

Gender Equality Plan by fortiss GmbH

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This regulation was approved by the Management Board.

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1. Introduction for Gender Equality Plan – fortiss GmbH

As a non-profit research institution predominantly funded by the Free State of Bavaria, fortiss GmbH is considered part of the public sector. We proactively ensure compliance with the provisions of the Bavarian Equal Opportunities Act (*Bayerisches Gleichstellungsgesetz – BayGlG*) in its current version.

Section 1 BayGlG specifically obliges public institutions to promote the actual equality of women and men and to eliminate existing disparities. According to Section 3 BayGlG, fortiss, as an institution with a permanent employment structure, is required to develop a gender equality concept. The associated reporting obligation is set out in Section 8 of the BayGlG and is fulfilled annually through a report submitted by management by June 30. Our commitment to gender equality is ongoing. The resolution by the supervisory board on December 7, 2016, led to the first version of the equality concept being presented on April 1, 2017.

While the BayGlG is focused on promoting the equal participation of women and men, particularly in areas where one gender is underrepresented (see Fischer/Thoma, *BayGlG*, Art. 2), it does not extend to non-binary or gender-diverse individuals. To meet broader European standards and ensure inclusivity, fortiss GmbH also aligns with the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) and the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) requirements defined by the European Commission for Horizon Europe participants. These frameworks emphasize equal participation regardless of gender, explicitly including non-binary and gender-diverse individuals (cf. European Commission, *Guidance on Gender Equality Plans*, 2021, p. 7; Kamanabrou, *AGG Kommentar*, § 1).

It was in this context that the supervisory board of fortiss GmbH, recognizing the importance of gender equality and diversity, tasked the management with further developing and expanding the existing equality concept into a comprehensive GEP, in line with the requirements of the European Commission.

At fortiss, we firmly believe that gender equality and diversity are not just buzzwords, but essential pillars of our commitment to equal opportunity. This commitment, which extends beyond gender identity, is rooted in a broader and intersectional understanding of diversity – including physical appearance, ethnic origin, religion or belief, (dis)ability, age, and sexual identity.

fortiss employees share the conviction that informatics plays a key role in knowledge generation, innovation, and value creation. Their work is guided by the ambition to contribute technological solutions to the public good. Diversity in skills, perspectives, and life experiences is seen as an indispensable resource for excellent and socially relevant research.

The active promotion of equality and diversity is therefore closely linked to the strategic goal of unlocking the full intellectual, creative, and human potential of all employees. For fortiss GmbH, appropriate gender representation across all functional areas and responsibility levels is regarded as a core element of high-quality research and institutional excellence.

The following table outlines the key requirements of the European Commission's GEP framework and the corresponding measures implemented at fortiss.

Table 1 Gender Equality Plan – fortiss GmbH: EU Requirements and Measures.

Requirements of the European Commission	fortiss Measures
<i>Resources</i> – commitment of resources and gender expertise to implement it.	Designation of the HR Division as the relevant body, with plans to provide appropriate training and tools.
<i>Data Collection and Monitoring</i> Sex-disaggregated data on personnel	The HR division has access to sex-disaggregated data on personnel and processes these statistics to monitor and report on gender distribution.
<i>Training</i> Awareness-raising training and activities on gender equality for the entire organization, as well as training on unconscious gender biases for staff and decision-makers.	Development of measures to foster gender equality and prevent discrimination. Current activities include awareness-raising initiatives (e.g., posters on anti-sexism, internal communication) and consideration of equality topics in relevant HR processes.
<i>Work-life balance and organizational culture</i>	Flexible working hours can be arranged to address short-term personal and family challenges. Regular analyses of physical and psychological stress factors are part of our occupational health management. The most recent <i>psychosocial risk assessment</i> was conducted in 2023 and will be repeated at regular intervals.
<i>Gender balance in leadership and decision-making/and gender equality in recruitment and career progression</i>	In cases of comparable qualifications, preferential treatment of the gender underrepresented in the relevant area.
Incorporating the <i>gender dimension</i> into the workplace.	Use of gender-neutral language in job postings, internal guidelines, documentation, and corporate communication.
<i>Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment</i>	Implementation of a whistleblower system allowing for anonymous reporting. Appointment of ombudspersons with the express responsibility to provide support and information regarding any kind of issues at the workplace, including gender-specific discrimination and sexual harassment.

