

Gender Equality Plan (GEP)

DASK – DASKALOS APPS

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Executive Commitment

As a startup founded on principles of inclusive innovation, DASK recognises that gender equality is not merely a compliance requirement but a fundamental driver of our success. Our small but growing team currently comprises five dedicated professionals, three men and two women, representing a balanced foundation upon which we are building a truly equitable organisation. This Gender Equality Plan articulates our unwavering commitment to maintaining and enhancing gender balance as we scale, while embedding equality principles into every aspect of our operations, from our groundbreaking research projects to our daily workplace interactions.

The technology sector, particularly in emerging fields like Extended Reality and Artificial Intelligence, has historically struggled with gender representation. As a young company, we have the unique opportunity to build equality into our DNA from the beginning, avoiding the systemic biases that plague established organizations. This plan represents more than policy; it embodies our vision for a technology company where brilliant minds of all genders collaborate to create solutions that serve everyone.

Our commitment to gender equality is already evident in projects like XR-CareerAssist, INTERACT, INFINITY, where we ensure gender-diverse representation in both our development team and our community advisory boards. This approach has taught us that inclusive practices lead to better technical outcomes, more innovative solutions, and products that truly meet the needs of all users. We pledge to continue this trajectory, making gender equality a cornerstone of our growth strategy.

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Research and Development Director and Co-Founder, DASK
January 1, 2025

1. Introduction: Building Equality from the Ground Up

DASK emerged from a simple yet powerful vision: technology should be accessible to everyone, regardless of ability, background, or identity. As a startup specialising in XR accessibility and AI-powered solutions, we understand that creating truly inclusive technology requires diverse perspectives at every level of our organisation. This Gender Equality Plan represents our formal commitment to translating this vision into concrete actions that will guide our growth from a five-person team to whatever scale our ambitions take us.

Our current team composition, three male and two female professionals, reflects our early success in building a gender-balanced workforce. However, we recognise that maintaining and improving this balance requires intentional effort, particularly as we expand into technical domains traditionally dominated by men. This plan outlines how we will preserve our commitment to equality through every stage of our growth, ensuring that gender diversity remains a strength rather than becoming a challenge to be managed.

The startup environment presents unique opportunities and challenges for gender equality. On one hand, our small size and flat structure allow us to implement changes quickly and avoid the bureaucratic barriers that hinder larger organisations. We can create policies that are immediately impactful and build a culture of equality from day one. On the other hand, limited resources mean we must be creative and strategic in our approach, focusing on high-impact initiatives that align with our core mission and values.

This Gender Equality Plan serves multiple purposes. It fulfills the requirements of the Horizon Europe program, enabling us to participate in cutting-edge research collaborations. More importantly, it provides a roadmap for building the kind of company we want to be, one where talented individuals of all genders can contribute their best work, where our products reflect the diversity of our users, and where equality is not an afterthought but a fundamental operating principle.

2. Our Current Landscape: Strengths and Opportunities

As a startup with five team members, we have the advantage of knowing each person's contributions intimately and ensuring everyone's voice is heard. Our current gender distribution - three men and two women - represents a 60-40 split that, while not perfect parity, is significantly better than industry averages in the technology sector. More importantly, this distribution exists across all levels of our flat organisational structure, with women holding key technical and leadership roles from our inception.

Our founding team made conscious decisions to prioritise gender diversity from the beginning. This proactive approach allowed us to build a team based on both excellence and diversity.

The benefits of this gender-balanced team are already evident in our work. In developing the INTERACT project, our female team members brought crucial insights about the importance of representing diverse signing styles and ensuring that avatar customisation options didn't reinforce gender stereotypes. Their perspectives led us to question assumptions about "neutral" avatar designs and to create more inclusive customisation options that serve all users regardless of their gender identity or expression.

However, we also recognise areas where we must improve. Our technical development work still shows some gender imbalance, with male team members taking the lead on certain coding tasks while female members focus more on user research and project management. While these divisions emerged organically based on individual interests and expertise, we are committed to ensuring that all team members have opportunities to develop skills across all areas of our work. This includes providing training opportunities, encouraging cross-functional collaboration, and actively challenging any unconscious biases that might limit team members' growth.

