8. To **highlight and communicate** about the actions that ICLEI members are taking on gender mainstreaming in their local contexts (e.g. implementing gender equity policies, hiring gender equity officers, integrating gender dimension in urban planning, etc.).

The following chapters further unpack the above-mentioned objectives, providing a concrete way to organise the gender mainstreaming work at ICLEI Europe.

## 2.3 Building blocks for gender work at ICLEI Europe

In alignment with the [Horizon Europe guidance on gender equality plans](#)' mandatory and recommended building blocks, this GEP has been specifically prepared for ICLEI Europe, considering the needs and priorities that emerged from the survey presented in the previous chapter. Based

on the process-related and thematic building blocks for gender equality plans, general measures to be undertaken are mapped in the table below. Please note that some of these measures have already been implemented or are ongoing.

Dreamstime / Lucian Milasan



**Table 3:** Overview of general measures to be undertaken and their current status, divided by building blocks in alignment with the [Horizon Europe guidance on gender equality plans](#).

Process-related building blocks	Identified measures	Progress on the measures
Dedicated Resources	a. Establishment of a gender mainstreaming group with a mandate of 3 years (2022-2025), to be extended (2026-2029). b. Allocation of a budget to work on gender mainstreaming, translated into a dedicated cost centre for the gender group members, including at least 7 staff members (at least 5 core members, at least 2 reserve).	a. The gender mainstreaming group has been established. b. A budget has been allocated for the gender mainstreaming group.
Data collection and monitoring	a. Data collection via surveys. b. Data analysis of the responses. c. Sharing the results with all staff. d. Data monitoring on an annual basis.	a. Surveys were conducted in 2022 and 2025. b. The survey responses were analysed. c. The survey results were shared with all staff members. d. Data monitoring has not been collected on an annual basis.
Training	a. Gender equality training was organised and conducted in 2023 and 2024. b. Communications and engagement with all staff via a dedicated gender mainstreaming email service. c. Collection and analysis of feedback from participating staff.	a. Training on gender was provided to a select group of staff in 2023 and 2024. b. A dedicated email address has been established and is monitored weekly. c. A feedback survey was sent to the staff members who participated in the training.
Thematic building blocks	Identified measures	Progress on the measures
Work-life balance and organisational structure	EMAS certification: certifies ICLEI as a family-friendly organisation, with assessments conducted regularly.	ICLEI EMAS reporting and audit happened in April 2024 and May 2025.
Gender balance in leadership and decision-making	Restructuring within ICLEI Europe to ensure equal opportunities are given.	The structure and composition of the board of directors have slightly changed. With the restructuring, a new function of heads of teams was established (9 female and 7 male), and two new managing directors were appointed (1 female, 1 male).
Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment	The staff council is legally mandated and trained to respond on a case-by-case basis.	The ICLEI staff council has received legal training about performing its functions. They received training on the first module on Conflict Management, and are planning to be trained on the second module. Gender-based violence was among the cases that they discussed, but they did not receive targeted training on how to tackle such cases in more detail.

A set of concrete actions focusing on ICLEI Europe's gender mainstreaming work is included in the Gender Action Plan available in the Annex.

### 3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### 3.1 Gender equity and gender mainstreaming roles

Gender equity and mainstreaming responsibilities are split between different members of ICLEI Europe's staff, according to their role in the organisation. Below is a brief outline of the gender mandate for Human Resources and Managing Directors, the Staff Council and the Gender Mainstreaming Group.

##### Human Resources and Managing Directors

ICLEI Europe is currently undergoing an internal phased restructuring process, which started in 2023 and will be completed by 2027. Responding to the rapidly growing number of employees, a member of the senior management team has been overseeing and further developing Human Resources (HR) capacities and processes. On the one hand, ICLEI Europe's Managing Directors remain the main responsible people for contracting staff and making legal decisions in the name of the company. At the same time, HR is the main lever for addressing gender-related issues and ensuring ICLEI Europe is an inclusive and gender-sensitive work environment. The Senior Manager for HR acts in close collaboration with the Managing Directors and the Director's Group (including both Managing Directors and Deputy Directors) to ensure necessary measures to enable such an environment are agreed upon, funded and implemented.

##### ICLEI Europe's Staff Council and Gender Mainstreaming Group

In line with current German legislation, ICLEI Europe defines separate responsibilities regarding planning, implementation and monitoring actions on gender equity and mainstreaming to two different working groups:

- ✦ The Staff Council
- ✦ The Gender Mainstreaming Group

Both groups periodically meet with Management to ensure alignment on critical issues and potential opportunities for improving gender equity in ICLEI Europe and its work.

On the one hand, the Staff Council is responsible for advising on critical issues regarding gender equity and a gender-sensitive approach to staff management. Thus, this is a reference point for staff experiencing gender-related issues in their professional experience at ICLEI Europe (such as discrimination, violence, harassment, etc). All employees have the opportunity to discuss privately and anonymously these types of issues with any of the Staff Council representatives and have the right to ask for support and advice on how to address these.

On the other hand, ICLEI Europe's Gender Mainstreaming group has the mandate to guide and support the integration of gender considerations into ICLEI Europe's activities and work. This includes the gender dimension and/or monitoring gender dynamics in project work, including integrating a gender perspective in ICLEI's advocacy work and ensuring compliance with European gender-related standards and requirements to advance in research and innovation.



