



Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development Gender Equality Plan 2022 – 2025

Table of Contents

1. The context and legal framework	3
2. The Organisational Policy, Regulations and Procedures.....	6
2.1 Work-Life Balance and Organisational Culture	7
2.2 Gender balance in leadership, management and decision-making	9
2.3 Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression.....	10
2.4 Integration of the Gender Dimension into Research and Teaching Content.....	10
2.5 Measures Against Gender-Based Violence Including Sexual Harassment.....	11
3. Implementation of the Gender Equality Plan	11

1. The context and legal framework

Gender equality has historically constituted a sensitive yet, under-researched topic in Albania, for a number of socio-political and cultural reasons. Up until the early '90s, the communist propaganda depicted the role of women as one of its most successful stories, supposedly leading to the emancipation of women. The narrative could not be farther from the truth, as in reality, women were subjected to very conservative treatment, including lack of privacy, daily hardship, and even persecution and other forms of violence including execution, imprisonment, exile and deportation, and restrictions on freedoms in the form of others.

Lack of gender sensitive policies overtime, has yielded effects on many levels, including economical, which according to the World Bank (2020), is clearly manifested in Albania's GDP – estimated 20% lower than it could have been had the environment been more conducive to gender balance.

Given the void and lack of alignment with international reference documents and standards, over the past 30 years, Albania has had to develop anew its legislative framework when it comes to gender balance. Since 1995, the legal framework for the promotion of legal equality has been considerably improved by the ratification of a series of important international documents and by other amendments. Below are listed the legal instruments that are actually in force in the Republic of Albania for gender equality. Albania became a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) via accession on May 11, 1994. On June 23, 2003, the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW was also signed, which includes an inquiry and complaints procedure into serious abuses of women. The CEDAW stipulates, amongst various rights, equal pay for equal work, equality in work possibilities (Article 11), equality in positions and access to private and public decision-making, including political positions (Article 7). The CEDAW also stipulates that a party state must make use of accelerating measures to increase gender equality (Article 4).

In 2011, Albania also signed the Istanbul Convention, ratified then in 2013, which requires the signatories to take action to prevent further gender-based violence to happen, to protect victims and witnesses of violence, to effectively prosecute aggressors and perpetrators of violence by enforcing laws and complete judicial proceedings, and to adopt coordinated policies.

At European level, the so-called Recast Directive (2006/54/EC) on equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men in employment and occupation requires the implementation of the prohibition of direct and indirect sex discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment in pay, (access to) employment and in occupational social security schemes.

The gender equality law (9970/2008) stipulates that gender mainstreaming shall be the approach to ensure gender equality in society, by enforcing the protection against discrimination on grounds of sex and against any form of conduct which promotes discrimination on grounds of sex. It also determines measures to guarantee equal opportunities to men and women, building upon the law 7961/1995, that enforces gender equality in terms of salaries. The law also provides for special temporary measures for guaranteeing at least 30% representation of the under-represented gender in political and public decision-making positions and administration.

In 2010, two laws (no.10221 and no.10237, please see Table I) were approved to enforce protection measure against discrimination related to gender and to bestow on the employer the obligation to ensure the protection of safety and health at work for all employees.

The four-year National Strategy and Action Plan for Gender Equality approved in 2016 poses three main achievements to fulfil in the concerned period:

1. To economically empower both men and women, by increasing the participation of women in the formal labour market, reducing the gender gap, increasing women's access to quality social services, with specific focus is devoted to rural and vulnerable women.
2. To guarantee equal political participation of women in the decision-making process, by increasing the number of women in leading positions and women participation in policy-making processes at local government level.
3. To raise awareness of the society on gender equality advancing as a prerequisite for development.

In 2019, a series of acts and measures were put in place to safeguard the employability of all women, from rural areas, marginalized groups, disabled, victims of abuse, single-mothers, and to provide them with social security nets and supports (laws 15/2019, 57/2019, 380/2019, 866/2019). Table I lists all of the relevant national laws and strategies. The Employment Protection Law enacted in the same year aims to increase the percentage of women employed through the National Employment Agency and assists vulnerable women with subsidies for related childcare needs (The World Bank, Results Brief, 2020).

