

Implementing the BBF policy on gender equality to achieve decent work for both women and men

"Since 2021 the BBF GEP has been put on the table as the main priority to work on. Now we are in the beginning of the process of creation and implementation of such a policy. I have no doubt that it is my responsibility to take the first steps in Varna Region and to lead as a good example."

Bulgarian Business Forums Executive Director Dimitar Vasilev

Bulgarian business forums is a non-profit organization that encourages innovative and creative business thinking and entrepreneurship, start-ups, innovations and digital transformation. **One of the pioneers in the digital and innovation Eco System** in Varna with more than nine years of experience in developing a sustainable environment for the exchange of successful business models, experiences and good practices between proven entrepreneurs and startups in Europe, USA, Canada and Bulgaria.

The main activities in recent years include:

- Building and developing sustainable and growing ecosystems;
- Establishing cities such as digital innovation hubs, attractive startup locations and investment destinations;
- Empowering youth in business and entrepreneurship.
- Supporting the development of startups to the level of global brands;

The mission of BBF is to create environment for the exchange of successful business models and public-private partnerships, to support the exchange of information on the latest trends and innovations in various sectors of the economy among innovators, business leaders, scientists, policy-makers, target audiences on both at European and global level and to encourage creative and innovative business thinking and entrepreneurship.

The goals of BBF are to develop sustainable national and international platforms / forums for exchange of information on the latest trends and good practices in the creation and implementation of innovations and digital transformation, as well as for networking between innovators, entrepreneurs / startups with the active participation of other key players: representatives of medium and large business, academia, local and national authorities, representatives of the EU institutions, etc.

In the next few years we will focus as before on supporting innovators and entrepreneurial activity, growing the innovative and startup ecosystem and developing the potential for Varna **to become**

a leading innovation hub and one of the most innovative and fast-growing technological cities in Europe.

This Gender Equality Plan (GEP) was developed for BULGARIAN BUSINESS FORUMS (BBF) Association in order to establish a framework for promoting gender equality in innovations, research, employment, social relations among the community of the BBF NGO. The BBF GEP development refers to the equality between women and men and other key objectives related to this topic as stated in the EC Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 [1]. At the national level, the main strategic document that the BBF GEP has referenced is the policy on equality between women and men- 2021-2030 National Strategy for Promoting the Equality between Women and Men [2]. The BBF GEP aims to ensure equal opportunities for women and men to participate entirely and actively in all areas of activities of the association and to prevent discrimination based on gender differences.

Gender Equality refers to “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys”[3] . BFF Association believes that all employees shall be given the same opportunities to develop as professionals and individuals. For the purposes of this GEP, analyses of the current situation of gender equality at BFF were developed. Also, the authors tried to identify challenges and existing problems related to gender equality in the organization, targets to be achieved in the short- and long-term, and finally monitoring actions and indicators for the GEP were defined and analyzed. The challenges that BBF Association is facing are related to the balance in Leadership and Decision Making (the organization structure consists of one leading top management person - the executive director, however the governing body consists of: General Assembly, Management Board, Chairman and Deputy Chairman). The NGO works with subcontractors and volunteers. When we look at the data related to the people involved in the projects and conferences supervised and organized by BBF, we can summarize that women - experts and top management representatives predominate among the overall picture.

Statistical data for subcontractors, volunteers and other part-time employees regarding their satisfaction with working conditions, their opportunities for development within the BBF were analyzed. The data showed the numbers are divided almost equally for both genders.

Challenges, Objectives and Measures for their achievement

Purpose №1:

Promoting equal opportunities within the organisation’s personnel

Measures:

Ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in career development will be represented by implementing changes in the modes of operations in the NGO and its recruitment approach. The results and effects from these changes should relate to the development of transparent and structured recruitment practices which will be based on non-discrimination. Also, such structured

approach will help the organization to minimize the risk of complaints to the Commission for protection against discrimination as well as court cases.

Purpose №2:

Promoting and raising awareness of the importance of gender equality

Measures:

Introducing the employees to the Gender Equality Plan in the BBF Association. Engaging staff and partners in trainings on the organizations gender equality policy. The means of such trainings relate to:

- Presenting that it can be an important tool for ensuring that every employee is aware of gender equality principles and measures as they play general role in the process of implementing this Gender Equality Plan.
- Helping to facilitate the exchange of ideas, improve mutual understanding and develop competencies and skills necessary for societal change
- Increasing general sensitivity and understanding and knowledge about gender (in)equality through observing gender equality legislation and its implementation in practice and other relevant materials on gender equality in the work environment, the pay gap and working conditions.

Purpose №3:

Raising awareness about the benefits of and educational and professional opportunities for improving the qualification of the employees.

Measures:

- 1) Providing careers guidance and access for education and training providers related to professional development.
- 2) Giving access to and participation in education and training opportunities by organizing events, workshops and other meetings and educational sessions on topics related to the work and development of employees.

Monitoring of the GEP

The monitoring of the implementation of the current Gender Equality Plan and the set goals will be carried out through a report on a yearly basis which will address the achieved results and re-evaluate the plan. It will present a brief explanation of the plan in view of the current situation both in the foundation and at the national and international level. The plan and reports can be found on the foundation website.

To update, implement and monitor the plan are Martina Abrasheva and Stefan Petrov. If necessary external expertise will be included.

[1]https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_bg

[2]<https://www.mlsp.government.bg/uploads/41/test/stra>

[3] <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>