



UNIVERSITY  
*of* NICOSIA

**Office of the Senior Vice Rector**

**Equality, Diversity, Inclusion  
Strategy and Action Plan (EDI-SAP)**

**2024-2029**

## **At a Glance**

The purpose of this strategy document is to offer policy guidance and implementation strategies that address the nexus of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) at the University of Nicosia (UNIC). By actively pushing for equity principles, UNIC can cultivate greater equality within and beyond its community. The document thoroughly discusses the University's priorities, strategic objectives, and approach to implementing EDI policies and activities in a meaningful manner.

UNIC is taking a more comprehensive approach to implementing meaningful policy over EDI, in line with its Sustainability Strategy (2024-2029) and Gender Equality Plan (2022-2025). Additionally, the Strategy and Action Plan (SAP) for 2024-2029 addresses important gaps and provides a thorough examination of equity pillars and priorities for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion within our UNIC community.

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# **1. An Introduction to UNIC's Approach: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**

## **EDI-SAP for 2024-2029**

*Professor Constantinos N. Phellas*

*Senior Vice Rector, University of Nicosia*

The University of Nicosia, in its quest to address the practice and implementation of a holistic approach towards EDI, has put forward a Strategy and Action Plan (EDI-SAP) that seeks to fill in any gaps and uncertainties over how we understand and embrace every single member of our community. UNIC is dedicated to raising awareness among its staff, faculty, students, associates, and partners, by pursuing a set of strategic objectives aimed at promoting equity, safety, security, and embracing the unique qualities of each individual in our University and extended community.

UNIC has pioneered in its innovative approach, by launching earlier in 2022 its first Centre for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (CEDI). At the same time, our institution remains fully committed to our vision of positively shaping the world, starting with UNIC, by building bridges between our city and the wider community, engaging with partners nationwide, and sharing our knowledge, experience, and approach with the international community.

Vulnerable groups have long struggled to achieve meaningful representation and co-exist in a highly unequal environment marred by toxic masculinity, prejudice, discrimination, and patriarchal remnants of a bygone era. Despite persistent inequality, we pledge to devote ourselves fully to expediting the path to complete equality. This includes embracing our diverse friends, students, and colleagues, promoting inclusivity within UNIC, and advocating for policies that safeguard against all forms of discrimination and harmful behaviour or assault.

Our EDI-SAP is, in essence, a fundamental building block that lays the foundation for us to reach our full potential. Research shows that promoting inclusivity within universities enhances communication, promotes healthy growth and professional development across all fields, and fosters a constructive and sustainable work-life-research balance. We aspire that our policies and

approach will help as a source of inspiration for other institutions, partners, and stakeholders, and our own UNIC family will enable the expansion of a positive sphere of influence that accommodates EDI practices beyond the workplace.

Within this document, you will find our vision, mission statement, and step-by-step outline of our strategic objectives for 2024-2029, an implementation timeline, and a record of the progress we have made thus far. Additionally, a comprehensive database of relevant documents will keep track of UNIC's priorities in implementing this EDI-SAP and ensure consistent progress through annual reports. While we recognise the many challenges that come with creating a path towards a more inclusive and sustainable future, we acknowledge that change begins with the simplest, smallest act of kindness that prioritises the best interests, well-being, equity, equality, and inclusion, of our own community and beyond.

## **2. UNIC's Strategic Vision: Equity and Commitment**

Our aspiration is to emerge as a prominent and dependable institution of higher education that pushes through equity and upholds EDI principles. By doing so, we aim to enable our extended community to flourish and make enduring, constructive contributions to a variety of social, educational and employment contexts. With this goal in mind, UNIC is committed to advancing our vision in Cyprus, throughout the broader Eastern Mediterranean region, and globally.

## **3. UNIC's EDI Mission Statement**

At the University of Nicosia, we firmly believe that a focus solely on pushing through equity in order to achieve meaningful equality is insufficient in our quest for greater inclusion in our diverse community. Instead, we endeavour to develop and improve our approaches to integrate equity practices over equality, diversity, and inclusivity into our daily lives. Furthermore, our practice prioritises EDI activities by conducting thorough analyses and situational assessments to identify the areas of greatest need. With this in mind, we remain dedicated to creating meaningful policies that prioritise equality, which requires sacrifice, strategic planning, and monitoring our progress and accomplishments.