#### 3.2 People working on gender

This section introduces the staff members with a role in gender equity and mainstreaming at ICLEI Europe, and their contact information.

##### Director's Group

General email: [european.director@iclei.org](mailto:european.director@iclei.org)



Matthew Bach  
Managing Director



Wolfgang Teubner  
Managing Director



Shtilyana Koppe  
Managing Director  
(as of January 2026)

##### Human Resources

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Vera Noppenberger  
Officer  
[vera.noppenberger@iclei.org](mailto:vera.noppenberger@iclei.org)

##### Staff Council General email: [staffcouncil-europe@iclei.org](mailto:staffcouncil-europe@iclei.org)



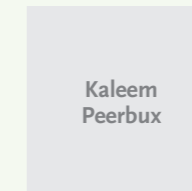
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Luca Arbau  
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##### Reserve Group



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Nanuna Amisulashvili  
[nanuna.amisulashvili@iclei.org](mailto:nanuna.amisulashvili@iclei.org)

## 4. ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIONS

### 4.1 Key achievements (2022-2025)

ICLEI Europe's gender mainstreaming group was established in spring 2022, and since then, it has developed key actions to make deeper and more systemic work possible in the future.

In particular, these actions were taken to enable the development and implementation of this Gender Equality Plan:

- ✦ **2022 survey:** it served to assess the level of understanding of gender issues and gender mainstreaming opportunities among staff, and their vision for developing gender work at ICLEI Europe.
- ✦ **Gender Action Plan 2023-24:** developed in 2022 to guide the operations of the gender mainstreaming group in its first two years of work.
- ✦ **Presentation and discussions at the Staff plenaries in 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025:** the Gender Mainstreaming group raised awareness among staff members about ongoing gender activities.
- ✦ **Gender game at the staff outing 2022:** it aimed to stimulate discussions around key gender issues.
- ✦ **Training on gender equity in 2023:** delivered by an external expert, it provided some staff members with

basic knowledge on gender equity and mainstreaming. It was the basis for a "train-the-trainer" approach, that sought to enable gender knowledge sharing among staff.

- ✦ **Gender "membinars" and podcast:** they showcased good practices on gender equity policies and measures implemented by ICLEI Europe members, aiming at inspiring others and raising awareness on the topic (every year, 2022-2025).
- ✦ **Tailored assistance to colleagues:** by responding to specific requests or taking initiative, the gender mainstreaming group has assisted and facilitated discussion on how to mainstream gender in the work of different ICLEI Europe's topical teams.
- ✦ **Brownbag lunch:** The ICLEI Gender Mainstreaming Group organised a brownbag lunch in May 2024 to present to Staff the draft GEP and get feedback from a diverse group of colleagues and via a survey.
- ✦ **Other activities for the staff:** a workshop was organised during the ICLEI week in 2024, focused on mapping gender-related topics within ICLEI Europe's ongoing projects. The workshop aimed to identify existing „gender troubles“ and cluster them according to the recently launched [ICLEI Gender Declaration](#).
- ✦ **ICLEI GEP publication:** Finalisation and publication of the GEP on the ICLEI Website.

Dreamstime / Rawpixelimages



### 4.2 Gender Action Plan

The actions outlined in ICLEI Europe's Gender Action Plan (GAP) aim to put into practice the gender mainstreaming objectives of this GEP. The GAP was developed in 2022 by the gender mainstreaming group and underwent a process of approval by the Managing Director, ensuring economic feasibility and alignment with the company's strategic goals. It was reviewed and updated in 2025. The full GAP is available in the Annex of this document.

This GAP lists actions led by the gender mainstreaming group to set up the gender work at ICLEI Europe and test actions in different areas of work. The actions have been grouped into 4 main spheres, which constitute the pillars of work. These 4 main spheres are presented below with their scope and ambition.



#### ORGANISATIONAL ACTIONS

- Aligning with existing ICLEI protocols and ambitions.
- Ensuring the presence of the gender group in key organisational processes.
- Disseminating and advocating for a gender-sensitive approach to sustainability within ICLEI Members' work.
- Identifying common goals and potential synergies across ICLEI offices.
- Maximising collaboration on gender equity and mainstreaming with other organisations.
- Benchmarking interesting calls and potential flagship projects integrating gender and sustainability.
- Gaining visibility for ICLEI's gender work and maximising impact.



#### COMMUNICATION

- Enabling transparent communication with ICLEI Europe's staff by actively engaging them via different channels, such as the Gender Mainstreaming Group email address and events organised by the group.
- Raising awareness among ICLEI Europe's members about gender equity and mainstreaming in urban planning and development.
- Creating workplace guidelines on gender-sensitive communication.
- Disseminating relevant resources and materials to further gender equity and mainstreaming in the EU policy sphere.



#### TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- Raising awareness among ICLEI Europe's staff about gender equity and mainstreaming.
- Increasing skills of the ICLEI ES staff for including gender as a transversal dimension in their expert topic, and through projects.
- Improving ICLEI's capacity as a gender-inclusive employer.



#### MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Gauging progress on the gender equity and mainstreaming plan.
- Defining key issues and opportunities for improving the work on gender in ICLEI Europe.
- Monitoring staff interest and engagement in gender issues.



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