Table I: List of the main national changes in the field of gender equality (1995 – 2019)

Year	Law / Strategy	Comments
1995	Law no. 7961, 12.7.1995 "The Code of Labor of the Republic of Albania" [changed].	This law reflects gender equality in terms of salary: men and women must be paid equally based on the work done.
1998	Law no. 8454, 04.02.1999 "For the Ombudsman".	Law on the protection of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of the individual from illegal and irregular actions or omissions of public administration bodies, as well as third parties by the Ombudsman.
2008	Law no. 9970, 24.07.2008 "On Gender Equality in the Society".	The purpose of the lawno.9970 is: a) to provide effective protection against discrimination on grounds of sex and against any form of conduct which promotes discrimination on grounds of sex; b) to determine measures to guarantee equal opportunities between women and men.
2010	Law no. 10221, 04.02.2010 "On the Protection from Discrimination". Law no.10237, 18.02.2010 "On Health Security at Work".	Law 10221 This law regulates the implementation and observance of the principle of equality in relation to gender, as well as other important elements Law 10237 provides for the taking of measures for the protection of safety and health at work, which is guided by the principle of equal gender treatment and the obligations of the employer to take special measures for the protection of safety and health at work of employees, pregnant women, those who have just given

		birth and those who are breastfeeding, are not considered discriminatory because of their gender.
2014	<p>Employment Promotion Program "For unemployed jobseekers in difficulty" no.48, 11.01.2012, amended with no. 192, 02.04.2014.</p> <p>Employment Promotion Program through Job Training. no. 47, 16.01.2008, amended by no.193, 02.04.2014.</p>	Beneficiaries of this program are unemployed job-seekers man and woman, who will receive on-the-job training. The relevant employment office finances the cost-based fee, in the amount of 19,000 (nineteen thousand) ALL for each month of training for each person.
2015	Amendments introduced to the Electoral Code with the Law 74/2012 to ensure 50 % women at local councils at the new LGU	<p>This amendment stipulates that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The obligation to respect the principle of gender equality belongs to electoral subjects, electoral administration and the court. - Electoral law promotes gender equality for elected bodies and election administration; - Sanctions for non-compliance with gender equality.
2016	National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020.	<p>Among others, the relevant strategic goals posed by this strategy are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To empower economically both men and women, by increasing the participation of women in the formal labor market, reducing the gender gap, increasing women's access to quality social services. A specific focus is devoted to rural and vulnerable women. 2. To guarantee equal political participation of women in the decisional-making process, by increasing the number of women in leading positions and women participation in policy-making processes at local government level. 3. To raise awareness of the society on gender equality advancing as a prerequisite for development.
2019	<p>Law no. 57/2019 "On social assistance in the Republic of Albania"</p> <p>Law No. 15/2019 "On the promotion of employment</p> <p>Law "On the approval of the political document" Reform of the disability assessment in the social protection system and the action plan 2019-2024 for its implementation ", no. 380, dated 05.06.2015</p>	<p>Law 57/2019 regulates the manner of providing economic assistance, disability payments and baby bonuses, to guarantee social protection for all citizens.</p> <p>Law 15/2019 defines as special groups who are disadvantaged jobseekers in the labor market the victims of gender-based violence and victims of domestic violence.</p> <p>In order to implement and fulfill the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee of this convention, a special attention in the planning and implementation of the activities of the Plan will be given to vulnerable groups that may face multiple discrimination such as women</p>

	Law "On the approval of the National Strategy for Social Protection 2020-2023 and the action plan in its implementation", no. 866, dated 24.12.2019.	with disabilities who due to cultural prejudices and gender stereotypes, often face multiple discrimination. The National Strategy for Social Protection 2020-2023 and the action plan in its implementation provides as goal no. 5 achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.
--	--	---

2. The Organisational Policy, Regulations and Procedures

Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development (hereinafter referred to as Co-PLAN) has its organisational policy, regulations and procedures clearly outlined and explained in the 'Manual on Organisational Policy, Regulations and Procedures'. This Manual is an official document that articulated the internal policies, practices, and procedures relating to general management, organization, operations, gender balance, and other relevant aspects. The manual is reviewed periodically, and every time considered necessary in order to reflect important developments. This document constitutes the cornerstone of Co-PLAN's commitment to building and offering a conducive working environment.

Since its inception in 1995, it has been the policy of Co-PLAN to provide equal employment opportunities to all persons; to prohibit discrimination in employment because of race, ethnicity, colour, religion, national origin, gender identity, gender and sexual orientation, marital status, political affiliation, age or handicap; and to enable gender equality. This policy sets the basis this Gender Equality Plan.

