



forest 4.0

D.2.1 Human Resources Strategy and Policies

WP2: Human resources

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Executive summary

This Human Resources (HR) Strategy outlines a comprehensive plan for building and sustaining a motivated, diverse, and high-performing workforce at the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence (CoE). The CoE aims to integrate AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry into a single mission-driven entity focused on research and innovation. To support this, the HR strategy focuses on talent acquisition, performance management, professional development, workplace well-being, and compliance.

Over the next six years, the strategy will prioritize policies designed to attract top talent in emerging fields, support employees' career growth, and foster an inclusive, collaborative work environment. Key elements include recruitment from global talent pools, structured onboarding processes, continuous development opportunities, and a performance-based reward system. Additionally, the CoE will implement policies ensuring workplace safety, data protection, and gender equality in compliance with European Union standards.

By following this strategy, the CoE will build a resilient workforce capable of leading innovation in forestry, data integration, and sustainability research, while fostering a diverse and supportive environment that aligns with its mission.

Introduction

This document is the report on Work Package 2 (WP2), Deliverable D2.1- Human Resources /strategy and Policies of CoE "Forest 4.0".

HR Strategy and policies overview

The HR strategy is organized into several key areas that are essential for building and maintaining a talented and motivated workforce. These include:

- **Talent Acquisition and Recruitment:** A focus on attracting top-tier talent from international recruitment pools, using diverse channels, and ensuring a non-discriminatory, transparent hiring process.
- **Performance Management:** Implementing a structured performance review process tied to the CoE's research and innovation goals. This includes personalized development plans for each employee, as well as linking performance with rewards.
- **Professional Development and Career Growth:** A commitment to continuous learning through training programs that enhance employees' skills in AI, IoT, and sustainability research, while also providing pathways for career advancement.
- **Workplace Well-being:** Creating a supportive work environment by offering **flexible working arrangements**, ensuring **workplace safety**, and providing resources for both mental and physical well-being.

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** Establishing policies to ensure equal opportunities for all employees, conducting regular pay gap audits, and fostering a culture that values diversity and gender equality.
- **Risk Management and Compliance:** Ensuring compliance with **GDPR**, workplace safety regulations, and intellectual property protection, while maintaining high standards for research ethics and data security.

The strategy also outlines a **timeline** for the drafting and implementation of key HR policies over the six-year period, prioritizing foundational elements such as recruitment and compliance in the first year, followed by professional development, rewards, and ongoing risk management.

HR Strategy for FOREST 4.0 CoE

1. Talent Acquisition and Recruitment

The goal is to recruit 40 research and support staff by Month 72 (Year 6). To meet this, the HR unit will:

1. Design a Recruitment Plan:

- 1.1. Develop job descriptions for all positions, aligned with the CoE's objectives, covering AI, IoT, forest data intelligence, and sustainability.
- 1.2. Create hiring timelines that ensure key talent acquisition by critical project milestones.
- 1.3. Utilize multiple recruitment channels including EURAXESS, LinkedIn, and Research Gate to attract a diverse pool of international candidates.
- 1.4. Collaborate with partner universities and leverage their networks to promote job openings.

2. KPIs for Recruitment:

- 2.1. Time-to-hire, quality-of-hire, and cost-of-hire.
- 2.2. Recruitment-channels-diversity: targeting diversity through specialized platforms for gender balance and equality.

3. Selection Process:

- 3.1. Ensure the process adheres to the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct.
- 3.2. Provide training to hiring managers to use best-practice attraction and selection techniques.
- 3.3. Pre-selection will focus on candidates whose research aligns with the CoE's objectives (AI, IoT, sustainable forestry).

Effective talent acquisition is the foundation of any successful project, particularly one as ambitious as the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence (CoE). The project aims to recruit 40 research and support staff over a six-year period, bringing together experts in AI, IoT,

and sustainable forestry. This strategy section outlines a comprehensive talent acquisition and recruitment strategy for the CoE, focusing on each phase of the process, including planning, recruitment, selection, onboarding, and monitoring. Each section will highlight the key steps involved, the focus areas, and the responsibilities assigned to various stakeholders.

1.1. Recruitment Planning

The recruitment process begins with meticulous planning, which is essential for aligning the CoE's talent needs with its long-term objectives. The first step is to define the roles required for the project, ensuring that each position is directly linked to the Centre's core mission of promoting **forest-based research through AI and IoT applications**. Job descriptions should be detailed, outlining not only the technical skills required but also the soft skills that are crucial for interdisciplinary collaboration.

