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Twinning for Excellence in Noninvasive Brain Stimulation



D5.2

Gender equality plan

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Executive summary

The present document is the deliverable D5.2 “Gender Equality Plan” of the TWINNIBS project, funded by the European Commission’s under its Horizon EUROPE Framework Programme for Research and Innovation under the grant agreement no.101059369. The main objectives of this deliverable are to evaluate all Institutional Partners’ Gender Equality Plans against the Horizon Europe Requirements and specify measures to ensure Gender balance equality and fairness within the project and specific project activities dedicated to reaching these goals.



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INTRODUCTION

TWINNIBS aims to strengthen the Institute for Medical Research - IMR's research and innovation (R&I) as well as research management and administration capacities and to develop it into a prospective leading partner in international consortia that can attract strategic investments and R&I funding. TWINNIBS will promote interest in neuroscience research in Serbia and the region, and help to advance it, focusing on the multidisciplinary field of non-invasive brain stimulation (NIBS). NIBS is a set of techniques for transcranial (non-invasive) modulation of the activity in the specific brain areas and the large-scale brain networks to which they contribute. This is an innovative approach to neuroscience research and, ultimately, the clinical treatment of a wide spectrum of neuropsychiatric conditions. TWINNIBS will be a coordination and support tool for IMR to bring NIBS research in Serbia to a new level by partnering with leading European R&I institutions from Denmark, Italy, Germany, and Austria. TWINNIBS project includes a comprehensive set of cooperation and coordination activities to strengthen the scientific and technological capacities of IMR, including short term mobility, virtual and in-person short term expert visits, workshops, and boot-camps. A series of collaborative small-scale projects with the personalization of NIBS as an overarching theme are foreseen in the project. TWINNIBS set to strengthen the IMR research management and administration capacities and foster organizational changes through the establishment of The Centre for NIBS as well as R&I Project Management Unit will be established within the IMR.

DELIVERABLE SCOPE

In this deliverable we analyse Gender Equality Plans (GEP) of each participating institution and outline project-specific activities aimed at achieving gender balance.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- TWINNIBS Grant Agreement no. 101059369
- TWINNIBS Consortium Agreement
- Horizon EUROPE Online Manual <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/display/OM/Grant+management>
- Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en#gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025



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- Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffc06c3-200a-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232129669>

ACRONYM AND ABBREVIATION LIST

IMR	Institute for Medical Research, University of Belgrade
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
NIBS	Non-invasive Brain Stimulation
ESR	Early-stage researcher



INSTITUTIONAL GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

In keeping up with the Horizon Europe requirement for all participating institutions to have Gender Equality Plan (GEP), TWINNIBS consortium members submitted their existing GEPs and IMR's Gender team reviewed the GEPs and assessed their compliance against the requirements set by the Horizon Europe.

The overall assessment is that each of the five TWINNIBS partners have Institutional GEP in line with the Horizon Europe requirements. The GEPs differ in length and structure, but all comply with basic GEP requirements:

1. **Public document.** All partners have publicly available GEP. For convenience, the partners GEP can be found in the TWINNIBS shared workspace here: [Partners' GEPs](#).
2. **Dedicated resources.** All GEPs include consideration of resources needed to implement GEP.
3. **Data collection and monitoring.** All GEPs have recent desegregated gender data on personnel at different positions and levels. This data is updated on an annual or biannual bases depending on the Partners' resources.
4. **Training.** Partners' GEPs include awareness raising training towards achieving gender equality.

In addition, HE Guidance provides five recommended content-related (thematic) areas for organizations to consider in the GEP:

1. Work-life balance and organizational culture.
2. Gender balance in leadership and decision making.
3. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression
4. Integration of gender dimension in research and teaching
5. Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment.

Most of the Partners' GEPs include actions in line with these recommendations. To further develop GEPs of all participating institutions each partner is advised to consult the most recent Horizon Europe recommendations when updating institutional GEPs.