## **4. Principles and Focus Areas**

As part of our strategic direction towards meaningful EDI initiatives, identifying the key principles and focus areas for UNIC is of utmost importance. We aim to challenge conventional norms and concepts by re-evaluating various categories and labels that should never be used to create divisions or discriminate against fellow human beings.

As such, we have identified ten key areas in which we seek to challenge conventional norms and promote active participation and inclusion across the social spectrum. We firmly believe that these areas represent fundamental rights and freedoms that every human being is entitled to:

### **1. Race**

No one should be discriminated on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or national origin. This includes discrimination based on skin colour or other physical characteristics associated with race. Our UNIC community is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial community that embraces its diversity.

### **2. Gender**

At UNIC, unfair treatment of an individual based on their sex or gender is not tolerated. People of all genders are treated equally and fairly, and have equal rights and opportunities.

Moreover, we openly acknowledge the fluidity of gender, which encompasses gender identity. This includes all individuals' gender identities regardless of whether they identify as male, female, transgender, or non-binary.

We further acknowledge that individuals have the freedom to choose whether they wish to express their gender in a manner that conforms to societal expectations associated with their assigned gender or

whether they prefer to present themselves in ways that challenge or defy conventional gender norms.

### **3. Sexual Orientation**

We firmly believe that a person's sexual orientation, whether it be gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, or otherwise, is not open to questioning, discrimination, or exclusion from our community. We are dedicated to providing unwavering support and raising awareness about the right to express their sexuality and sexual orientation freely.

### **4. Religion or belief**

UNIC is a diverse community that comprises various religions or beliefs, or lack thereof. The University welcomes individuals from different religious backgrounds and outlooks, including those who do not identify with any particular belief system.

### **5. Disability**

Discrimination based on disability is not tolerated. Our commitment extends to individuals with physical, mental, or intellectual disability, as well as other related medical conditions. These factors should never serve as a basis -for excluding anyone from fully participating in our vibrant community.

### **6. Age**

No individual should face discrimination based on age. This includes discrimination against both older and younger individuals. UNIC unequivocally rejects age-related stigmas and ageism. We welcome individuals of all ages into our community with open arms.

### **7. Family Status**

An individual's family status (their familial responsibilities, relationships, and obligations, such as being a parent or caregiver) should not act as a barrier to active participation and enjoyment of all



professional and extracurricular opportunities available at our University.

### **8. Civil Status**

At our Institution, we firmly believe that a person's civil status (single, married, separated, divorced, widowed, civil partnered, formerly civil partnered) is a personal decision and does not impact their standing within our community.

### **9. Socio-Economic Status**

The amount of income one earns should not create a hierarchy in society. While socio-economic status can help us understand the correlation between economic merit and social position, based on factors like income, education, and occupation, we reject the idea of such a dichotomy. We believe in promoting justice and equal opportunity for all, regardless of their socio-economic background.

### **10. Political Opinion**

The unfair treatment of individuals based on their political opinion or affiliation should not be tolerated. As an academic institution, UNIC is an open, diverse community that promotes the freedom of expression.

UNIC advocates for a fairer community, a just society, and a better world. We focus on specific actions, delivering on key equity, diversity, and inclusion priorities across seven objectives as addressed below.

## Strategic Objectives & Pillars



## 5. Strategic Objectives and Pillars

In pursuing our strategy, we have identified four (4) pillars that in turn shape seven (7) strategic objectives. This is an integral part of a more precise approach and a refined definition of the identity of our EDI strategy.

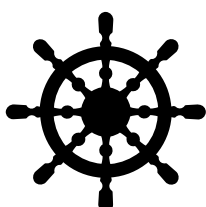
### Pillars

#### Justice



We are committed to ensuring equitable treatment of all individuals. Equality as a guiding principle is insufficient without equity and equal opportunities, which in turn safeguard prospects of the entire community. Our goal is to address and eliminate prejudice and any barriers that perpetuate systemic discrimination. By doing so, we aim to create an inclusive environment that embraces and incorporates our broader community in all aspects of UNIC's activities.