There is zero tolerance toward sexual harassment and gender-based and discrimination-based violence and in case of occurrence it will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. When the case, legal action will also be taken as per the respective legislation in Albania.

At Co-PLAN, compensation is determined based on the employee's seniority rank or level within the organization, their qualifications, education and training, professional experience, years of work experience, salary history and their demonstrated commitment to the organization.

In 27 years, such policy, regulations and procedures have contributed to the establishment and consolidation of a healthy organisational culture, where gender equality is viewed as an asset, and is maintained in balance at all times. In order to maintain such standards, and progress in parallel with the international context, the organisation invested in the preparation of a Gender Equality Plan, and some complementary measures such as the designation of the Gender Equality Focal Point position.

This Gender Equality Plan is considered an important instrument in ensuring a gender balanced work environment, and is structured in line with the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy considerations: (1) work-life balance and organisational culture; (2) gender balance in leadership and decision-making; (3) gender equality in recruitment and career progression; (4) integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content; (5) measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment.

2.1 Work-Life Balance and Organisational Culture

Co-PLAN acknowledges the importance of work-life balance for its employees and works to maintain it in healthy norms. Support to professional growth alongside fulfilment of core personal responsibilities is fundamental and is regulated as follows:

- *Workload Management:* Based on the framework terms of reference for each position, detailed terms of reference are developed for each Co-PLAN staff. These terms are clearly communicated by management, and upon confirmation, and endorsement by the employee are included in the employment contract. The workload and work performance are monitored regularly by management (Project Manager, and/or Unit Manager, and/or Executive Director) and registered in monthly timesheets. Based on this practice, balanced workload is ensured as follows:
 - Management assesses and ensures that workload is distributed in a balanced way, and in line with what has been agreed with the employee.
 - The employee is offered the possibility to raise any concerns to management, including: Project Manager, and/or Unit Manager, and/or Executive Director. This happens in two different moments: (1) pre-set: twice a year, during the internal organisational planning sessions as explained below; (2) on need-basis: when the employee raises the concern to the management.

For better planning of workload, internal organisational planning sessions (annual and midterm reflections) are held regularly. During these processes, Co-PLAN staff, organised into teams and/or units, work on joint work plans, with clearly assigned tasks. The plans are introduced to the organisation, discussed and then endorsed. The agreed plans, are monitored regularly.

- *Flexibility in working time and place arrangements:* The working times and premises (including all necessary equipment) are regulated in the 'Manual on Organisational Policy, Regulations and Procedures', however, Co-PLAN has shown, and will continue to show flexibility to suit circumstances of individual employees, or overall circumstances that apply to all staff. More specifically, Co-PLAN has shown flexibility, and commits to continuing to do so in the following situations:

- Work and Study (Masters or PhD, or post-doctoral studies) for temporary, jointly agreed, and defined periods of time;

When an authorized training course or study that is related directly to Co-PLAN (inside or outside Albania) may be granted, the normal salary will be paid for a maximum period of 3 months. For longer periods, special arrangement will be made.

In case of part time courses in Albania, time-off is given during normal working hours, if applicable.

Study time outside the normal working hours will not be compensated.

For a long period of studies (a sabbatical), a study leave contract is signed.

In case of training courses that relate directly to the Employee as an individual, the Employee shall use his/her free time to attend such courses. In special cases it

is possible to shift these within the official working hours for reasons of attending classes or courses, but the Employee will have to work on holidays to compensate for the lost time.

Co-PLAN allows the Employee to sit for official exams during official working hours

- Serious health issues of the employees or of depending family members:

Sick leave may be used for medical reasons only that directly affect the staff member, spouse, minor child and immediate dependant. The number of days/hours off for due to sickness will be shown on the Time Sheet format. All leave due to sickness should be notified to the Co-PLAN office administrator and respective project/program manager not later than 9:00 AM of the first day of absence and on each succeeding day. A certified medical document must be submitted to the financial administrator for time periods from 3 days (three) onwards (absence due to illness). Payment of salary applicable sick leave is according to the Albanian law. Full-time staff have 14 (fourteen) days of paid sick leave per year, which must be certified by a medical document. Staff on sick leave shall continue to accrue annual leave and still be subject to maximum annual leave limits.
- Outbreaks of pandemics, or similar situations, affecting the health, and safety of employees;

