Equality and Non-discrimination Action Plan of Alternet

Document details	
Title:	Equality and Non-discrimination Action Plan of Alternet
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Version management	

Versio n	Date	Description
0	14.11.2023	Original draft of the Plan shared with the Alternet management for review
1	18.12.2023	Manuscript comments from Alternet Management Board included, focus areas for the 2024-2025 period to be selected in the upcoming Board meeting
2	12.1.2024	Manuscript ready to be presented to the Council, including plan for next steps in the implementation in 2024-2025 period
3	**12.11.2024**	Revised version based on council's comments: *"revisions making directives Alternet-specific (not aimed at member institutes' own policies) and elaborating on the discipline-specific nature of equality challenges and directives for ensuring equality"*
4	**27.11.2024**	Revised version: designed and edited the actions and objectives related to Theme *Diversity and gender balance in management and decision-making of Alternet* both in the Plan and in Table 1 .
5	**18.3.2025**	Revised version based on the comments by Alternet council

Short introduction of Alternet

Alternet is an international non-profit organization, which integrates the understanding of biodiversity, ecosystems, and the services they provide to society and, thus, creates a platform for meaningful communication with policymakers and the public. It brings together international natural and social science researchers from 21 European countries.

Together with its partner organizations Alternet:
- Facilitates and engages science-policy-society dialogue interface, including **Eklipse mechanism** and its management.
- Hosts the **Alternet Summer School** in Peyresq, which has been providing training for young researchers in interdisciplinary approaches to biodiversity and ecosystems research since 2006.
- Brings together diverse scientific, policy, stakeholder, and NGO perspectives for bi-annual **Alternet Conferences**, developed in cooperation with the European Commission.
- Supports high-impact research on pressing topical issues facing science and society through the **AHIA initiative.**
- Funds multi-site research projects that take advantage of Alternet's pan-European facilities through the **MSR initiative.**
- Supports international research and exchange through the **Mobility Fund.**
- Enables international consortium building and internal sharing of funding opportunities through the **Call Exchange clearing house mechanism.**
- Supports research infrastructure, including the LTER-Europe network of Long-Term Ecosystem Research sites (LTER), Long-Term Socio-Ecological Research platforms (LTSER) and LifeWatch; Alternet was instrumental in developing this major European research infrastructure.

Currently, Alternet comprises 33 partner institutes from a total of 21 countries. Alternet enables integration among its network of partner institutes. Transdisciplinary in nature, Alternet partners bring together expertise from both the natural and social sciences and supports platforms for high-impact interactions with policymakers, the scientific community, and the public. It is based in Brussels, Belgium.

List of partner institutes/logos:

Introduction

This document outlines the Equality and Non-discrimination Action Plan of the Alternet network. Scheduled for periodic review and updates in response to evolving needs, this plan is designed to be a dynamic framework guiding the network towards enhanced gender equality and diversity. Rooted in the aim to further develop equality and non-discrimination across various Alternet activities and among its employees, the plan focuses on fostering a more inclusive environment at all levels. Aligned with the Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans, it delineates the measures and objectives that the network and its partner organizations are encouraged to consider in their daily activities.

At its core, the Equality and Non-discrimination Action Plan seeks to establish a workplace and network culture that transcends discrimination based on gender, origin, religion, sexual orientation, or any other factor. Emphasizing the collective responsibility for realizing equality within the project, the network underscores the importance of project employees and stakeholders, considering them as vital assets. The commitment to building a diverse and sustainable society is articulated through the recognition that different perspectives, people, and skills contribute to impactful research and professional outcomes.

The Equality and Non-discrimination Action Plan has been produced based on the experiences from previous research and development projects relevant for Alternet. In formulating the Plan's recommendations, examples have been drawn from existing Gender Equality Plans of Alternet's partner institutes (including CESAM, IGB, INBO, INRAE, Syke, UFZ and UK-CEH) and the EU Horizon 2020 funded projects Baltic Gender Project (No. 710363) and BioAgora (No. 101059438). ChatGPT has been beneficial in summarizing and formulating the action points: the text generated by ChatGPT has been edited for the Plan.