2 Measures to Promote Equality

To comply with national equal opportunity provisions (cf. § 1 and § 3 BayGlG) and the institutional obligation to foster substantive gender equality as required by EU Framework Programme conditions, fortiss GmbH is committed to promoting balanced gender representation across all functional areas and hierarchical levels. A gender-specific differentiation of the workforce, as well as a structured variance analysis compared to the previous year, is carried out using standardized personnel statistics indicators, following Section 6 TV-L in conjunction with Section 6 (1) of the Federal Equal Opportunities Act (BGleGG).

Particular attention is devoted to increasing the representation of women in scientific positions, where structural underrepresentation persists. This objective is to be pursued not only through targeted recruitment and development measures, but also by fostering an inclusive, non-discriminatory, and equality-oriented organizational culture following § 11 AGG and the European Commission's GEP framework.

As supported by equality literature (e.g., Baumann/Loerbroks, Gleichstellungsrecht in der Praxis, 2022; Kahlert/Mense, Gender Equality in Research Organizations, 2021), sustainable gender equality cannot be achieved solely through numerical targets, but requires institutional commitment to cultural transformation, fair participation, and structurally anchored anti-bias strategies.¹

2.1 Cascade Model

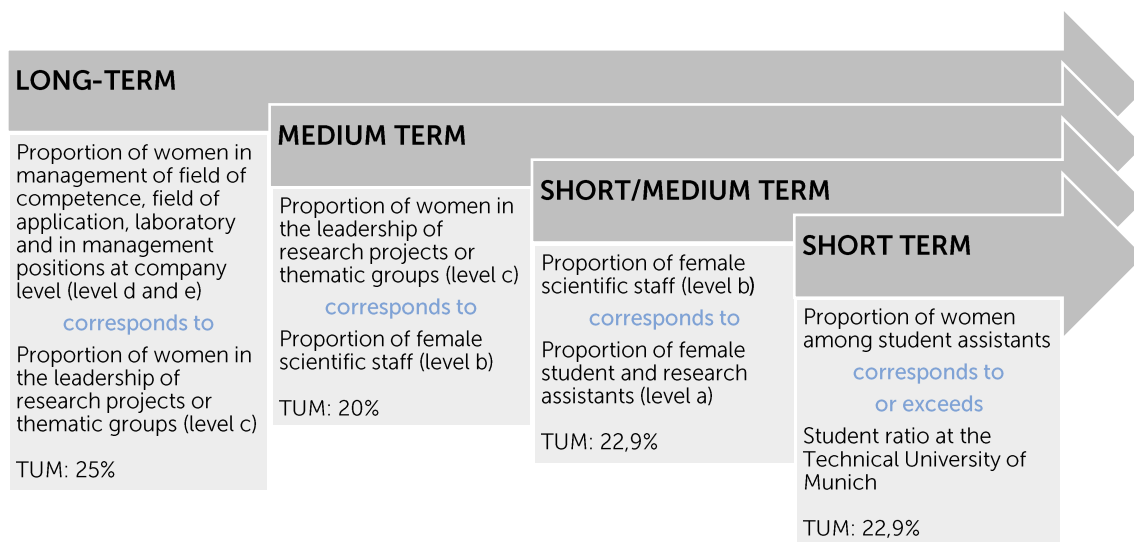
fortiss GmbH's unwavering commitment to gender equality is strategically underpinned by the Cascade Model, a robust framework outlined in the Research-Oriented Standards on Gender Equality of the German Research Foundation (DFG). This strategic underpinning, in alignment with DFG standards and the fortiss Gender Equality Concept, ensures both the institutional credibility and the operational effectiveness of our equality efforts, providing a solid foundation for our stakeholders.