Once the roles are defined, the HR team will establish a recruitment timeline. Senior roles, such as the **Director of the CoE** and the **Heads of Units**, will be filled within the first 12 months to ensure that the project leadership is in place early. This phased recruitment approach ensures that the CoE can meet critical milestones efficiently.

Additionally, a well-structured **compensation and benefits package** will be developed. To attract top talent, the HR team will need to benchmark salaries against industry standards while also offering non-monetary benefits such as **flexible working conditions**, opportunities for professional development, and career growth. These elements will not only help attract candidates but also improve retention rates in the long run.

Focus Points:

- Align the hiring process with the strategic objectives of CoE.
- Ensure the roles contribute to the overall FOREST 4.0 objectives.

The responsibility for recruitment planning falls on the **HR Director**, who will collaborate with the Heads of Research, Technology Transfer, and other units to ensure that the roles are tailored to the CoE's strategic objectives.

1.2. Recruitment Channels and Advertising

The success of any recruitment strategy depends largely on the channels used to reach potential candidates. For the FOREST 4.0 CoE, the HR team must leverage multiple recruitment platforms to ensure a wide pool of candidates. Posting job advertisements on EURAXESS, LinkedIn, and ResearchGate will attract international researchers and professionals with expertise in AI, IoT, and forestry. Moreover, leveraging the networks

of partner universities will be crucial in promoting these opportunities locally and internationally.

A key focus during this phase should be ensuring that job postings appeal to a diverse audience, emphasizing the CoE's commitment to gender equality and inclusivity. Recruitment campaigns should highlight the innovative nature of the CoE's research and the role it plays in addressing the EU Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This messaging will attract candidates who are not only technically skilled but also passionate about the CoE's mission.

Focus Points:

- The recruitment channel mix should cater to both international and local audiences to ensure a balanced workforce.
- Promoting the CoE's cutting-edge research focus will help attract top talent.

The HR team will manage this phase, ensuring that all job postings are widely distributed and that applications are tracked efficiently.

1.3. Selection and Screening

The selection process is a critical step in ensuring that the CoE recruits individuals who not only have the right qualifications but also align with the Centre's mission. To maintain transparency and fairness, the recruitment process will adhere to the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment.

Initial screening will be conducted by the HR team to evaluate basic qualifications and experience. Candidates who meet the minimum requirements will move on to a multi-stage interview process, which will include both technical and strategic assessments. The first round of interviews will focus on technical skills, led by unit heads in research and technology transfer. The second round, conducted by the CoE Director, will focus on strategic alignment, ensuring that candidates are not only technically capable but also aligned with the long-term vision of the project.

Focus Points:

- Emphasize skill alignment with FOREST 4.0's research objectives and collaborative abilities for interdisciplinary work.
- Ensure diversity in selection panels to promote a bias-free recruitment process.

Throughout the selection process, the emphasis should be on identifying candidates who possess the collaborative skills necessary for interdisciplinary work. This is particularly important given the CoE's focus on integrating AI-IoT technologies with forestry applications. The HR team, in collaboration with the unit heads, will be responsible for conducting interviews and making final recommendations.

1.4. Onboarding Process

Once candidates are selected, the next step is to provide them with a competitive offer that reflects both market conditions and the CoE's commitment to career development. The offer should include a clear career progression path, detailing opportunities for growth within the organization. For international hires, the HR team will also provide relocation support, ensuring a smooth transition for those moving to Lithuania.

Onboarding is a crucial phase in integrating new hires into the CoE. A structured onboarding program should include an introduction to the CoE's vision, goals, and operational processes, as well as early engagement with cross-functional teams. New hires should be paired with mentors who can provide guidance and help them acclimate to the CoE's culture. Early involvement in interdisciplinary projects will help new employees feel connected to the CoE's mission from the outset.

Focus Points:

- Onboarding should focus on making new hires feel connected to the CoE's mission of driving sustainable forest-based research and the EU Green Deal objectives.
- Ensure that onboarding is smooth, with early support for international staff through relocation services and integration support.

The HR team will oversee the offer and onboarding process, with input from the CoE Director and unit heads to ensure alignment with the Centre's strategic goals.