To uphold the principles of proportionality, privacy, personal data protection and non-discrimination Alternet pledges vigilant attention. Furthermore, the network embraces the Commission Recommendation on the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, underscoring transparent recruitment processes, career development, and optimal working conditions. A commitment to integrating gender, equality, and social justice considerations pervades the organizational fabric, with ongoing discussions at partner organizations ensuring the relevance of these themes.

Objectives

Altogether the Equality and Non-discrimination Action Plan of the Alternet network covers the key equality relevant activities in the management and decision-making of Alternet itself, and the organizational culture of the Alternet network. The Plan describes possibilities to promote equality through key action and functions of the Alternet, as well as means to handle possible disruptions occurring in the events organized by Alternet. Finally, we conclude the plan from the perspectives of its implementation the following two years at a time.

1. Diversity and gender balance in management and decision-making of Alternet

Ensuring diversity and improving gender balance and inclusivity in leadership positions is of paramount importance for Alternet, ethically but also for driving innovation and enhancing decision-making. At Alternet, we recognize that diversity improves the quality of decisions. When decision-making bodies include individuals of diverse backgrounds, they bring a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and ideas to the table. Inclusive decision-making processes tend to be more robust and well-rounded and lead to more comprehensive and effective strategies. A variety of perspectives helps identify potential blind spots, biases, or unintended consequences that might not be apparent in a less diverse setting.

At Alternet, we aim at fostering inclusive leadership culture, where leaders should actively champion the values of diversity, inclusivity, and gender balance and set the example for their teams and ensure equal development opportunities and support to employees at different career phases. The leadership culture should prioritize openness, collaboration, and the recognition of the unique perspectives that diverse leaders bring to the organization. A diverse leadership team and inclusive decision-making processes can help future-proof a network by ensuring it is adaptable, responsive, and aligned with evolving societal expectations.

Objective 1.1.: Promote diversity in decision-making bodies of Alternet

Actions:

- 1.1.1. Pay attention to diversity and gender balance in the selection of members for Alternet SteeringBoard and Network Council and encourage diversity in gender representation when nominating individuals for these positions.
- 1.1.2. Periodically review and assess the composition of the Alternet SteeringBoard and Network Council to ensure gender equality and diversity. And based on the review, develop criteria for diversity when selecting experts for various activities, including diversity in academic background, discipline, seniority and gender identity when forming expert groups.

Objective 1.2: Ensure equal development opportunities and support to employees with diverse backgrounds and in different career phases

Actions:

- 1.2.1. Ensure equal possibilities to take various roles and apply funding through Alternet's Mobility Scheme to partner institute employees in different career phases and from different backgrounds. Implement measurable targets for gender balance, holding leaders responsible for progress and actively supporting the development of diverse talent within their teams.
- 1.2.2. Foster inclusive leadership culture and capacities by cultivating a leadership culture that prioritizes openness and collaboration and creates an environment where diverse voices are not only heard but actively contribute to Alternet activities of various kinds.

2. Organisational culture in Alternet as a network

In Alternet, we work proactively to improve the inclusive and open organisational culture of the network. Promoting diversity and inclusion isn't just about gender; it should encompass all aspects of identity, creating an environment where everyone feels valued and respected. A culture where everyone can excel, collaborate, and find personal fulfillment in their work not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the long-term success and sustainability of the whole network. Advancing healthy organisational culture, promoting learning and self-awareness of the employees, and ensuring diversity, inclusivity and fair treatment of all need to be taken into consideration when creating a more positive and inclusive organizational culture.

Open, honest, and transparent communication is a key to a healthy and inclusive organizational culture. A culture of respect, fairness, and accountability should start at the top and permeate through all levels of the organization. It ensures that individuals feel heard, valued, and informed about the organization's goals, values, and expectations. Encouraging regular feedback from Alternet members and participants and actively listening to their concerns can lead to positive changes and build trust.

Objective 2.1: Advance healthy organizational culture

Actions:

- 2.1.1. Promote open and transparent communication culture in the network, starting from Alternet's decision-making bodies.
- 2.1.2. Actively work to reject all forms of racism, discrimination, and bias
- 2.1.3. Encourage regular feedback from Alternet network members to advance open and transparent communication.