Our startup status means we lack some of the formal structures that larger organisations use to promote gender equality - we don't have a dedicated HR department, formal mentorship programs, or extensive parental leave policies. However, we view this as an opportunity to create innovative, flexible approaches that better serve our team's actual needs. Rather than implementing rigid corporate policies, we can develop practices that genuinely support work-life balance and career development for all team members.

3. Work-Life Balance and Organizational Culture in a Startup Context

Creating a supportive work-life balance in a startup environment requires rethinking traditional approaches. The demanding nature of startup work, with its long hours and intense deadlines, can disproportionately impact team members with caregiving responsibilities. Responsibilities that still fall more heavily on women in most societies. We are committed to building a culture that values output over hours, flexibility over face-time, and sustainable practices over burnout-inducing sprints.

Our approach begins with radical flexibility in work arrangements. While we maintain core collaboration hours to ensure team connectivity, we trust each team member to manage their schedule in ways that accommodate their life outside work. This means that team members can start their day early to accommodate school drop-offs, take extended breaks for family responsibilities, or work from home when needed. We've found that this flexibility actually increases productivity, as team members can work during their most effective hours and aren't stressed about rigid schedules.

The SENTISIGN project exemplifies how we implement flexibility in practice. When conducting user testing sessions with our Community Advisory Board, we scheduled meetings at various times to accommodate participants' different schedules, recognising that many of our female advisory board members had caregiving responsibilities. This flexibility extended to our own team, with members able to attend different sessions based on their availability. The result was richer feedback and higher engagement from both our team and our community partners.

We recognise that startup work can be all-consuming, potentially pushing out other life priorities. To combat this, we've instituted "sustainable sprint" practices that acknowledge the need for intense work periods while building in recovery time. After major project milestones, team members are encouraged to take compensatory time off. We also practice "meeting-free Fridays" to provide uninterrupted time for deep work or early weekend starts. These practices benefit all team members but are particularly important for maintaining gender equality, as women often face greater pressure to balance work with family responsibilities.

Our small size allows us to take a personalised approach to supporting each team member's needs. Such individual accommodations set precedents that will scale into formal policies as we grow. Communication plays a crucial role in maintaining work-life balance. We use asynchronous communication tools that allow team members to contribute when they're available, rather than requiring constant real-time availability. Our project management systems are transparent, allowing everyone to see project status and contribute without needing to be physically present. This approach has proven particularly valuable for team members managing complex schedules and has prevented the kind of "always-on" culture that drives talented people, out of the tech industry.

4. Leadership and Decision-Making in a Flat Structure

While our startup currently operates with a relatively flat structure, we recognise that leadership and decision-making processes significantly impact gender equality. Even without formal hierarchies, informal power dynamics can emerge that inadvertently favor one gender over another. Our commitment is to maintain transparent, inclusive decision-making processes that value all voices equally as we grow.

Currently, our five-person team operates on a model of distributed leadership, where different team members take the lead on projects aligned with their expertise and interests. We've implemented several practices to ensure that gender doesn't influence whose voices are heard in team discussions. Our weekly team meetings follow a structured format where each member provides updates and input, preventing the common dynamic where more assertive voices dominate. We rotate meeting facilitation responsibilities, giving everyone experience in leading discussions. When making significant decisions, we use written proposals and asynchronous feedback periods, allowing team members who might be less comfortable speaking up in meetings to contribute their thoughts fully.

As we anticipate growth, we are laying the groundwork for maintaining gender balance in future leadership structures. We've also committed to creating advisory positions that bring external perspectives on gender equality as we scale. These preparations ensure that gender equality remains central to our governance even as we evolve beyond our current informal structure.

Mentorship and sponsorship, while informal in our current structure, play crucial roles in developing future leaders. We've established a practice of cross-gender project partnerships, ensuring that team members work closely with colleagues of different genders. This approach breaks down potential gender silos and creates natural mentoring relationships. Decision-making transparency extends to career development and opportunity allocation. When new projects arise or conference speaking opportunities emerge, we openly discuss who would benefit most from the experience, considering both project needs and individual development goals. This transparency prevents the common scenario where opportunities flow through informal networks that often exclude women. Our commitment is to maintain this openness even as we grow and decision-making processes necessarily become more complex.