1.5. Monitoring and Reporting

The recruitment process does not end once positions are filled; continuous monitoring is essential for ensuring that the CoE meets its talent goals. The HR team will track recruitment KPIs such as time-to-hire, quality-of-hire, and the diversity of the applicant pool. This data will be reviewed periodically and used to refine the recruitment strategy as needed.

Regular reports will be submitted to the Governing Board, detailing the progress of recruitment efforts and any challenges encountered. By maintaining an agile recruitment strategy, the HR team can ensure that the CoE remains competitive in attracting and retaining top talent.

Focus Points:

- Regular assessments will ensure the recruitment strategy is agile and adaptable, meeting project needs as they evolve.

The HR Director will be responsible for overseeing this process, ensuring that the recruitment strategy is flexible and aligned with the CoE's evolving needs.

The talent acquisition and recruitment strategy for the FOREST 4.0 CoE is designed to ensure that the Centre attracts, recruits, and retains top talent in AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry. By focusing on strategic recruitment planning, leveraging diverse channels, maintaining a robust selection process, and providing comprehensive

onboarding, the CoE will be well-positioned to achieve its ambitious goals. Monitoring and continuous improvement will ensure that the recruitment process remains dynamic and responsive to the Centre's evolving needs, ensuring the success of the FOREST 4.0 project.

2. Performance Management and Development

The HR unit will implement a system of performance management that aligns employee objectives with the CoE's strategic goals.

1. Performance Reviews:

- 1.1. Conduct annual reviews against established KPIs.
- 1.2. Performance indicators, such as contributions to research, publication outputs, and project delivery milestones, will be used.

2. Professional Development:

- 2.1. Offer continuous training in AI-IoT technologies, sustainable forestry, and related fields.
- 2.2. Develop a talent management framework that includes internal promotions, mobility opportunities, and training to retain talent.

3. Reward and Compensation:

- 3.1. Implement a competitive compensation system, including salary benchmarking, bonuses for key achievements, and non-financial rewards (e.g., flexible working conditions).

The success of the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence hinges on a performance management and development strategy that aligns individual contributions with the institution's broader goals. As the CoE seeks to lead innovation in AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry, it must ensure that staff are both motivated and supported in their professional growth. By integrating structured performance reviews, continuous professional development, and transparent reward systems, the CoE can foster a culture of excellence and accountability. This segment will outline a comprehensive approach to performance management and development, detailing the key processes, focus points, and responsibilities involved at each stage.

2.1. Performance Reviews

Performance reviews are the backbone of any effective performance management system. They provide a structured opportunity to evaluate whether individual contributions align with organizational objectives, offering both employees and supervisors a platform to discuss achievements, challenges, and future goals.

At the FOREST 4.0 CoE, the performance review process will begin with annual performance evaluations. During these reviews, each employee's performance will be assessed against pre-defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). For researchers, these KPIs will include metrics such as research outputs, contributions to interdisciplinary

projects, and engagement with AI-IoT applications for sustainable forestry. By establishing clear, measurable goals, the CoE ensures that individual efforts contribute directly to its mission.

However, annual reviews alone are not sufficient to ensure continuous progress. Therefore, the CoE will also implement mid-year check-ins - informal, yet structured conversations between employees and their supervisors. These check-ins offer an opportunity to adjust goals, address emerging challenges, and provide real-time feedback, ensuring that employees remain aligned with the Centre's evolving priorities. This continuous feedback loop is crucial for maintaining momentum and fostering a culture of open communication.

Focus Points:

- The review process should be tied directly to the FOREST 4.0 project's milestones, ensuring that individual contributions are directly linked to the success of the project.
- A continuous feedback loop will promote open communication, allowing employees to discuss challenges and opportunities for growth throughout the year.

The responsibility for coordinating the performance review process will rest with the HR team, which will ensure that reviews are standardized across all departments. Unit Heads will lead the evaluations for their teams, providing insights into how individual contributions support broader research and innovation goals.

2.2. Professional Development

While performance reviews are essential for assessing progress, professional development is equally important for fostering long-term growth and ensuring that employees have the skills needed to contribute to the CoE's objectives. In fields such as **AI, IoT, and bioeconomy**, where technology and methodologies are constantly evolving, continuous learning is a necessity, not a luxury.

To meet this need, the CoE will offer a range of **training programs** tailored to the specific needs of its staff. These programs will focus on key areas such as **AI-IoT technologies, sustainability practices, and data-driven research applications**. By offering continuous opportunities for skill-building, the CoE can ensure that its workforce remains at the cutting edge of innovation in forest data management.