The Cascade Model (see Table 1) is a structural framework stipulating that the proportion of women at each academic qualification level should, at a minimum, correspond to the proportion at the level immediately below. In particular, it entails the systematic support and advancement of qualified female professionals, forming a central pillar of our gender equality strategy. These measures are designed to make a sustainable contribution to equal opportunities and to strengthen diversity across all organizational levels, inspiring us with the vision of a more gender-equal future. As fortiss GmbH does not set absolute internal target values, the model is applied using the gender distribution data² of the *School of Computation, Information and Technology* (CIT) at the Technical University of Munich (TUM) — which, inter alia, covers computer science degree programs — as an appropriate and discipline-specific reference point. The following figure illustrates the cascade model as applied at fortiss GmbH, showing the hierarchical levels (a–e) and the corresponding reference values.

¹ cf. Gusy, in: BeckOK GG, Art. 3 Abs. 2, Rn. 36 ff.

² cf. URL: https://www.tum.de/en/about-tum/facts-and-figures/tum-in-figures/students?utm_source=chatgpt.com (retrieved on July 8, 2025).

Table 2 Gender Equality Concept of fortiss GmbH dated April 1, 2017 (pp. 5f.). Note. The model is based on the principle that the proportion of women at each qualification and leadership level should at least correspond to the proportion at the immediately preceding level.



This model is intended to promote continuous, gender-equitable career development and to eliminate systemic barriers during transitions between qualification phases. In practice, this means that as women progress through each career stage, the target is to maintain or increase their representation at the subsequent level, thereby ensuring equality of opportunity throughout the academic pipeline.

In this context, advancing women in science—particularly in senior and leadership positions—remains the overarching objective of the gender equality policy at fortiss GmbH. The attainment of this objective, however, is influenced by factors beyond the organization’s direct control, such as the availability of qualified female researchers in specific disciplines, individual career preferences, and location-specific conditions. These factors can pose challenges to achieving gender equality; however, we are committed to addressing them as part of our comprehensive strategy.

Accordingly, fortiss GmbH applies a holistic gender equality strategy, further developing as a learning organization. This includes:

- the integration of gender-specific perspectives into research,
- the systematic support and empowerment of early-career female researchers (e.g., excellence-oriented programs),
- the identification and removal of structural disadvantage,
- active prevention of gender-based discrimination, and
- the promotion of gender competence at all organizational levels.

This multi-level approach is both embedded in the structural design of fortiss’s equality policy, which is based on the Cascade Model and the DFG standards, and reflected in measurable, practice-oriented implementation, thereby ensuring its long-term sustainability. These efforts are further reinforced by legal obligations under Section 5 (1) sentence 2 of the Bavarian Equal Opportunity Act (BayGlG) and Section 1 of the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), as well as by the European Commission’s requirements for GEPs.

The operationalization of this strategy is defined through the target values of the Cascade Model:

Level a – The employment share of female students and research assistants should reflect or exceed the proportion of female students at the Technical University of Munich (TUM).

Level b – In the short to medium term, the share of female academic staff should match the female share at Level a and should not fall below the proportion of female doctoral candidates at TUM.

Level c – In the medium term, leadership positions for research projects or thematic groups should reflect the share of women at Level b.

Levels d and e – In the long term, equivalent representation should be achieved in the leadership of competence fields, application domains, transfer units, and at the executive management level.