#### Leadership



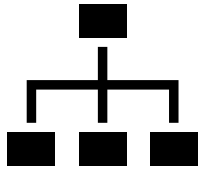
Fostering the development of young minds, constructing valuable portfolios and skills for every individual at UNIC, and promoting self-sufficiency and leadership, -are fundamental tenets of our strategic approach. By expanding training and creating opportunities for everyone, we aspire to witness our people emerge as future leaders in their respective domains.

#### Belonging



To function as a community, we must uphold the principle of 'belonging'. UNIC is committed to fostering an inclusive environment that welcomes everyone. We prioritise organising friendly and dynamic events and activities that contribute to building a robust UNIC identity that incorporates all members.

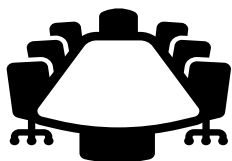
## Engagement



related matters.

UNIC is committed to integrating equality, diversity, and inclusion considerations into all of its academic and business operations. This approach promotes engagement by enabling students, staff, and faculty to participate in areas that interest them, thus creating actively engaged individuals in all UNIC-

## Objectives



### **Objective 1: Appointment of an Advisory Committee on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ACEDI)**

Ensuring Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion at UNIC is a priority, and the creation of an Advisory Committee on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ACEDI) is a key component of achieving this goal. The Committee will be responsible for advocating equity across UNIC and for overseeing the successful implementation and integration of all strategic objectives related to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. In addition, the Committee will provide specialised policy suggestions and other ideas to further enhance Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion at the University.

ACEDI will be composed of staff, faculty, and students who will communicate regularly to discuss EDI-related matters. This Committee will collaborate closely with the Centre for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (CEDI), which is UNIC's specialised centre for research, projects, events, and other EDI-related activities. The Office of the Senior Vice Rector will chair ACEDI.

The Office of the Senior Vice Rector will strategically serve as the primary policy-suggesting entity on behalf of ACEDI to Senate.

#### **Action**

ACEDI is to produce an annual progress report to highlight how activities carried out throughout the year contribute towards achieving the EDI strategy.

To oversee the implementation of EDI policies and other strategic objectives mentioned herein.

#### **Target/Progress**

Publication of EDI Annual Report for an initial five (5)-year period; submission to Senate for evaluation every December.

Identifying policy priorities during the first year of launch 2024 and collaborating with CEDI to develop meaningfully policies on an annual basis.

To publicise, promote, and ensure that UNIC's priorities and dedication to EDI principles are widely visible. This should be reflected in all published and public documents, including this strategy.

To carry out equity impact assessments (EIA) by (a) coordinating with different departments at UNIC, and (b) establishing EDI-KPIs to track progress in each annual report.

To convene meetings with ACEDI members to identify policy change and deliberate on findings, progress, or other pertinent matters regarding EDI.

To integrate EDI-related concerns throughout the University and across various departments and units.

To implement and refine the Gender Equality Plan (GEP).

Wide dissemination through various channels, such as social media, the website, public announcements, and news, that UNIC is dedicated to the creation of a diverse, equal, and inclusive environment.

Establishment of a streamlined process to identify metrics and KPIs, with the aim of determining gaps and areas of improvement. It is essential to ensure that this process complies with privacy and GDPR regulations.

A minimum of two meetings per semester. The Chair of ACEDI and/or their officers will circulate the meeting schedule at the beginning of each academic year. The agenda, along with any minutes of prior meetings, will be disseminated at least one month in advance of each meeting.

Improved diversity in the membership of decision-making bodies, and the inclusion of an ACEDI representative at Senate, (not holding any other function or portfolio).

Strict adherence to existing policy. At the same time, further policy review is important, while signing the Cyprus Diversity Charter will identify other important commitments to be made to society and the academic community regarding EDI and Gender.



## **Objective 2: Enhanced Experience for the UNIC Community and Beyond**

While prioritising ideas and initiatives that promote Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion within our own University community, we must also proactively plan to integrate EDI principles into broader public life and address obstacles and taboos that hinder true equality and inclusion. UNIC aims to break the glass ceiling by introducing a series of initiatives that directly engage with civil society entities, the city of Nicosia, and other interested stakeholders to promote communication and collaboration in advancing EDI principles.

### **Action**

### **Target/Progress**

To increase the availability of funded or partially funded programs, scholarships, and financial aid, and reach out to vulnerable groups and individuals seeking to enhance their academic skills and knowledge. Furthermore, we will enhance the visibility and transparency of the admissions process.