Beyond formal training, the CoE will also establish a **mentorship program**. This program will pair junior researchers with senior staff, offering guidance and fostering an environment of knowledge-sharing. Mentorship not only helps junior staff develop technical skills but also instills a deeper understanding of the CoE's interdisciplinary research culture. In addition to mentorship, **peer learning sessions** will encourage collaboration, as researchers from different units share their findings and methodologies, promoting cross-disciplinary knowledge transfer.

Focus Points:

- The development plans should focus not only on immediate skill acquisition but also on long-term career growth, allowing employees to advance within the organization and contribute to higher-level projects over time.
- Encouraging employees to engage with international research networks will expand their horizons and bring innovative ideas to the CoE.

The HR Team will oversee the creation and implementation of these training and mentorship programs, ensuring that development opportunities are aligned with both individual career goals and the Centre's long-term strategic objectives.

2.3. Reward and Compensation

No performance management system is complete without a fair and transparent reward system. Recognizing and rewarding employees for their contributions is essential for maintaining morale, improving retention, and motivating staff to excel in their work. A competitive and transparent reward system motivates employees to perform at their best and stay committed to the CoE's long-term objectives.

At the FOREST 4.0 CoE, the reward system will be closely tied to the performance review process. Performance-based compensation will be a key element, with salaries and bonuses linked to specific performance metrics such as research outputs, project completions, and contributions to interdisciplinary initiatives. By tying financial rewards to measurable outcomes, the CoE ensures that employees are incentivized to achieve both individual and organizational goals.

However, financial rewards are not the only form of recognition. The CoE will also implement a system of non-financial rewards, including flexible working hours, opportunities for teleworking, and access to professional development programs. These non-monetary incentives will be tailored to the needs of individual employees, ensuring a balance between work and personal life that promotes long-term job satisfaction.

Recognition programs will also play a role in motivating staff. Initiatives such as "Employee of the Month" awards and internal recognition for significant research contributions will provide additional avenues for acknowledging excellence. By fostering a culture of appreciation, the CoE can motivate its staff to continuously strive for innovation and excellence.

Focus Points:

- The reward system should prioritize equity and transparency, ensuring that all employees feel they are rewarded fairly for their contributions.
- Non-financial incentives should be tailored to the specific needs of the employees, with a focus on work-life balance and career development.

The HR Team will be responsible for designing and managing the reward system, ensuring that it remains transparent, equitable, and aligned with the CoE's strategic priorities.

2.4. Monitoring and Adjusting the System

Performance management and professional development systems must be dynamic, evolving alongside the needs of the CoE and its staff. To ensure continuous alignment between individual and organizational goals, the CoE will implement a process of ongoing monitoring and adjustment.

The HR Monitoring Team will regularly track key performance metrics, including research output, project delivery timelines, and collaborative efforts. By analyzing these indicators, the team can assess the effectiveness of the performance management system and identify areas for improvement. Regularly track performance indicators such as research output, project delivery, and interdisciplinary collaboration to assess whether the performance management system is meeting its objectives. Feedback from annual reviews and mid-year check-ins will also inform adjustments to the performance and development strategies. Based on feedback from annual reviews and check-ins, adjust performance expectations and development plans to ensure they stay aligned with both individual and organizational goals.

Additionally, the CoE will gather employee feedback through surveys and informal discussions. This feedback will provide valuable insights into how staff perceive the performance review process, the effectiveness of development programs, and the overall work environment. By listening to employees and responding to their concerns, the CoE can ensure that its performance management system remains relevant and effective.

Focus Points:

- Ensure that performance reviews and professional development programs are agile and responsive to both organizational and individual needs.
- Use employee feedback to enhance satisfaction and ensure that the system is both efficient and motivating.

The responsibility for monitoring and refining the system will rest with the HR Team, in collaboration with Unit Heads and the CoE Director, who will ensure that the system continues to drive high performance and innovation across all departments.

The performance management and development strategy for the FOREST 4.0 CoE is designed to create a cohesive and motivated workforce aligned with the Centre's broader mission of innovation in sustainable forestry and AI-IoT applications. Through structured performance reviews, continuous professional development, and a transparent reward system, the CoE will foster a culture of excellence, accountability, and collaboration. By continuously monitoring and refining the system, the CoE can ensure that its performance management strategy remains dynamic and responsive to the needs of both the organization and its employees, driving success for years to come.