TWINNIBS MEASURES FOR INCREASING GENDER EQUALITY

In line with Grant Agreement (Article 14), the partners are taking all measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in the implementation of the action and in line with the institutional GEPs. The project fully supports the EU policy on equal opportunities for the target groups (for details see section 2.2 of the Grant agreement description of the action) and implements measures to secure gender equality both in the project implementation as well as in output generation. Partners aim, to the extent possible, for a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including at supervisory and managerial level.

One of the WP5 objectives is to increase gender balance through networking and taking up leading positions on research projects/publications, and therefore with dedicated **Task 5.3** to all gender-related aspects of the TWINNIBS project.

Our first goal was to establish a Project committee for gender equality comprising researchers across all partner institutions. The Gender Committee is envisioned as a monitoring and advisory body which meets monthly to discuss gender equality issues that arise across all project activities and takes action to implement a proactive approach in achieving gender equality. To ensure full transparency the meeting minutes of the Gender committee meetings are available to all project members and main action points are included in the monthly consortium meetings. A social scientist with expertise in gender issues is enrolled in the project to monitor, evaluate and direct these activities.

The Gender committee has devised a set of specific targets to achieve throughout the project's implementation. Namely, ESRs and female scientists will be fostered to take up the principal investigator role in research projects (Task 3.2., Task 4.1 - 4.4), to actively participate in relevant networks and societies (Task 5.2), to present novel NIBS results at international conferences (Task 7.2), as well as to take leading roles in the joint scientific papers (Task 5.2) and grant applications (Task 6.2). The committee also agreed on the following targets: at least 50% women scientists in the consortium, and with aiming at 60% of women in the ESR category (KPI Gender Balance: >50% of women).

So far, out of 41 participants, 18 are female (44%). However, the women have significantly fewer leading roles in the project as the ratio at the Partner lead position is 1:5, and at the WP lead position it is 1:7. This imbalance reflects the state of the NIBS



and neuroscience as a field in which, in spite of the increase of female researchers and clinicians, male scientists occupy higher faculty ranks, publish more papers as first authors and are given prominent awards more frequently¹. As the project progresses, more gender segregated data will be collected and communicated to the Partner leads, who will be encouraged and provided with adequate support to take measures to increase gender balance at all levels.

PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT

Being aware of the fact that NIBS is as male dominated field, TWINNIBS consortium aims to contribute to the reshaping of the gender composition of the field in the future especially to fairness when it comes to more prominent roles. To that end, TWINNIBS will have more female-led small scale research projects (under WP3) and support females to take up leading roles in the research activities under WP4. To achieve this, numerous actions have been taken to facilitate female scientist engagement in the research activities.

Example: ESR Bootcamp (Task 3.2).

TWINNIBS bootcamp is a series of small-scale research projects aiming to increase competences and career prospect of ESRs, as well as to provide a platform for post PhD scientists to develop their leadership skills. The preparatory activities took place between November 2022 and February 2023, and the activities will be conducted between April 2023 and September 2024. So far, the following measures have been taken to promote female engagement and achieve gender balance:

- *The Call for Mentors & Topics was designed as an open call and distributed to all project participants.*
- *The Call for Mentors & Topics explicitly listed benefits for mentors and participants.*
- *Before being published, the Call for Mentors & Topics was submitted to the Gender committee for review. The Gender committee were explicitly asked to*

¹Hoy, K. (2017). Gender Imbalance at Brain Stimulation Conferences: We Have a Problem and It is Everyone's Problem. *Brain stimulation* 10(1), 155-156

Melnikoff, D. E., & Valian, V. V. (2019). Gender disparities in awards to neuroscience researchers. *Archives of scientific psychology*, 7(1), 4.

Nguyen, A. X., Yoffe, L., Li, A., Trinh, X. V., Kurian, J., Moss, H. E., & Wu, A. Y. (2021). Gender gap in neurology research authorship (1946-2020). *Frontiers in Neurology*, 12, 715428.