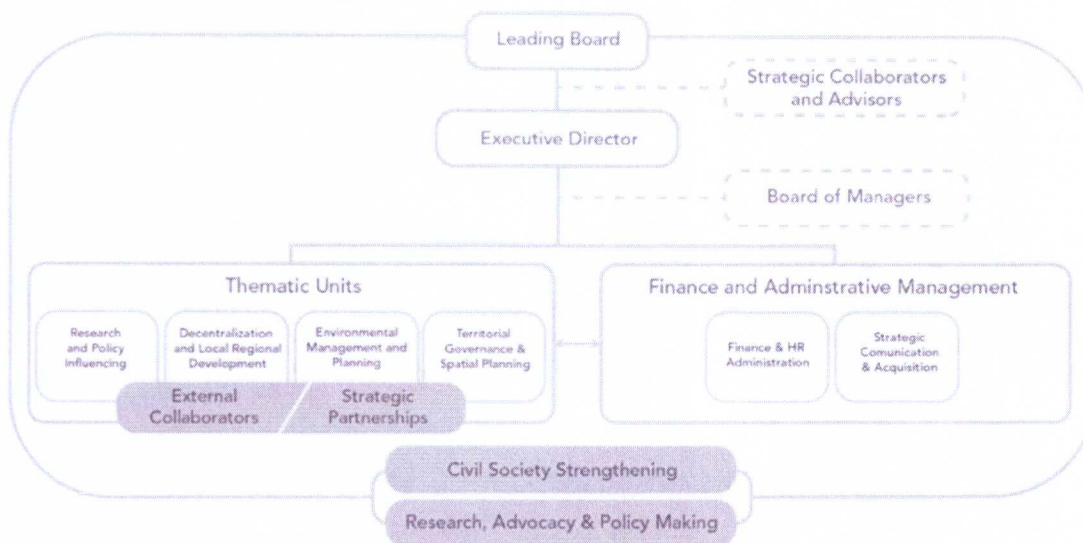
In case of pandemics, or similar situations, affecting the health and safety of employees, Co-PLAN shall implement the respective laws and regulations set by the Albanian government or the respective local government. In absence of such regulations, or complementary to them, Co-PLAN's management will consider the issuance of specific regulations for the employees, in accordance with the risk of the situation and respecting a work-life balance.
- And any other situations with serious implications.
- *Professional Development:* Training is considered as very important for the professional development of the Co-PLAN Employees, and we distinguish between two types of training: 1) Training that is directly related to Co-PLAN needs and activities, and 2) Training that primarily benefits the Employee as an individual.
 - Training that is directly related to organizational activities is stimulated and sponsored by Co- PLAN through investing on research and training. For courses that are either enabled or paid for by Co-PLAN, it will request a commitment from the Employee to remain working with the Organisation for the following periods: (1) a minimum of 1 (one) year for two-month courses; (2) a minimum of 2 (two) years for three-month courses; and (3) at least 3 (three) years for one-year or longer courses. In cases when the contract is not respected, the employee has the duty to return to Co-PLAN the money allocated for her/him during the course attendance. Special cases are discussed with the Executive Director.
- *Parental Leave Policy:* Co-PLAN grants maternity leave to all employees who request it for up to a maximum of (one) year, according to the Albanian Labour Code. The employee is requested to provide sufficient advance notice of the impending delivery

date, not less than 4 (four months), to the supervisor, so that appropriate replacement coverage of work requirements may be arranged.

- For this period the payment to the employee will be covered by Social Insurance Institute. Co-PLAN provides a baby bonus of one salary.

2.2 Gender balance in leadership, management and decision-making

The organisational structure of Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development is as follows.



Since inception, at Co-PLAN we have strived for a 50-50 representation ratio, which is reflected in the following levels:

- Strategic Collaborators and Advisors
- Leading Board
- Board of Managers/ Heads of Thematics Units, including Finance and Administrative Management
- Project Managers

At the time of most recent revision of this plan (2022), the ratio averages 40% men, and 60% women. Co-PLAN commits to maintaining a ratio of no lower than 50% representation of women in management and decision making positions, as well as in the project teams.

Leading Board, Executive Director, and Board of Managers are management, and decision-making structures, with clearly regulated functions and competences in the 'Manual on Organisational Policy, Regulations and Procedures'.