- 2.1.4. Promote continuous learning and adaptation to ensure adaptability of the network; organise training and education on diversity, equity, and inclusion to help raise awareness and promote personal growth in this area.
- 2.1.5. Actively address any instances of discrimination or harassment and provide resources for reporting such incidents.
- 2.1.6. Assess the development of healthy organizational culture within the Alternet network by surveys/feedback.

Objective 2.2: Ensure diversity, inclusivity and fair treatment of all

Actions:

- 2.2.1. Formulate and implement equality and non-discrimination plan for Alternet employees

- 2.2.2 Assess the formulation and implementation of equality and non-discrimination plan
- 2.2.3. Actively work to reject all forms of racism, discrimination, and bias.

3. Equality, occupational health and well-being in Alternet workplace

Critical steps for research organizations committed to fostering inclusivity and gender equality in their work environment are equality in career progression and measures ensuring work-life balance.

Alternet, as an employer, should aim at implementing policies that promote diversity and inclusivity, address pay gaps, and provide opportunities for all genders and people with different backgrounds to excel in different roles. Fostering equality in career progression is crucial as it ensures that individuals have a level playing field, regardless of their background or characteristics, allowing them to advance based on their skills and contributions. This fosters diversity, inclusion, and fairness in the workplace, leading to better organizational performance, reduced turnover, and compliance with legal and ethical standards.

Different practices can be emphasised. For instance, flexible work arrangements, workload management, promotion of equal parental leave policies and provision of support on work-life balance in different career phases not only benefit employees but also create a more equitable and supportive environment. By offering alternatives, such as part-time contracts, telecommuting, or flexible hours, the organization acknowledges the diverse needs of its employees, allowing them to better manage their work commitments alongside personal responsibilities.

Objective 3.1: Promote equal, inclusive and transparent recruitment and career progression practices

Actions:

- 3.1.1. Implement policies that promote diversity and inclusivity, address pay gaps, and provide opportunities for all genders to excel in different roles.
- 3.1.2. Define transparent policies and criteria for internal career advancement.
- 3.1.3. Promote gender equality in recruitment, selection, and career progression
    - Set clear targets for recruiting women and advancing them into senior roles.
    - Implement inclusive and proactive measures to achieve these targets.
    - Review and amend selection processes to eliminate biases and promote transparency.
    - Ensure gender equality expertise is involved in recruitment and promotion committees.

- 3.1.4. Foster inclusive practices in recruitment and promotion.
    - Establish codes of conduct for recruitment and promotion to enhance transparency.
    - Provide unconscious bias training for recruiters and review language used in job advertisements.
    - Increase the visibility of women candidates in underrepresented fields.
    - Utilize standardized CVs and blind assessment of CVs.
    - Promote gender balance in search and appointment panels.

- 3.1.5. Revise evaluation and appraisal criteria to consider diverse career paths and achievements.
    - Account for career breaks, non-traditional career paths, and soft skills in assessment criteria.

o Prioritize research quality over quantity and consider alternative metrics.
o Ensure that administrative responsibilities and workload distribution are transparent and valued.

Objective 3.2: Ensure workload management and foster flexible work arrangements

Actions:

- 3.2.1. Acknowledge diverse needs of the employees by offering alternatives, such as part-time contracts, remote work, or flexible hours.
- 3.2.2. Develop and implement transparent, organization-wide workload planning models that promote fairness and equity.
- 3.2.3. Ensure workload distribution is consistent across departments.
- 3.2.3. Regularly assess the effectiveness of workload planning models.
- 3.2.4. Ensure fair sick leave policies and flexibility for medical appointments.

Objective 3.3. Promote equal parental leave policies and career reintegration

Actions:

- 3.3.1. Encourage all employees, regardless of gender, to use parental leave benefits.
- Facilitate smooth reintegration after career breaks by offering active mentoring and support.
- 3.3.2. Consider caregiving support measures employees might have beyond parental leave, such as elder care and support for individuals with disabilities.
- 3.3.3. Ensure resources and access to information and guidance on coping with different challenges related to balancing work and personal life.