Increased student diversity and integration of EDI practices throughout the entire admissions process, including interviews, induction/orientation, and throughout their studies.

To collaborate with managers and Human Resources (HR) in order to review UNIC's hiring process, ensuring visibility and transparency, while also attracting employees from diverse backgrounds.

Increased employee diversity and integration of EDI practices throughout the entire hiring process, from application screening to interviews, and the professional environment.

To form working groups within/under ACEDI to focus on: (a) ethnic and cultural diversity, (b) religious and belief diversity, and (c) gender diversity, with the aim of

The target is to advance the representation, diversity, and inclusivity of UNIC's environment, and to enhance collaboration with diverse audiences and partners both within and outside the Organisation,

conducting research and presenting recommendations to the Committee.

To improve accessibility for all individuals across all UNIC campuses and facilities and create a Disability Working Group (DWG). The DWG will serve as the primary group for addressing disability concerns in policy, infrastructure, and culture across UNIC.

To reform the appointment and election procedures and policies of decision-making bodies (including the Senate, Rectorate, Council, and Heads of Departments and Schools) to ensure improved gender balance throughout the University.

To establish an inclusive and inviting environment that caters to individuals who aspire to self-improvement but may be unable to meet the financial requirements necessary to do so. This includes offering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which will be offered in consultation with each School and Department.

as outlined in the recommendations. Additionally, efforts will be made to improve working conditions.

Improved accessibility across UNIC. For this purpose, the Department of Facilities will be required to provide annual progress reports annually, identify targeted areas, and address any gaps. The Disability Working Group will gather data and feedback from Facilities, and then coordinate with ACEDI to include any data/feedback collected in the annual report.

Enhanced gender balance throughout UNIC's primary decision-making bodies (to be achieved by promoting greater equality of opportunity in the appointment process and eligibility for election/re-election to these positions).

The target is to offer cost-free and easily accessible programmes and training opportunities (including Massive Open Online Courses – MOOC) to eligible individuals and groups throughout the society.





### Objective 3: Inclusive Culture

The University's primary focus is to foster an inclusive culture that promotes and preserves the dignity, respect, and well-being of all members and partners within the UNIC community. By pursuing this objective, UNIC aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

#### Action

To enhance awareness of inclusive culture, respect, and dignity by incorporating these principles into UNIC's existing policies.

To introduce effective and suitable measures for employees and students to address instances of harassment and/or bullying in accordance with UNIC's ten (10) key focus areas.

To carry out a feasibility study on the implementation of anonymous reporting for incidents related to, while also enhancing any previous work in this field. Ensure that this resource is widely available to all members of staff, faculty, and students.

#### Target/Progress

The target is to develop a University Dignity and Respect Policy (UDRP) and integrate it into the University Code of Conduct.

The target is to establish training programmes and professional counselling services aimed at preventing, alleviating, and eliminating. Such problems. Progress will be monitored annually to assess any potential increase and improvement resulting from the utilisation of these services. These training initiatives may encompass certified courses that are openly accessible, as outlined in UNIC's Sustainability Strategy.

Implement anonymous reporting and promote it extensively throughout UNIC, both physically and online. Additionally, initiate a monthly campaign under the hashtag #ZeroTolerance to address incidents of harassment and bullying.

Encourage a variety of inclusive activities and events throughout the campus and its surrounding areas.

The introduction of an annual “inclusive UNIC” project (that can last up to two (2) days per year), featuring events, games, and other activities designed to cultivate a more inclusive culture at UNIC. This could be featured during UNIC’s Welcome Week.



## Objective 4: R&D in New Frameworks

UNIC and ACEDI will collect EDI data for students and employees across the University's ten (10) focus areas to monitor progress in areas of under-representation. This data will be strictly anonymised, in accordance with privacy and GDPR-related regulations. The collected data will be used to introduce new frameworks that further enhance EDI practices at UNIC.

### Action

To improve the methodology of data collection for individuals who are seeking to apply for academic programmes or employment opportunities at the University. This should be done by establishing a connection between the data gathered during the application process and the subsequent appointment of successful candidates.

To conduct a comprehensive 'demographic' study across UNIC to gain insights into the existing employee population's EDI composition.

To develop a procedure for capturing EDI data during student registration, in order to gain an understanding of the EDI composition of the current student population.