5. Recruitment and Career Development: Building an Equitable Pipeline

As a startup planning significant growth, our recruitment and career development practices will largely determine whether we maintain or improve our gender balance. We've learned from the technology industry's failures that good intentions aren't enough, systematic approaches are needed to overcome unconscious biases and structural barriers that limit women's participation in technical fields.

Our recruitment strategy begins long before we post job openings. We actively cultivate relationships with organisations promoting women in technology, participate in diversity-focused career fairs, and maintain connections with university programs known for supporting female students in STEM fields. This proactive approach ensures that when positions open, we have access to diverse candidate pools.

Our interview process is designed to minimize bias while giving all candidates the best opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities. We use structured interviews with predetermined questions, ensuring all candidates are evaluated on the same criteria. Interview panels always include at least one woman, even if this means including advisors or partners when our internal team lacks gender balance for a particular role. We've also implemented "work sample" assessments that allow candidates to demonstrate their skills through practical exercises rather than relying solely on traditional interviews that may favor certain communication styles.

Career development in our startup context means ensuring all team members have opportunities to expand their skills and take on new challenges. We've implemented a quarterly review process where each team member discusses their learning goals and identifies stretch opportunities. Importantly, we actively encourage women to pursue

technical skill development and men to develop skills in areas like user research and community engagement, breaking down traditional gender-based role divisions.

Professional development support, while limited by our startup resources, is allocated equitably. Each team member has access to learning resources, whether online courses, conference attendance, or certification programs. We track this allocation by gender to ensure unconscious biases don't lead to unequal investment. Internal mobility, though limited in a five-person team, is encouraged through project rotation. Team members can express interest in leading different aspects of our work, gaining experience that prepares them for future roles.

6. Integrating Gender Dimensions into Our Research and Innovation

As a company developing AI-powered XR solutions, we have a responsibility to ensure our technologies don't perpetuate or amplify gender biases. This responsibility goes beyond avoiding obvious discrimination; it requires actively considering how gender intersects with technology use, accessibility needs, and social contexts. Our approach to gender-aware innovation is woven throughout our development process, from initial concept to final deployment.

Our AI development process includes explicit consideration of gender bias at every stage. Data collection and privacy considerations take on additional importance when viewed through a gender lens. We recognise that women and gender minorities may face particular safety risks in virtual environments, including harassment and unwanted attention. Our data handling practices include strong privacy protections and user control over what information is shared. Our user research methodologies explicitly address gender dimensions. When conducting usability testing, we ensure balanced gender representation among participants and analyze results for any gender-based patterns. We use inclusive research methods that accommodate different communication styles and comfort levels with technology. For example, we offer both individual and group testing sessions, recognizing that some women may feel more comfortable providing critical feedback in supportive group settings while others prefer private sessions.

Innovation in our context means pushing beyond current industry standards for gender inclusion. While many XR applications still default to male-coded avatars and interactions, we see an opportunity to establish new standards that center inclusivity from the start. This includes developing guidelines for gender-inclusive XR design that we share openly with the broader development community, contributing to systemic change beyond our own products.

7. Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment

While our small team has fortunately not experienced issues of gender-based harassment or discrimination, we recognise the importance of establishing clear policies and procedures before problems arise. Creating a safe environment where all team members can thrive requires proactive measures, clear communication, and a culture that prevents harassment rather than merely responding to it.

Our approach begins with clear, unambiguous policies that define unacceptable behaviors and outline consequences. These policies cover not only obvious forms of harassment but also subtler behaviors that can create hostile environments, such as consistently interrupting female colleagues, making assumptions about technical abilities based on gender, or excluding team members from informal networking opportunities. We recognise that harassment can occur in virtual environments as well, particularly relevant given our work in XR, and our policies explicitly cover online interactions.

Education and prevention form the cornerstone of our approach. All team members, regardless of gender or seniority, participate in regular training on recognising and preventing harassment. These sessions go beyond legal compliance to explore unconscious bias, microaggressions, and the ways that seemingly harmless behaviours can accumulate to create unwelcoming environments. We use interactive workshops rather than passive video training, encouraging honest discussion about challenges and scenarios relevant to our startup context.

