

Gender Equality Plan 2026–2029

Necia Tech Cluster

“Gender equality is a fundamental value of the European Union. It benefits research and innovation by improving quality and relevance, attracting and retaining talent, and ensuring that everyone can maximise their potential.” — European Commission, Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans 1

1. Official Endorsement

This Gender Equality Plan (GEP) represents the formal, public commitment of Necia Tech Cluster to fostering gender equality, diversity, and inclusion within our organisation, among our member companies, and throughout our broader innovation ecosystem. It is a strategic document that sets out our goals, actions, and monitoring framework for the period 2026 to 2029.

This plan has been developed in full alignment with the requirements set out by the European Commission for participants in the Horizon Europe funding programme 1 2, as well as Norway’s Equality and Anti-discrimination Act (Likestillings- og diskrimineringsloven) 3. It constitutes a public document that will be published on the official Necia Tech Cluster website at necia.no and actively communicated to all employees, members, and stakeholders.

We believe that embracing gender equality is not only a matter of ethical and social responsibility, but is also fundamental to driving innovation, enhancing competitiveness, and achieving sustainable industrial growth. We commit the necessary resources, expertise, and leadership attention to implement, monitor, and continuously improve the actions outlined in this plan.

Endorsed and signed by:

Eva Helen Rognskog CEO, Necia Tech Cluster Moss, Norway Date: 15 March 2026

2. About Necia Tech Cluster

Necia Tech Cluster — the Norwegian Environment for Commercial and Industrial Alliances — is a cross-industry innovation cluster based in Moss, Norway. We connect businesses, technology suppliers, educational institutions, and government bodies to strengthen industrial growth and global competitiveness 4. Our work spans multiple programs, including VOXTRY (a growth accelerator for companies with global potential), Green Offshore Tech (supporting innovation in SMEs), the Leadership Forum, and Fremtidens Arbeidskraft (building bridges between industry, education, and the public sector).

As a cluster organisation, Necia Tech Cluster occupies a unique position: we are not only an employer with our own internal staff, but also a platform and convener for a wide network of member companies, partners, and stakeholders. This dual role means that our GEP must address both our internal organisational practices and our broader influence on the ecosystem we serve.

3. Rationale and Context

3.1. Why Gender Equality Matters for Innovation

An increasing body of evidence demonstrates that gender equality is not merely a social imperative, but a driver of excellence in research and innovation. The European Commission's Gendered Innovations 2 report 5 shows that integrating sex and gender analysis into R&I content improves scientific quality, reproducibility, and societal relevance. Diverse teams produce more creative and robust solutions, and organisations that actively promote gender equality attract and retain a broader pool of talent.

In the technology sector specifically, gender imbalances remain pronounced. Women are significantly underrepresented in STEM education and careers, in technology leadership roles, and as founders of technology companies. Addressing these imbalances is therefore both a strategic priority and a competitive advantage.

3.2. Alignment with Horizon Europe

Horizon Europe — the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation — has introduced a strengthened commitment to gender equality through three main provisions 2:

Provision	Description
GEP Eligibility Criterion	Public bodies, research organisations, and higher education establishments from EU Member States and Associated Countries must have a GEP in place to be eligible for Horizon Europe funding.
Gender Dimension in R&I Content	The integration of sex and gender analysis into R&I content is a mandatory requirement by default across all work programmes and topics.
Gender Balance	A target of 50% women in advisory bodies, expert groups, and evaluation panels; gender balance among project researchers is strongly encouraged.

As a cluster organisation active in the European research and innovation landscape, Necia Tech Cluster is committed to meeting and exceeding these requirements.

3.3. Alignment with Norwegian Law

Norway's Equality and Anti-discrimination Act 3 requires all employers to work in an active, targeted, and systematic way to promote equality and prevent discrimination. This GEP fulfils and builds upon these national legal obligations, ensuring that our commitment to gender equality is embedded in both our legal compliance framework and our strategic vision.

4. Mandatory Process-Related Requirements

This section details the four foundational building blocks required by the Horizon Europe GEP eligibility criterion 1.