2.2 Evaluation and Monitoring

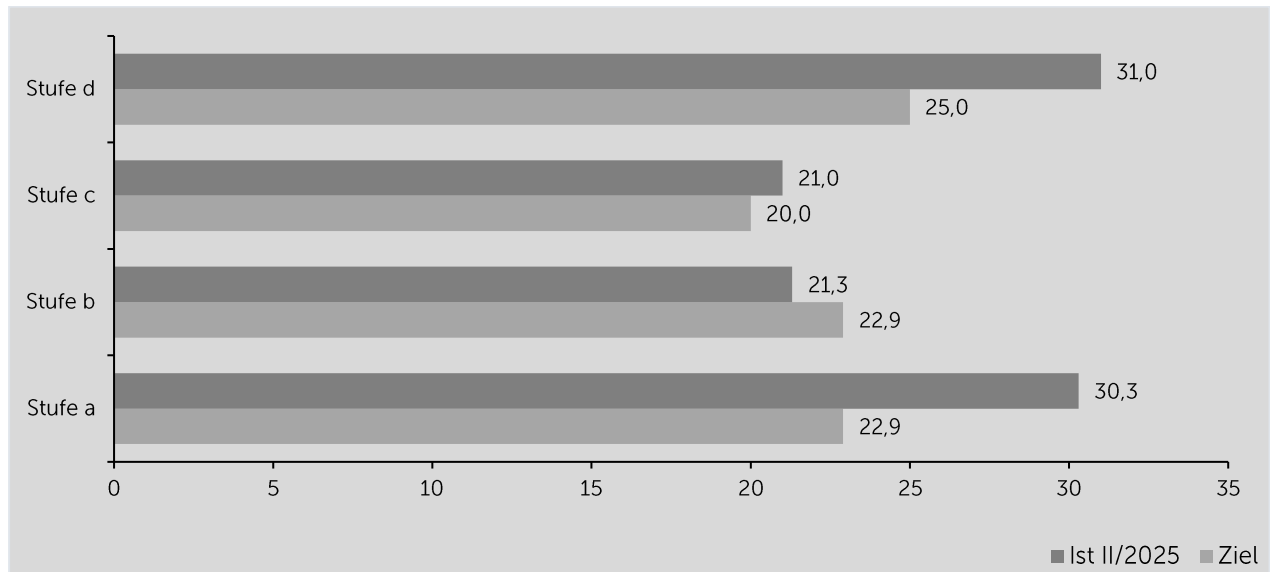
Our commitment to gender equality is demonstrated through our ongoing systematic evaluations of all measures. Each year, we conduct a comprehensive monitoring process and analyze the current status and trends in gender distribution among staff and students. This information is then published in the Gender Equality Monitor, ensuring transparency and encouraging continued engagement.

Regarding the gender distribution within the scientific staff, while the current figures do not yet fully meet the recommendations of the cascade model, there has been significant progress. We are actively addressing the comparatively low proportion of women in the postdoctoral phase through a stronger focus on excellence, which gives us reason to be optimistic about the future.

Our annual gender equality monitoring (see Figure 1), using standardized indicators, provides the evidence base for evaluating progress toward our targets. As of the reporting date, 30 June 2025, the share of female employees at fortiss stands at 30.8%. Within the scientific sector, representation is 21.3%, while female students and research assistants account for 30.3%. It is encouraging to note that the non-scientific sector maintains a high representation of women at 60%, demonstrating a healthy gender balance in this area. This is a positive signal, showing that women at fortiss are visibly represented in responsible roles and have been able to advance here at a disproportionately high rate. At the same time, it remains important to consolidate and sustain this positive trend over the long term.

Our evidence-based approach ensures transparency for stakeholders and keeps them actively informed and engaged in fortiss's gender equality objectives. The results confirm the effectiveness of specific measures while also highlighting persistent structural disparities—particularly in the scientific domain—which we are committed to addressing through further targeted personnel development initiatives. These initiatives aim to systematically prepare qualified female professionals for advanced academic positions and leadership roles, reaffirming our dedication to gender equality.

Figure 1 Cascade Model as of June 30, 2025. *Note:* Stufe = Level; IST II/2025 = Actual Value, Ziel: Planned Value.



The continuation and further development of gender equality measures remains a central concern of fortiss GmbH. This is particularly important to fulfil the structural objectives of the cascade model in the long term.

