**INNOVATION FUND GENDER EQUALITY POLICY**

1. **BACKGROUND**

The Innovation Fund (IF) is a national umbrella institution for the implementation of measures and innovation policies designed for micro, small and medium entrepreneurship, as well as for the transfer of technologies from research and development institutions.

The key role of the IF is to develop various support instruments to effectively implement the Government’s innovation policy, which is based on the concept of smart specialization, and intended for the development of innovative entrepreneurship as a generator of sustainable economic development.

The IF builds a stimulating environment for faster growth and development of small and medium innovative entrepreneurship and increases the competitiveness of the Montenegrin economy with quality grant programs, created in accordance with the identified needs.

The primary aim of the IF is to boost Montenegro’s economic growth and competitiveness by raising the innovativeness of the Montenegrin economy.

* 1. **Strategic context**

In 2021, a new National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2025 was adopted, with an accompanying Action Plan which until now, together with the Law on Gender Equality, represented a key link for the development and implementation of this policy in Montenegro. This strategy represents the 4th strategic document in a row that aims to establish a better framework for achieving gender equality in Montenegro and recognizes the low level of gender equality as a central problem, from which the following strategic goal arises:

Raise the level of gender equality in Montenegro by 2025.

Within this goal, 3 operational ones are defined:

1. Improve the application of the existing normative framework for the implementation of gender equality policy and protection against discrimination based on sex and gender;

2. Improve policies in the field of education, culture and media in order to reduce the level of stereotypes and prejudices towards women and persons of different sexual and gender identities;

3. To increase the level of participation of women and persons of different sexual and gender identities in areas that enable access to natural and social resources and benefit from the use of resources.

In addition, In 2021, the new Strategy for the Development of Female Entrepreneurship of Montenegro 2021-2024 was adopted, which establishes continuity in relation to the previous one and which contains the vision of "Encouraging business environment and systemic programmatic and institutional support" that "contribute to development, sustainability and competitiveness women's entrepreneurship, which becomes a generator of economic growth, creation of new jobs and economic development of Montenegro". This strategy contains 3 strategic goals:

1. Building an environment favorable for the sustainable development of female entrepreneurship;

2. Ensuring better access to finance and strengthening the competitiveness of women's business;

3. Advocacy of interests and positioning of women entrepreneurs.

* 1. **IF equality principles**

The IF consulted the EU Policy Brief from the Gender action project as inspiration in setting up the IF principles[[1]](#footnote-1).

Taking into account all of the above, the IF aims to contribute to the gender equality policy goals of the government and from the challenges and opportunities that IF has identified in the innovation system so far. With these as a starting point, IF has organized the work to integrate gender equality into its processes with the following principles:

* Promoting gender diversity among employees with a strong emphasis on greater participation of women in decision-making bodies and decision-making processes, in accordance with institutional, national, and other regulatory frameworks. In this regard, IF plans to organize annual workshops in order to raise the culture of gender sensitivity.
* Business atmosphere in which cooperation, trust, partnerships, and high ethical standards, as well as the involvement of employees in creating and improving business processes and services, are the basis for achieving results. In this regard, it is exceptional to establish a balanced relationship between professional and work obligations, so employees can reach their full potential.
* Raising the visibility of gender equality and awareness of the importance and benefits of adequate gender balance at all levels.
* It is ultimately a democratic matter that innovations financed via tax funds have relevance for as many people as possible in society. If the results of the funding are not equal or contribute to greater equality, the innovation system will exclude groups in society. They are then excluded both as innovators and as groups whose needs for new solutions are not met. Therefore, the results from supported projects by the IF should also contribute to greater equality. This will be achieved by promoting to the applicants the importance to consider gender equality in their projects
* Monitoring of funded projects from a gender perspective - the proportion of women in the teams, the proportion of women as co-founders, etc.
* Gender-balanced composition of committees, peer reviewers and bodies.
* Prohibition of sexual and other harassment

The IF will undertake all necessary activities to achieve and maintain a higher level of gender equality at all levels and in all areas of work.

1. **IMPLEMENTATION**

By establishing institutional capacities for the identification of relevant information, the IF will continuously collect data referring to the above-mentioned principles as follows:

* Organization of annual workshops in order to raise the culture of gender sensitivity within the IF.
* Measuring gender structure in the IF
* Number of Workshops on the visibility of gender equality and awareness
* Proportion of women in the team of applicants, co-founders of the applicants, and in supported projects
* Proportion of women in the Investment committees, peer reviewers, and bodies

1. **CONCLUSION**

The IF will undertake all necessary activities to achieve and maintain a higher level of gender equality at all levels and in all areas of work.

In its operations, the IF adheres to the fundamental values of integrity, transparency, and accountability, and equally encourages the full development of the human personality and the promotion of basic human rights and freedoms. In this sense, the promotion of gender equality is an important component of building these values, their sustainability, and ensuring equal opportunities that the IF guarantees in all spheres of its activity. The principles of gender equality and anti-discrimination policies have been implicit values in their work since the IF establishment.

This policy will be valid for 3 years i.e. until 2025. After this period, additional revisions will be made based on the data collected and conclusions.

1. <https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/GENDERACTION_PolicyBrief_RFOs-March-8-2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)