Reporting mechanisms in a five-person startup require careful consideration. Traditional corporate approaches with HR departments and formal investigation procedures don't translate directly to our context. Instead, we've established multiple reporting channels, including direct communication with leadership, anonymous feedback tools, and connections with external advisors who can provide objective perspectives. Supporting team members goes beyond addressing negative behaviors to actively fostering positive interactions. Bystander intervention training empowers all team members to address problematic behaviors they witness. In our small team, everyone has a responsibility to maintain our positive culture. We practice intervention techniques through role-playing exercises, helping team members feel confident speaking up if they observe behaviors that don't align with our values. This distributed responsibility prevents the common dynamic where women bear the burden of addressing their own harassment.

8. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

As a data-driven technology company, we apply the same rigorous approach to monitoring our gender equality efforts as we do to our technical development. However, we also recognise that meaningful progress on gender equality requires looking beyond simple metrics to understand the lived experiences of our team members and the broader impact of our work.

Our monitoring approach combines quantitative metrics with qualitative insights. On the quantitative side, we track obvious indicators like gender distribution across roles and projects, allocation of professional development opportunities, speaking opportunities at conferences and events, and lead roles on different project components. But we also measure factors like participation rates in team discussions, analysed through meeting transcripts, distribution of code commits and technical contributions, and user feedback on our products disaggregated by gender.

Continuous improvement requires regular revision of our approaches based on what we learn. Our Gender Equality Plan is a living document, updated annually based on our evaluation findings. But we don't wait for annual reviews to make changes. When we identify issues or opportunities, we address them immediately. This agility is one of our advantages as a startup and ensures our gender equality efforts evolve with our company and our understanding.

Sharing our learning contributes to broader change in the technology sector. We publish blog posts about our gender equality journey, speak at conferences about integrating gender dimensions into XR development, and open-source not just our code but our processes for inclusive development. By sharing both successes and failures, we help other startups avoid our mistakes and build on our achievements.

9. Resources and Accountability

While our startup status means we operate with limited resources, we recognise that meaningful progress on gender equality requires real investment. Our approach focuses on integrating gender equality into our core operations rather than treating it as an add-on activity, ensuring that our investments in equality also advance our business objectives.

Human resource allocation begins with distributed responsibility. Rather than appointing a single person as "diversity officer," each team member has specific responsibilities for advancing gender equality. Our CEO champions policy development and external partnerships, our technical lead ensures gender considerations in product development, our UX researcher integrates gender dimensions into user studies, and all team members contribute to maintaining an inclusive culture. This distributed model ensures gender equality remains everyone's responsibility while avoiding the common trap of making it solely "women's work."

Time allocation for gender equality activities is built into our project planning. We allocate roughly 5% of our collective time to activities directly related to advancing gender equality, including training and education sessions, policy development and review, community partnerships and outreach, and monitoring and evaluation activities. This time investment is tracked and protected, ensuring it doesn't get squeezed out by urgent project demands.

Financial resources for gender equality are integrated throughout our budget rather than siloed in a separate line item. Professional development funds are tracked by gender to

ensure equitable distribution. Conference sponsorships prioritise events promoting diversity in tech. Our marketing materials showcase our diverse team and inclusive practices. When hiring, we invest in posting on diversity job boards and partnering with organizations promoting women in technology. These integrated investments demonstrate that gender equality is core to our business strategy, not a charitable activity.

External resources amplify our internal investments. We actively seek partnerships with organisations promoting gender equality in technology, leveraging their expertise and networks. We participate in programs offering free or subsidized training on inclusive practices. We apply for grants supporting women in technology, using these funds to expand our gender equality initiatives beyond what our startup budget alone would allow. These partnerships provide not just financial resources but valuable expertise and connections.

Accountability structures ensure our commitments translate to action. Our quarterly board meetings include standing agenda items on gender equality progress. Our annual reports to stakeholders include specific sections on diversity and inclusion metrics. We participate in voluntary certification programs for gender equality, subjecting ourselves to external evaluation. Most importantly, we maintain transparency with our team, regularly discussing our progress and challenges in all-hands meetings.

Long-term sustainability of our gender equality efforts requires building them into our organisational DNA. As we develop operational procedures, write documentation, and establish company traditions, we ensure gender equality considerations are embedded throughout. Our employee handbook includes clear policies on equality and inclusion. Our technical documentation includes guidelines for gender-inclusive development. Our onboarding process for new team members emphasizes our commitment to equality from day one.