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provide suggestions on how to make the Call as inviting as possible to female scientists.

- *Each female scientist involved in the project received personal invitation from the Project leads encouraging her to submit the proposal.*
- *Female scientists were offered support in shaping the proposal if they felt they need it.*
- *Call for Participants included the diversity statement: "There are no restrictions in terms of age, gender, nationality, or geographical region. We specifically encourage and welcome applications from women and underrepresented groups".*
- *Before being published the Call for participants was shared with four junior female researchers (MA and PhD students), with the explicit instruction to adjust the content and the wording of the Call so that it appeals to them.*
- *Within the Call for participants, the Topics to choose between are advertised in a way that puts emphasis on Mentors research interests and expertise. To further increase visibility of female scientists taking up the Mentorship roles and showcase them as role models for ESRs who might apply.*
- *In the Call for Participants both female and male scientist are listed as contact points to omit gender-related barriers in asking for additional information.*
- *The submitted ESR applications are reviewed by Topic mentor and leading scientist of both genders, to ensure gender perspective in the recruitment procedure.*

For more information on Bootcamp see project website <http://twinnibs.imi.bg.ac.rs>

RAISING AWARENESS AND NETWORKING

To further empower and promote female engagement in NIBS research, the Gender committee will organize Women in neuroscience and Women in NIBS events and periodic meetups. These activities aim to promote female engagement in the field and support female scientists in recognizing self-imposed barriers. The exact calendar will be made on a 6-month basis, starting from month 10 of the project. In addition to that, all female NIBS researchers are encouraged to list their competences in the online databases such as <https://womeninbrainstim.com/>.

Furthermore, the Gender committee will provide information on the external gender-related training opportunities and facilitate participation in global gender-related initiatives (e.g. Women in neuroscience, women in cognitive science). All these



activities will be conducted in synergy with other project activities to avoid gender segregation within the project. To this end, several Gender-Equality workshops will be organized back-to-back with other project activities as well as outside events (e.g. international conferences). These workshops aim to raise awareness and be the forum for discussion on gender-related issues in the NIBS field and science in general.

GENDER DIMENSION IN RESEARCH

The gender dimension will be also integrated in TWINNIBS research activities. This includes recruitment of both male and female participants in the experiments and studies, using both male and female brain models to adjust stimulation parameters (when individual brain scans are not available), record sensations, dosing and thresholds measures and reporting them in gender desegregated manner. When gender differences are explored, the researchers will make sure that the study is sufficiently powered to avoid presenting misleading conclusions or overstated generalizations.

GENDER DIMENSION IN COMMUNICATION DISSEMINATION AND EXPLOITATION

As one of the measures to maximize gender-related impact, the WP7 team was mindful of gender dimension when creating Communication Dissemination and Exploitation strategy. Namely, one of the requirements for the project visual identity was to be inviting for female scientists. Gender consideration was included in the brief for developing TWINNIBS brand identity: "The logo and project visual identity should be modern, simple, innovative and represent human neuroscience research focused on brain targeting, stimulation, scanning, etc. The brand identity should be female and young researchers oriented and the design should consider them as a primary communication target group.

To further adjust the project communication, a female junior researcher (social psychologist) was given the leading role in creating content on project social media, with the explicit instruction to be mindful of age/gender objectives of the project. This includes choosing/creating the visuals and shaping the wording to communicate project activities across different platforms (website, social media, printed materials). These actions were taken to ensure that the perspective of young and female researchers is represented across all communication channels.



MONITORING AND ADJUSTMENTS

The effects and progress of gender activities will be monitored throughout the project by the Gender committee and the project leads. The final WP5 deliverable D5.4 “Final report on research profile, including scientific outputs and gender equality” will have a specific section dedicated to the Gender dimension of the TWINNIBS project, which will include the assessment of the effectiveness of implemented measures and lessons learned.