3. Work Environment and Conditions

The HR team will focus on creating a positive and supportive work environment to ensure employee retention and well-being.

1. Work-Life Balance:

- 1.1. Promote flexible working arrangements, such as teleworking and flexible hours.
- 1.2. Ensure supportive workplace conditions for gender equality, encouraging diversity and inclusion at all levels.

2. Employee Well-being:

- 2.1. Develop policies that support mental and physical health, including wellness programs.
- 2.2. Establish clear safety, hygiene, and security policies to create a risk-free work environment, compliant with national and EU regulations.

Creating a positive and supportive work environment is essential for the success of the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence. A well-designed work environment not only enhances employee well-being but also improves productivity, collaboration, and retention. For an institution focused on interdisciplinary research in AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry, it is crucial to foster a workplace that supports both technical excellence and personal well-being. This segment will outline the key components of the work environment and conditions strategy, detailing the steps involved, focus points, and responsibilities for creating a workplace conducive to innovation and collaboration.

3.1. Work-Life Balance

One of the most important aspects of a supportive work environment is the ability to balance professional and personal commitments. For an organization like the FOREST 4.0 CoE, which employs a diverse workforce involved in both field and technical research, maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for fostering long-term employee satisfaction and productivity.

The CoE will implement flexible working arrangements as a key component of its work environment. These include flexible hours to accommodate different lifestyles and personal obligations, allowing employees to manage their time effectively. In addition, the CoE will encourage teleworking options, which have proven to increase job satisfaction while maintaining productivity. This level of flexibility not only benefits the individual but also ensures that the CoE can attract talent from a broader geographical area, enabling remote work for those who may not be able to relocate.

Further supporting work-life balance, the CoE will implement comprehensive leave policies that ensure employees can take time off for personal or health reasons without fear of negative repercussions. These policies include paid vacation, sick leave, and parental leave, allowing employees to recharge and maintain their personal commitments without jeopardizing their careers.

Focus Points:

- Promoting work-life balance will help the CoE retain top talent, especially in competitive fields like AI and sustainable forestry.
- Flexible arrangements should be available to all staff, ensuring equity and inclusivity across the organization.

By promoting a flexible and supportive environment, the CoE can retain top talent, particularly in competitive fields like AI and forestry research, where work-life balance is increasingly prioritized by employees. The responsibility for designing and managing these policies will fall on the HR team, ensuring they align with the CoE's strategic goals and employee needs.

3.2. Mental and Physical Well-being

A positive work environment must also focus on the mental and physical well-being of its employees. Research-intensive environments like the CoE, where staff are engaged in both fieldwork and high-level technical tasks, require a holistic approach to health and safety to ensure long-term productivity and engagement.

The CoE will develop comprehensive health and safety programs that comply with both national and EU regulations. These programs will focus on creating ergonomic and safe workplaces, particularly for employees engaged in fieldwork related to forestry. Safety protocols for on-site research, regular health checks, and workplace hygiene will be emphasized to protect employees from physical harm.

On the mental health front, the CoE will offer wellness programs that include access to mental health resources, such as counseling services and workshops on managing stress and maintaining emotional well-being. The goal is to foster a culture of care, where employees feel supported both physically and emotionally.

Diversity and inclusion initiatives will further enhance the well-being of the CoE's workforce by creating a culture where all employees feel welcome, regardless of their background. Regular diversity and inclusivity training will be provided to ensure that employees understand the importance of maintaining a respectful and collaborative environment. Promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination are key aspects of this initiative, with specific policies aimed at supporting underrepresented groups in research and leadership roles.

Focus Points:

- Creating a workplace where employees feel safe, supported, and included will lead to higher levels of engagement and productivity.
- Well-being programs should address both the physical safety of employees working in forest environments and the mental well-being of staff working in technical and research-intensive roles.

These well-being programs, combined with safety initiatives, will be overseen by the HR team, ensuring that every employee has access to the resources they need to thrive in a demanding research environment.

3.3. Gender Equality and Inclusivity

A key pillar of the FOREST 4.0 CoE's work environment strategy is its commitment to gender equality and inclusivity. Research institutions, particularly in STEM fields like AI and forestry, often face challenges related to gender imbalances. To address this, the CoE

will implement policies and programs aimed at promoting equality across all departments.