10. Vision for the Future: Scaling Equality with Growth

As we look toward our future growth, we see gender equality not as a challenge to be managed but as a competitive advantage to be leveraged. Our vision is to demonstrate that startups can scale successfully while improving rather than compromising their commitment to gender equality. This requires thoughtful planning, continuous adaptation, and unwavering commitment to our core values.

Our growth projections anticipate expanding from five to fifteen team members over the next three years. This three-fold increase presents both opportunities and challenges for maintaining gender balance. We've developed scenarios for different growth patterns, ensuring we have strategies to maintain equality whether we grow gradually or experience rapid scaling. Each scenario includes specific targets for gender representation, not just overall but in technical roles, leadership positions, and new specialty areas we might develop.

Future organisational structures are designed with gender equality built in. As we move from our current flat structure to more defined roles and departments, we're establishing principles that will guide this evolution. Any future department must have gender-diverse leadership. Technical teams will maintain at least 40% representation of underrepresented genders. Decision-making bodies at all levels will include balanced gender representation. These structural commitments are written into our operating agreements, making them binding as we grow.

Industry leadership on gender equality is part of our long-term vision. We aim to be known not just for our innovative products but for demonstrating that technology companies can succeed while prioritising equality. This includes publishing research on gender-inclusive XR development, hosting workshops for other startups on building equality from the ground up, contributing to industry standards on AI fairness and bias prevention, and mentoring other founders committed to building inclusive companies.

Partnerships and ecosystem development will extend our impact beyond our own organisation. We're cultivating relationships with universities to create pipelines for diverse talent, venture capital firms that prioritize investing in diverse teams, technology companies interested in learning from our approaches, and advocacy organizations working for systemic change in the industry. These partnerships create multiplier effects, spreading gender equality practices throughout our ecosystem.

Challenges we anticipate include maintaining culture during rapid growth, competing for talent in a tight market, resisting pressure to compromise equality for speed, and avoiding complacency as we achieve initial success. We're developing strategies to address each challenge, from culture preservation through careful hiring and onboarding to market positioning that makes our commitment to equality a recruiting advantage.

Success metrics for our long-term vision go beyond simple gender counts. We envision a future where team members of all genders report equal satisfaction and opportunity, our products are recognised for inclusive design excellence, other companies adopt our practices and cite our influence, and we contribute to measurable improvement in our industry's gender balance. These aspirations guide our daily decisions and long-term planning.

11. Conclusion: A Living Commitment

This Gender Equality Plan represents not a final statement but a living commitment that will evolve with our company, our team, and our understanding. As a startup, we have the unique opportunity to build equality into our foundation, creating structures and cultures that will serve us well as we grow. Our experience with past projects demonstrates that prioritising gender equality enhances rather than hinders innovation, leading to better products and stronger teams.

We recognise that achieving true gender equality requires more than good intentions or written policies. It demands daily attention to our practices, regular examination of our

biases, and willingness to change when we fall short of our ideals. It requires investing real resources - time, money, and effort - even when startup pressures tempt us to defer equality efforts until we're "more established." Most importantly, it requires recognising that gender equality isn't a destination we'll reach but a journey we'll continue throughout our organization's life.

Our commitment extends beyond our own organisation to the broader technology ecosystem. By sharing our approaches, both successes and failures, we hope to contribute to industry-wide change. We believe that startups, with their agility and innovation, can lead the way in demonstrating that gender equality and business success not only compatible but mutually reinforcing.

As we implement this plan, we remain open to feedback, learning, and adaptation. We invite our team members, partners, advisors, and community to hold us accountable to these commitments and to help us identify blind spots and opportunities for improvement. Together, we're building not just innovative technology but a model for how technology companies can embody the values of equality and inclusion we hope to see in the world.

This Gender Equality Plan is our public commitment to continue this journey with intention, transparency, and determination. We look forward to reporting on our progress, sharing our learning, and contributing to a future where gender equality in technology is not an aspiration but a reality.

For questions, feedback, or partnership opportunities related to our gender equality efforts, please contact:

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This document is available in multiple accessible formats. We welcome requests for translations or alternative presentations that would make this plan more accessible to diverse audiences.

DASK is committed to continuous improvement in gender equality. This plan will be reviewed annually and updated based on our learning, growth, and evolving understanding of best practices in building inclusive organizations.