4. Integration of the gender/diversity dimension into research and stakeholder engagement of Alternet

Alternet advances equal and inclusive practices beyond its own bodies and activities by promoting diversity and gender balance in stakeholder engagement, meeting and workshop representation, by integrating gender dimension into research and training content, as well as by integrating gender awareness and education to conferences and other activities.

Objective 4.1: Promote diversity and gender balance in stakeholder engagement and conferences

Actions:

- 4.1.1. Maintain an adequate gender balance among invited speakers and chairs in meetings and workshops organized by the network.
- 4.1.2. Strive for equal representation of all genders to ensure a diverse and inclusive environment.
- 4.1.3. Collect feedback on unacceptable behavior during meetings and workshops through online feedback tools to address any issues promptly.
- 4.1.4. Ensure diverse participation of actors and stakeholders, including underrepresented genders and ethnicities, in project-related activities.
- 4.1.5. Develop a process of engagement and capacity building to broaden the involvement of individuals from various backgrounds, both within and outside the network.

- 4.1.6. Utilize interviews, surveys, workshops, and existing networks to recruit participants.
- 4.1.7. Clearly communicate the voluntary nature of participation and provide comprehensive information on the aims, methods, implications, and data handling of activities.

Objective 4.2: Integrate the gender dimension into research and training content (e.g. Alternet's Summer School)

Actions:

- 4.2.1. Incorporate the gender dimension into research and educational activities and outputs.
- 4.2.2. Establish a commitment to gender equality in research and innovation priorities, ensuring that sex and gender analysis is considered throughout the research and teaching processes.
- 4.2.3. Support researchers in developing methodologies that incorporate the gender dimension.
- 4.2.41. Address gender-related aspects in research from defining concepts to evaluating results and transferring them into products and innovations. This integration is essential for research excellence, societal relevance, and proper training of the next generation of researchers and innovators.
- 4.25. Raise awareness among researchers and prospective applicants about the importance of the gender dimension in research and innovation.
- 4.2.6. Provide opportunities for gender-related education and training, such as academic conferences and briefings.
- 4.2.7. Encourage researchers and applicants to consider gender impacts in their work and projects.

Objective 4.3: Ensure Gender Dimension in Research Funding

Actions:

- 4.3.1. Collaborate with research funding organizations to promote the integration of the gender dimension into research projects.
- 4.3.2. Encourage applicants to consider the gender dimension in their work and assess the impact of research results on different groups.
- 4.3.3. Include gender-related objectives in strategic research funding initiatives.
- 4.3.4. Implement mechanisms for evaluating how research projects account for the gender dimension as part of evaluation criteria.
- 4.3.5. Monitor program outcomes to measure the integration of the gender dimension, including applications, publications, innovations, and market opportunities.

5. Disruptions in events organized by Alternet: (gender-based) harassment and violence

At Alternet, we take seriously any kind of gender-based harassment and violence, and aim to foster safe organizational spaces, including safe online environments in events organized by Alternet. The aim is to create a safe, inclusive, and gender-sensitive environment within the network, where gender-based violence and harassment on all levels are prevented, reported, and addressed effectively, and where all members actively contribute to cultural change and gender equality in Alternet. This requires ensuring possibilities for reporting cases of harassment, support for victims and promotion of cultural change.

Objective 5.1: Prevent harassment and violence on all levels (sexual, psychological, moral)

Actions:

- 5.1.1. Ensure that all researchers and participants involved in the network are aware of equality and non-discrimination plans and guidance.
- 5.1.2. Provide information on the action plan and how to respond to infringements.
- 5.1.3. Ensure easy access to the action plan by placing it in the network's shared online workspace.
- 5.1.4. Establish clear and comprehensive organizational policies and measures to prevent gender-based violence and sexual harassment.
- 5.1.5. Define behaviors and actions that constitute harassment on all levels, taking into account power dynamics within different relationships.
- 5.1.6. Encourage reporting of incidents by creating a safe and anonymous reporting system.
- 5.1.7. Conduct regular assessments to examine the prevalence of any sort of inappropriate behavior and harassment within the network.