Gender equality measures are not just implemented within existing resources, but with a strategic focus on effectiveness. We carefully consider potential repercussions on third-party funded projects, funding conditions (e.g., EFRE, BayVFP), and organizational structure, ensuring that our efforts are aligned with our broader goals.

To ensure sustained progress and structural implementation, the following priorities have been identified:

- The introduction of selective qualification programs for promising early-career female researchers with leadership potential;
- More intensive use of female role models in mentoring and coaching structures;
- The development of a systematic strategy to facilitate early assumption of responsibility in research and project structures.

This ongoing commitment is also in line with broader policy objectives, as set out in the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. It also aligns with the binding equality requirements for funding recipients under Horizon Europe, which mandate that all funded projects must demonstrate a commitment to gender equality. By adhering to these requirements, we not only meet our legal obligations but also contribute to the broader goal of achieving gender equality in research and innovation contexts.

With this plan, fortiss GmbH not only documents its implementation of legal requirements but also reaffirms its unwavering commitment to achieving genuine gender equality in research and innovation contexts. Our ongoing efforts are a testament to our dedication to this important cause.

2.3 Support Structures, Workplace Conditions, and Prevention Measures

As part of our unwavering commitment to fostering a family-friendly working environment, fortiss GmbH is in the process of establishing a Family Services Office. This service will provide confidential advice and assistance on matters related to reconciling professional responsibilities with family obligations, as well as promoting a healthy work-life balance. The initiative is being developed in line with best practices for family-friendly workplaces and in consideration of the provisions of § 3(2) and § 11 of the German Part-Time and Fixed-Term Employment Act (Teilzeit- und Befristungsgesetz, TzBfG) and relevant guidance under § 1 of the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG).

In particular, the organization recognizes that working conditions play a decisive role in employee well-being. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, fortiss introduced extensive mobile working arrangements and digital communication channels, initiating substantial changes in day-to-day operations. Building on the lessons learned during this exceptional period, fortiss has developed a robust digital and spatial infrastructure. A formal works agreement (*Dienstvereinbarung*) on mobile work has increased the possible share of telework available to staff, providing greater flexibility for both full-time and part-time employees, while fortiss remains committed to maintaining operational effectiveness. Eligibility applies to all staff members who meet the agreed conditions. In addition, fortiss is committed to supporting employees with dependents. We carefully examine each position to determine if it can be filled on a part-time basis. Where applicable, employees are informed about options for reducing working hours following Section 8 of the Part-Time and Fixed-Term Employment Act, as well as the possibility of fixed-term part-time employment for the care of children or other dependents under Section 11(1) of the Collective Agreement for the Public Service of the Federal States (TV-L). Information is also provided on part-time employment during parental leave by Section 15(5) of the Federal Parental Allowance and Parental Leave Act (Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz; BEEG). Flexible working time arrangements can be agreed at any time within the framework of core working hours, and extended individual agreements are offered further to improve the compatibility of family and professional responsibilities, insofar as these are compatible with operational requirements.

Since 2023 fortiss GmbH has maintained designated confidential counsellors for all employees to provide information and support in cases of sexual harassment or discrimination. Serving as the first point of contact in cases of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, or bullying, these counsellors are specifically appointed to address discrimination, (sexual) harassment, and violence. They ensure both personal and anonymous communication channels and stand as a testament to our commitment to protecting privacy and well-being. In addition to this dedicated and topic-specific mechanism, fortiss also operates a general internal reporting channel in line with the German Whistleblower Protection Act (*Hinweisgeberschutzgesetz*, §§ 12–18 HinSchG). This channel, accessible via the internal rexx HR system, allows confidential reporting of a broader range of legal or compliance-related concerns. It is designed to protect whistleblowers from retaliation and is regularly evaluated in accordance with statutory best-practice requirements. Reports submitted through this channel are reviewed by an external law firm and followed up with appropriate measures in coordination with the organization, ensuring that all concerns are addressed promptly and effectively. This distinction ensures that sensitive interpersonal matters are addressed by our confidants, while all other forms of misconduct can be

reported through the general compliance channel, reassuring employees of the support available to them. In 2022, fortiss issued an updated Code of Conduct outlining behavioural standards for all members of the organization, as well as a revised complaints procedure following § 13–§ 15 AGG. Beginning in September 2025, all onboarding processes will include a dedicated guideline on the prevention of sexual harassment, underscoring the institution's commitment to a safe and respectful work environment. In-house publications and forms also observe the principles of gender-sensitive language, reinforcing our dedication to equality and respectful communication in all internal and external interactions.