Indicators as per January 2022 are:

- Leading Board: 66% are women;
- Board of Managers: 50% are women;
- Project Managers: 60% are women;
- Project Teams: 60% are women;

The mid-term target is to maintain a ratio of no lower than 50% representation of women in management and decision making positions, as well as in the project teams.

2.3 Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Progression

The recruitment policy and process are clearly outlined in the 'Manual on Organisational Policy, Regulations and Procedures'.

In the event of vacant position announcements, the relevant members of staff will prepare a job description and submit them to the Executive Office Administrator in order to announce these vacancies on local newspapers, on the internet and with the employment office. All staff-recruitment is discrimination-free and any advertising is gender-neutral. It is not discrimination if it promotes equality. All announcements must have the following two statements:

"Co-PLAN is an equal rights and opportunities employer."

"All applications will be treated with strict confidentiality in compliance with Law No. 9887/2008 "On the Protection of Personal Data".

The evaluation of a candidate's skills and qualifications is a process led either by the Executive Director and/or by a Project Manager depending on the function of the employee in the organization.

A first pre-selection is made on an application basis (CV + supportive documentation), by a committee of at least three persons. If no qualified candidates apply, the job will be re-advertised for an additional period.

Following the preselection of suitable application in line with the announcement, the recruitment process proceeds with the interviewing procedure, which comprises of: (a) written test; (b) oral interview.

The gender ratio of applications is conditioned by what the market has to offer, however, the organisation is at all times aware and responsible for ensuring:

- a fair, non-discriminatory and balanced process;
- recruitment in line with the overall gender equality plan provisions (section 2.2)

2.4 Integration of the Gender Dimension into Research and Teaching Content

Research constitutes a core component in Co-PLAN's activity. It is conducted either as a flagship organisational commitment, or as part of specific donor-funded projects.

In both instances, the gender dimension is integrated in the following ways:

- In the case of own flagship organisational projects, in addition to the fact that teams are gender balanced, depending on the typology of (research) projects, gender considerations are integrated including in: research design, data collection, research analysis, etc.
- In the case of donor-funded-projects, gender considerations are (a) either already integrated by design or (b) integrated by the implementing team, following a simple assessment. When already part of the project, the team(s) are qualified to implement and monitor the required assignment in full compliance with the scope of work.
- In the event that the gender considerations are vague or absent, the team conducts a simple assessment. Some sample questions used as part of the assessment are:
 - Are consultations organised with the stakeholders conducted in a participatory way?

- Are gender statistics available for the work at hand?
- Are gender aspects included in the monitoring and reporting?
- Does the external communication strategy/approach challenge the gender perceptions?

2.5 Measures Against Gender-Based Violence Including Sexual Harassment.

Harassment of any kind, including gender-based violence, sexual harassment and any such behaviour, is strongly objected to, and prohibited at Co-PLAN. In case of occurrence, whether observed or reported, it will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment, including legal action if relevant as per the law.

Co-PLAN prohibits accessing pornographic, sexually explicit, racist, or otherwise abusive web sites, newsgroups, or chat rooms or sending e-mail with such content.

3. Implementation of the Gender Equality Plan

The following steps are taken for the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan:

1. The approval of the GEP by the Board of Managers and endorsement by the Executive Director.
2. The appointment of the GE Focal Point. The GE Focal Point will monitor the achievement of the above policies and tasks and will report to the Executive Director as follows: (1) pre-set based on a template: once per year, during the internal organisational planning session; (2) on need-basis: anytime a related problem or concern arises.
3. The publication of GEP: GEP is easily accessible online, in the webpage of Co-PLAN, in Albanian and English language.
4. The evaluation conducted annually by the Executive Director with the Employees shall contain questions on gender equality and equal treatment.
5. Whenever documents, guidelines, policies and plans and other similar administrative supporting documents are updated, they will also be assessed from a gender equality and equal treatment perspective, and changed accordingly, if necessary, before any decisions are made.
6. The self-evaluation report completed by each employee during the internal organisational planning will contain a section on gender.
7. Co-PLAN's annual report will contain a statement on gender and on ethics.

The Gender Equality Plan 2022-2025 has been approved for implementation with immediate effect by the Board of Managers and the Executive Director.

Tiranë, January 31, 2022

Dritan Shutina
Executive Director