Objective 5.2: Ensure possibilities to reporting and support for victims

Actions:

- 5.2.1. Define disciplinary and grievance procedures for perpetrators at the organizational level.
- 5.2.2. Provide guidance and support for victims considering legal proceedings.
- 5.2.3. Encourage reporting to the police and support victims throughout legal proceedings, including court cases.
- 5.2.4. Implement visible and robust reporting channels for all members of the network.
- 5.2.5. Outline an investigatory and decision-making process with clear timeframes.
- 5.2.6. Ensure independent and fair investigations.
- 5.2.7. Specify potential actions that may result from investigations.
- 5.2.8. Establish clear procedures for appeals.
- 5.2.9. Provide victims and witnesses with information on their options after reporting.
- 5.2.10. Offer practical support such as counseling and pastoral care, both internally and through external organizations.
- 5.2.11. Facilitate referrals to support services.

Objective 5.3: Promote cultural change and zero tolerance to ensure safe organizational spaces

Actions:

- 5.3.1. Mobilize the entire Alternet network to establish a culture of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment and gender-based violence.
- 5.3.2. Develop communication activities to raise awareness of the issue.
- 5.3.3. Provide training for all staff on expectations, policies, and procedures.
- 5.3.4. Offer practical advice on how to respond to different situations, including bystander training.
- 5.3.5. Launch broader awareness campaigns to communicate expectations to the wider organization.
- 5.3.6. Agree on guidelines for online communication to ensure safe online spaces.
- 5.3.7. Appoint a harassment contact person for the network.

Implementation of the Equality and Non-discrimination plan

After acceptance in Council meeting, the Equality and Non-discrimination plan will be implemented. Implementation of the plan will be managed by the Steering Board.

The detailed implementation plan will be described in Table 1. The idea in designing the details of the implementation plan is as follows:
- First, building on the Council's decision and guidelines, the Steering Board chooses one of the main themes of the plan.
- Second, the Steering Board designs detailed concrete and measurable implementation plans for the actions as well as the schedule for their implementation during the following two years.
- Third, the Steering Board follows and evaluates the progress of the implementation of the actions to be presented to the next annual Council meeting.
- Fourth, based on the evaluation of progress in implementing the objectives and actions, the Steering Committee reedits the Themes/ Object/ Actions and/or designs new implementation targets for the following two years.

In 2025, the implementation of the equality and non-discrimination plan will begin with the Theme ***Diversity and gender balance in management and decision-making of Alternet,*** see in detail in Table 1. The following priority (to begin from 2026) will be decided in the Steering Committee meeting by the end of 2025.

Table: Equality and non-discrimination objectives and measures.

Theme	Objective	Action (2025-2026)	Implemented in	Measurable outcomes
1. **Diversity and and gender balance in management and decision-making of Alternet**	**1.1. Promote diversity in decision-making bodies of Alternet**	Pay attention to diversity and gender balance in the selection of members for Alternet Steering Committee and Network Council and encourage diversity in gender representation when nominating individuals for these positions.	Beginning from 2025>	Gender balance in the Alternet SteeringBoard and Network Council
		Periodically review and assess the composition of the Alternet SteeringBoard and Network Council to ensure gender equality and	In 2026, 2028	Review accepted in the Council meeting, prepared by MB

		diversity. And based on the review, develop criteria for diversity when selecting experts for various activities, including diversity in academic background, discipline, seniority and gender identity when forming expert groups.		
	Objective 1.2: Ensure equal development opportunities and support to employees with diverse backgrounds and in different career phases	Ensure equal possibilities to take various roles and apply funding through Alternet's Mobility Scheme to partner institute employees in different career phases and from different backgrounds. Implement measurable targets for gender balance, holding leaders responsible for progress and actively supporting the development of diverse talent within their teams	Implementation from 2025 Monitoring from 2026	Gender balance in the Alternet Mobility Scheme and in leadership positions; Development of participation and funding of Alternet communication schemes supporting early career researcher (A4Cap and summerschool)
		Foster inclusive leadership culture and capacities by cultivating a leadership culture that prioritizes openness and collaboration and creates an	Beginning from 2026	

		environment where diverse voices are not only heard but actively contribute to Alternet activities of various kinds.		