4.1. Public Document

This GEP is a formal, publicly accessible document. It is signed by the CEO of Necia Tech Cluster and will be published on our official website. It will be actively communicated to all staff, member companies, and partners through our internal communication channels, newsletters, and social media platforms. Regular progress reports will be published annually on the same platform, ensuring ongoing transparency and accountability.

The GEP clearly states:

- Our organisational commitment to gender equality;
- The objectives and desired outcomes of the plan;
- The relevant baseline data and targets we aim to achieve;
- The concrete actions we will take and the resources dedicated to them.

4.2. Dedicated Resources

Necia Tech Cluster commits to allocating dedicated human, financial, and knowledge resources to support the implementation of this GEP throughout its lifecycle.

Human Resources: A Gender Equality Working Group will be established, chaired by a member of the senior management team. The group will include representatives from across the organisation and, where appropriate, from member companies. It will meet at least quarterly and will be responsible for overseeing implementation, reviewing progress, and proposing adjustments to the plan.

Financial Resources: An annual budget line will be dedicated to GEP activities. This will cover training programs, awareness campaigns, data collection and analysis, external expert consultations, and any specific initiatives developed under the action plan.

Expertise: We will ensure access to gender equality expertise, whether through internal capacity building or by engaging external consultants and specialists. We will also leverage resources and tools provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the GEAR tool 6.

4.3. Data Collection and Monitoring

Evidence-based action requires systematic data. We commit to collecting, analysing, and publicly reporting sex/gender-disaggregated data on an annual basis. This data will inform the GEP's objectives, targets, and ongoing evaluation of progress.

The following table outlines the key indicators we will track:

Domain	Indicator	Frequency
Internal Staff	Gender distribution by role and seniority level	Annual
Internal Staff	Gender pay gap analysis	Annual
Leadership	Gender balance on the Board of Directors	Annual

Leadership	Gender balance in the senior management team	Annual
Recruitment	Gender distribution of applicants, shortlisted candidates, and new hires	Per recruitment cycle
Cluster Membership	Gender distribution of CEOs and leaders in member companies	Annual
Events & Activities	Gender balance of speakers, panelists, and facilitators at cluster events	Per event
Training	Participation rates in GEP-related training, disaggregated by gender	Annual
R&I Projects	Number of cluster-supported projects integrating the gender dimension	Annual

An annual Gender Equality Report will be published on our website, presenting progress against these indicators and updating the action plan where necessary.

4.4. Training and Awareness-Raising

We will implement a continuous, evidence-based programme of training and awareness-raising activities. This programme is designed to engage the whole organisation — from senior leadership to all staff — and to build lasting capacity for gender equality.

Unconscious Bias Training: Mandatory training on unconscious gender bias will be provided for all employees. Specialised sessions will be developed for managers and those involved in recruitment, promotion, and evaluation processes. This training will be incorporated into onboarding processes and refreshed regularly.

Leadership Engagement: Senior management and board members will participate in targeted training on inclusive leadership and the business case for gender equality, ensuring that commitment to the GEP is driven from the top of the organisation.

Awareness Campaigns: We will organise and promote internal and external campaigns to raise awareness of gender equality issues, celebrate female role models in technology and industry, and highlight the importance of diversity for innovation. This includes participation in events such as International Women’s Day and the Women in Tech movement.

Workshops and Seminars: Regular events will be organised for staff and members on topics including inclusive leadership, work-life balance, integrating the gender dimension in R&I, and preventing gender-based violence and harassment.

5. Recommended Thematic Areas and Action Plan

This section outlines our objectives, actions, responsibilities, and timelines across the five recommended thematic areas 1 6.

5.1. Work-Life Balance and Organisational Culture

Objective: To foster an inclusive, respectful, and supportive organisational culture that enables all employees to achieve a healthy work-life balance and to contribute fully to the organisation.

A positive organisational culture is the foundation of gender equality. Necia Tech Cluster is committed to creating an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and supported, and where flexible working is not seen as a disadvantage but as a standard feature of a modern, inclusive workplace.