The CoE will ensure compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policies, which guarantee that every employee has access to the same opportunities for hiring, promotion, and professional development, regardless of gender, race, or other demographic factors. By aligning with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment, the CoE will embed fairness and transparency into its recruitment and retention practices.

Specific gender equality initiatives will focus on closing the gender gap in leadership positions and underrepresented fields within the CoE. Programs such as mentorship for women and career development workshops for underrepresented groups will be introduced to create an inclusive environment that fosters growth and leadership opportunities. Additionally, the CoE will ensure that workplace facilities and policies are inclusive and accessible to employees of all backgrounds and abilities.

Focus Points:

- Gender equality is a key priority for the CoE, as it aligns with the broader goals of the EU Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize inclusivity and social equity.
- Promoting inclusivity will help the CoE attract a diverse range of candidates and create a work culture that supports innovation.

The HR Team will oversee the implementation of these gender equality and inclusivity policies, working closely with the CoE Director and other leaders to ensure that inclusivity is embedded into the Centre's strategic operations.

3.4. Internal Communication and Collaboration

Effective internal communication is essential for building a cohesive and collaborative work environment, especially in a project like FOREST 4.0, where interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial. To achieve this, the CoE will prioritize open communication channels and frequent collaboration between units.

The CoE will hold regular team meetings to discuss project updates, share research developments, and encourage cross-disciplinary cooperation. These meetings will not only serve to align goals across departments but also give employees a platform to share their ideas, provide feedback, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. For staff who work remotely or in the field, digital communication tools such as Microsoft Teams be employed to facilitate seamless communication and project management.

Additionally, the CoE will introduce anonymous feedback systems, allowing employees to voice concerns or suggestions about workplace conditions, management practices, or collaboration issues without fear of retaliation. This level of transparency will help build trust within the organization and ensure that any issues are addressed proactively.

Focus Points:

- Effective communication is key to maintaining a cohesive and collaborative culture, especially in a research environment where interdisciplinary work is critical.
- Open feedback channels will help build a culture of trust and transparency, fostering stronger collaboration across all levels of the organization.

By fostering a culture of open communication and collaboration, the CoE can ensure that its interdisciplinary teams work effectively together, driving the innovation needed to achieve its ambitious research goals. The HR team will manage the communication tools, while Unit Heads will ensure that collaboration is actively promoted within their teams.

The work environment and conditions strategy at the FOREST 4.0 CoE is designed to create a workplace that prioritizes flexibility, well-being, inclusivity, and collaboration. By promoting work-life balance, supporting both mental and physical health, and ensuring gender equality and diversity, the CoE will foster a supportive and innovative work culture. Furthermore, effective internal communication will enhance collaboration, ensuring that interdisciplinary research efforts are aligned with the Centre's overarching mission. Through continuous adaptation and feedback, the CoE will maintain a dynamic and supportive work environment that not only attracts top talent but also ensures their long-term success and well-being.

4. Organizational Culture and Collaboration

Creating a cohesive and innovative organizational culture will be essential to promote collaboration and innovation.

1. Cross-functional Collaboration:

1.1. Encourage collaboration between the research, technology transfer, and grant management units to foster interdisciplinary innovation.

2. Internal Communication:

2.1. Regularly update staff on project progress, CoE achievements, and future opportunities.

2.2. Provide platforms for staff feedback, suggestions, and concerns to ensure their voices are heard.

The success of the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence (CoE) depends heavily on the organizational culture it fosters. A strong, supportive culture is essential for ensuring that the CoE operates as a cohesive unit, where interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and open communication thrive. Given the complexity of its research objectives - integrating AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry - creating an organizational culture that encourages teamwork and values diverse perspectives is critical. This segment outlines the organizational culture and collaboration strategy for FOREST 4.0, focusing on the key elements needed to cultivate a unified and innovative environment.

4.1. Cross-Functional Collaboration

At the heart of the FOREST 4.0 mission is the integration of AI and IoT technologies into sustainable forestry practices. Achieving this ambitious goal requires collaboration across disciplines, departments, and expertise. Effective cross-functional collaboration is essential for driving interdisciplinary innovation and solving complex problems with diverse perspectives.

To foster this collaboration, the CoE will implement a structured framework that encourages regular interaction between different teams. Cross-departmental meetings will be held regularly to facilitate the exchange of ideas, update colleagues on project progress, and align teams working towards shared goals. These meetings will serve as a platform for interdisciplinary discussions, allowing researchers and technologists to combine their knowledge in ways that lead to creative solutions for sustainable forest management.