In addition to gender equality, the areas of diversity and inclusion are gaining increasing importance. We are committed to fostering a culture that values and includes all employees, and this development is designed as a participatory process, ensuring that employees at all levels can contribute to shaping an organizational culture that is equitable, respectful, and inclusive. At this stage, our initiatives primarily focus on the dimensions of "male" and "female" gender, aligning with our current data collection and reporting structures. We will progressively integrate additional diversity dimensions as part of our broader inclusion strategy.

These measures reflect fortiss GmbH's continued commitment to ensuring a safe, respectful, and inclusive work environment. They also demonstrate our dedication to providing effective recourse for employees in strict adherence to applicable legal requirements.

3 Gender Equality in Recruitment and Career Development

At fortiss GmbH, we are unwavering in our commitment to achieving and maintaining gender parity in the appointment of senior scientific positions. This commitment is reflected in our alignment of targets with the goals defined under the Cascade Model, ensuring that the proportion of women at each academic qualification level corresponds, at a minimum, to the proportion at the preceding level. To achieve this, we take proactive steps to implement a range of measures that support gender equality and ensure a fair, unbiased recruitment process. We do this in strict adherence to applicable equality and diversity standards, including the General Equal Treatment Act (cf. §§ 1–8 AGG) and the obligations under the Part-Time and Fixed-Term Employment Act (cf. § 8 TzBfG), providing a secure and confident environment for all. These actions are designed to influence measurable outcomes, such as the proportion of women in applicant pools, shortlists, and appointments. In particular:

- Job postings are written in a gender-neutral manner following § 11 AGG. Where a position is suitable for part-time work, this will be explicitly stated, as required under § 7(1) TzBfG. In areas where women are underrepresented, job advertisements may include the statement: "fortiss GmbH aims to increase the proportion of women in this area. Women are therefore particularly encouraged to apply."
- Recruitment and career advancement in areas where women are underrepresented are carried out following the priority of aptitude, ability, and professional performance (§ 8 AGG). If the objectives of the Cascade Model have not yet been met at a given level, women will be given preference in hiring or promotion where qualifications and professional performance are otherwise equal (§ 5 AGG).

- At least two interviewers from fortiss GmbH participate in each job interview, ensuring a balanced and fair assessment. Interviews are conducted in a non-discriminatory manner, and recruitment decisions are meticulously documented in compliance with data protection regulations.

Current key measures include:

- Development of an employer brand and employer value proposition to enhance fortiss's attractiveness to a broad spectrum of applicants.
- Further professionalization of active recruitment strategies.
- Enhancing the candidate experience throughout our selection process. We strive to make all applicants feel valued and respected, regardless of the outcome.
- Support for emerging researchers through a continuously evolving pool integrated with professional networks.
- Support measures to facilitate qualification for a research career.
- Optimization of the onboarding process.

4. Implementation and Entry into Force

The current version of the GEP is easily accessible, published on the fortiss website, available via the fortiss Intranet — the central internal information platform.

Reports on the implementation of this GEP shall be prepared and submitted by management as part of the regular reporting on the company's business performance and overall situation. The report must be submitted no later than 28 July each year.

This GEP entered into force on January 1, 2022. It's important to note that amendments to this GEP shall not affect the validity of the remaining provisions, providing a stable and secure framework for our operations.

Signed and approved by the Managing Director.

Munich, September 1, 2025

Dr. Holger Pfeifer
Managing Director (CEO)