Action	Responsible	Timeline	Indicator
Review and update flexible working policy to ensure equal access for all genders	HR / Management	Q2 2026	Policy published and communicated
Review and enhance parental leave policies to encourage equal uptake by all parents	HR / Management	Q3 2026	Updated policy in place; uptake monitored annually
Conduct an annual staff survey on organisational culture, work-life balance, and inclusion	Gender Equality Working Group	Annual (from Q4 2026)	Survey results published; actions taken
Develop and communicate clear guidelines on respectful workplace behaviour	HR / Management	Q2 2026	Guidelines published; training delivered
Actively promote the visibility of women and non-binary individuals in internal and external communications	Communications	Ongoing	% of women featured in communications tracked

5.2. Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-Making

Objective: To achieve equitable gender representation in leadership positions and decision-making bodies within Necia Tech Cluster, and to actively encourage this within our member ecosystem.

Increasing the number and share of women in leadership and decision-making positions is a key priority. This requires both structural changes to selection processes and active support for the career development of underrepresented groups.

Target: At least 40% representation of each gender on the Board of Directors and in the senior management team by 2029.

Action	Responsible	Timeline	Indicator
Conduct a baseline assessment of gender balance in all leadership and decision-making bodies	Gender Equality Working Group	Q2 2026	Baseline report published
Set and publish gender balance targets for the Board and senior management	CEO / Board	Q2 2026	Targets published
Ensure gender-balanced representation on all internal committees, advisory groups, and evaluation panels	Management	Ongoing	% gender balance on committees tracked
Launch a mentorship and sponsorship programme for women and underrepresented individuals	HR / Management	Q3 2026	Number of participants; career progression tracked
Advocate for gender balance in leadership within member companies through cluster activities	CEO / Cluster Team	Ongoing	Number of awareness activities held

5.3. Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression

Objective: To ensure that all recruitment, selection, and career progression processes are fair, transparent, and free from gender bias.

Critically reviewing selection procedures and remedying biases are essential steps for ensuring that women and men have equal opportunities to develop and advance their careers. Necia Tech Cluster will implement a set of concrete measures to achieve this.

Action	Responsible	Timeline	Indicator
Review all job descriptions and advertisements for	HR	Q2 2026	100% of new job ads reviewed

gender-neutral and inclusive language			
Implement structured interview processes with standardised, gender-neutral criteria	HR	Q3 2026	Process documented and in use
Ensure gender-diverse hiring panels for all recruitment processes	HR / Management	Ongoing	% of recruitment processes with diverse panels
Establish transparent criteria for promotions and career progression	HR / Management	Q3 2026	Criteria published internally
Analyse and address any gender pay gap identified in annual data collection	HR / Management	Annual	Pay gap report published
Provide guidance to member companies on inclusive recruitment practices	Cluster Team	Q4 2026	Number of members reached

5.4. Integration of the Gender Dimension into R&I Content

Objective: To encourage and support the integration of sex and gender analysis into the research and innovation activities of Necia Tech Cluster and its member companies.

The integration of the gender dimension into R&I content is a mandatory requirement under Horizon Europe 2. It means taking into account how sex and gender may affect research questions, methodologies, data collection, and outcomes. This is not about gender balance among researchers, but about the quality and relevance of the research itself.

For a technology cluster like Necia, this is particularly relevant in areas such as artificial intelligence, product design, and digital services.

Action	Responsible	Timeline	Indicator
Develop and distribute a practical guide for members on integrating the gender dimension in R&I	Cluster Team	Q3 2026	Guide published and distributed

Organise at least one annual workshop on gendered innovations and sex/gender analysis in R&I	Cluster Team	Annual	Number of participants
Incorporate the gender dimension as an evaluation criterion in cluster-supported project calls	Management	Q4 2026	Criterion included in project guidelines
Showcase best-practice examples of R&I projects with a gender perspective	Communications	Ongoing	Number of case studies published
Provide information on EU resources, including the Gendered Innovations 2 report 5	Cluster Team	Q2 2026	Resources made available on website

5.5. Measures Against Gender-Based Violence, Including Sexual Harassment

Objective: To maintain a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all, with zero tolerance for gender-based violence, harassment, and misconduct.