### Target/Progress

Assessment of any metrics used that help with the collection and compilation of such data while upholding privacy-related issues (upon liaising with HR and Admissions)

Enhance the diversity screening process by fully taking into account data protection considerations, the rationale for collecting such information, and the stage at which this information is collected (upon liaising with HR).

Enhancing diversity screening procedures, while fully taking into account data protection considerations, the rationale for collecting such information, and the stage at which this data is collected (upon liaising with Admissions).

To oversee the impact and effectiveness of EDI-related policies, by developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be integrated into the official UNIC strategy and later into a revised EDI strategy, and by monitoring progress in the annual reports.

Policy on EDI KPIs will be formulated and discussed at Senate. Once approved, these KPIs will be monitored annually through the EDI Report.



## Objective 5: Awareness Raising

To align with the Engagement strategic pillar, it is crucial to raise awareness of existing EDI practices and priorities throughout the entire UNIC community. This comprehensive approach will help enhance engagement with EDI-related issues across all aspects of the University's operations, including teaching, research, administrative work, and daily interactions.

### Action

To conduct a survey among the student and staff body of UNIC, aimed at enhancing our understanding of how well they comprehend EDI-related practices and challenges.

To organise events and initiatives in observance of significant EDI commemorative dates.

To introduce elective credit-bearing modules for students and offer professional development programmes for staff and faculty members. These initiatives will focus on promoting healthy and active citizenship, civic engagement, and EDI principles.

To proactively promote and communicate EDI-related activities throughout the academic year, by proposing EDI initiatives for awards.

### Target/Progress

HR and Student Affairs to jointly develop (in consultation with ACEDI) and disseminate the survey.

Increased frequency of EDI events, including 'International Days' that commemorate equality, diversity, and inclusion, hosted at UNIC. These events must be documented, either through written minutes and/or visual content, such as photographs.

Introduction of such module(s) or programme(s) across different disciplines.

Introduce of a brief awards ceremony for both employees and students, following the end of the Spring

This will serve as an incentive for individuals to be recognised for their efforts in this field.

Semester – either preceding, during, or succeeding the graduation period.

## Objective 6: External Relations



Establishing enduring partnerships and collaborations between external organisations and UNIC is crucial to achieve success across all strategic pillars and focus areas related to EDI. This objective is fundamental for UNIC to emerge as a leading higher education institution in Cyprus, promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, not only to its own community of scholars, students, and staff, but also among the broader Cypriot society, and the wider regional and international communities.

### **Action**

To increase engagement with organisations that support under-represented groups, while continuing to invest in established relationships with partners in this area.

To identify opportunities for enhanced collaboration with external bodies on EDI, and to engage with those that have demonstrated leadership in this area.

To enhance the visibility of EDI and to raise awareness over the importance of upholding EDI-related principles across society.

### **Target/Progress**

The organisation of two annual events, one per semester, with advocacy groups.

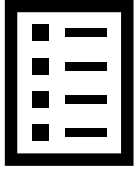
Organising collaborative events with industry partners, student bodies, and other relevant stakeholders.

The target is to collaborate with local authorities, civil society organisations, and other individuals and entities, to conduct research, workshops, and public events, with the aim of achieving policy-relevant goals that foster the integration of EDI into society. These networks would also enable the UNIC community to engage in network projects where funded opportunities are available.

To establish connections with other prominent academic institutions and organisations in Cyprus and beyond. This networking effort will help us engage with higher education authorities, such as the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA/DIPAE) and boost UNIC's progress at University Rankings.

Ensuring continued engagement with external bodies and partners.





## **Objective 7: Project Development**

Last but not least, this strategic objective focuses on development and management of EDI-related projects. Such projects may include large-scale competitions (e.g. Horizon), publications, or conferences.

### **Action**

Seek to secure funding for EDI and human rights-related initiatives, and to coordinate calls for funding across UNIC.

Aim to develop a narrative that is nationally and internationally recognised, drawing in academics, researchers, and practitioners interested in EDI-related research.

### **Target/Progress**

The Research & Innovation Office (RIO) should establish (in consultation with ACEDI) an EDI Research and Development sub-group and acquire funding for EDI-related initiatives.

To launch academic workshops and/or conferences with a focus on EDI and/or to integrate EDI practices into existing in-house academic workshops, conferences, and publications.