All individuals associated with Necia Tech Cluster — employees, members, partners, and event participants — have the right to work and participate in an environment free from harassment and violence. We are committed to establishing clear policies, accessible reporting mechanisms, and a culture of zero tolerance.

Action	Responsible	Timeline	Indicator
Develop and publish a zero-tolerance policy on gender-based violence and sexual harassment	HR / Management	Q2 2026	Policy published and communicated
Establish clear, confidential, and safe procedures for reporting incidents	HR / Management	Q2 2026	Procedures documented and accessible
Designate a confidential contact	Management	Q2 2026	Contact person appointed and communicated

person for reporting and support			
Provide mandatory training for all staff on preventing and responding to harassment	HR	Q3 2026 (and annually)	% of staff trained
Include anti-harassment expectations in event codes of conduct for all cluster activities	Communications / Cluster Team	Q2 2026	Code of conduct included in all events

6. Implementation, Monitoring, and Review

6.1. Governance

The Gender Equality Working Group, chaired by a senior management representative, will be the primary body responsible for implementing and monitoring this GEP. It will meet at least quarterly and will report to the CEO and Board of Directors on progress.

6.2. Annual Reporting

An Annual Gender Equality Report will be published on the Necia Tech Cluster website. This report will present progress against all indicators defined in Section 4.3 and the action plan tables in Section 5, and will include both quantitative data and qualitative reflections on achievements and challenges.

6.3. Review and Update

A comprehensive review of this GEP will be conducted at the end of the plan period (2029). An interim review will be conducted in 2027 to assess progress and make any necessary adjustments to the action plan. The GEP will be updated and renewed for the following period based on the findings of this review.

6.4. Timeline Overview

Year	Key Activities
2026	Establish Gender Equality Working Group; publish GEP; conduct baseline data collection; implement foundational policies (anti-harassment, flexible working, recruitment procedures); launch first training cycle.
2027	Publish first Annual Gender Equality Report; conduct interim GEP review; launch mentorship programme; develop

	and distribute R&I gender dimension guide; assess progress against targets.
2028	Continue all ongoing activities; deepen integration of gender dimension in cluster projects; expand training programme; publish third Annual Gender Equality Report.
2029	Publish fourth Annual Gender Equality Report; conduct comprehensive GEP review; develop new GEP for 2030-2033.

7. Compliance with Horizon Europe Requirements

The following table provides a summary of how this GEP meets the mandatory requirements and recommended thematic areas of the Horizon Europe GEP eligibility criterion 1 2:

Requirement	Status	Reference in this GEP
Public document, signed by top management	Met	Section 1 (Official Endorsement)
Dedicated resources	Met	Section 4.2
Data collection and monitoring	Met	Section 4.3
Training and awareness-raising	Met	Section 4.4
Work-life balance and organisational culture	Addressed	Section 5.1
Gender balance in leadership and decision-making	Addressed	Section 5.2
Gender equality in recruitment and career progression	Addressed	Section 5.3
Integration of the gender dimension into R&I content	Addressed	Section 5.4
Measures against gender-based violence	Addressed	Section 5.5

8. References

1. European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), Publications Office, 2021. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/876509>
2. European Commission, Horizon Europe (HORIZON) HE Programme Guide, Version 5.1, 15 September 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide_horizon_en.pdf
3. Lov om likestilling og vern mot diskriminering (likestillings- og diskrimineringsloven), LOV-2017-06-16-51. <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2017-06-16-51>

4. Necia Tech Cluster. "About Necia — Norwegian Environment for Commercial and Industrial Alliances." <https://necia.no/en/about-necia>
5. European Commission, Expert Group on Gendered Innovations, Gendered Innovations 2: How Inclusive Analysis Contributes to Research and Innovation, Publications Office, 2020. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/316197>
6. European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). "Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) Tool — Horizon Europe GEP Criterion." <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/horizon-europe-gep-criterion>