In addition, the CoE will establish interdisciplinary teams to work on key projects. These teams will bring together experts in AI, IoT, and forestry to tackle specific challenges, such as real-time forest monitoring and data-driven resource management. By encouraging joint research efforts, the CoE can leverage the strengths of its diverse workforce, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in forestry innovation.

Collaboration tools will also play a critical role in ensuring that all team members, regardless of their location or discipline, remain connected. The CoE will use digital tools like Microsoft Teams to facilitate seamless communication and project management, enabling real-time collaboration across departments. These platforms will ensure that ideas can be shared easily, fostering a culture of innovation that is not limited by geographical or disciplinary barriers.

Focus Points:

- Cross-functional collaboration is not only necessary for achieving research breakthroughs but also fosters a culture of innovation. By integrating diverse skill sets and perspectives, the CoE can tackle complex forestry challenges with more comprehensive solutions.
- Collaborative frameworks should be designed to encourage not just task-based cooperation, but also the sharing of creative ideas, which is essential for the development of novel AI-IoT applications in forestry.

Cross-functional collaboration will be overseen by the Unit Heads, who will ensure that teams are actively engaging in interdisciplinary projects. The HR team will provide the necessary guidelines, infrastructure and tools to support these collaborative efforts

4.2. Internal Communication

A key pillar of a successful organizational culture is clear and open communication. In an institution like FOREST 4.0, where research and technology are

closely intertwined, maintaining transparent communication is essential for keeping all teams aligned with the CoE's broader objectives. Without proper communication channels, departments can become siloed, hindering collaboration and innovation.

To prevent this, the CoE will prioritize a multi-channel communication strategy. Regular updates from senior leadership will keep all employees informed about project milestones, organizational changes, and upcoming opportunities for collaboration. This will be achieved through weekly updates from the CoE Director, departmental meetings, and internal newsletters that ensure everyone remains in the loop.

Additionally, the CoE will establish open forums where employees can ask questions, share concerns, and offer feedback. These forums will promote transparency, helping employees feel involved in decision-making processes and fostering a sense of ownership over the CoE's mission. When employees feel heard and valued, they are more likely to be engaged and committed to their work.

Another crucial aspect of internal communication is the visibility of leadership. The CoE Director and senior leaders will maintain a high level of engagement with staff across all levels, regularly meeting with teams to discuss progress and reinforce the organization's goals. An open-door policy will further encourage staff to communicate with leadership, fostering trust and ensuring that issues can be addressed promptly.

Focus Points:

- Ensuring transparency and openness in communication will be key to fostering trust within the CoE, which in turn promotes a collaborative culture.
- Effective internal communication also helps in aligning individual and team goals with the broader mission of the CoE, ensuring that every employee understands how their work contributes to the organization's success.

The HR team will play a vital role in managing these communication tools, ensuring that they are accessible and effective for all employees. By fostering a culture of open communication, the CoE will strengthen team cohesion and promote a shared understanding of its mission.

4.3. Innovation-Driven Culture

As a Centre of Excellence focused on technological advancements and environmental sustainability, FOREST 4.0 must cultivate a culture of innovation. Encouraging employees to experiment with new ideas, take calculated risks, and explore novel approaches is critical for maintaining a competitive edge in the rapidly evolving fields of AI and IoT.

The CoE will promote an innovation-driven culture by giving employees the autonomy to explore creative solutions. Researchers and technologists will be encouraged to experiment with new methods and technologies without fear of failure. This freedom to innovate will be supported by innovation labs where researchers can test their ideas in a low-risk environment. By providing the infrastructure for experimentation, the CoE will foster a culture where breakthroughs are not only possible but expected.

To further support innovation, the CoE will introduce internal performance-based bonuses for projects that align with its mission but explore areas beyond traditional research scopes. These financial rewards will motivate employees to propose and pursue initiatives that push the boundaries of forestry research and technological integration, encouraging a culture of creativity and innovation within the organization.

In recognition of the importance of innovation, the CoE will implement innovation awards and performance bonuses tied to research milestones. Recognizing and rewarding creative contributions will reinforce the value the CoE places on innovation and motivate employees to continue pushing the limits of their work.

Focus Points:

- Fostering a culture of experimentation will allow the CoE to stay competitive and push the frontiers of forestry research and technological integration.
- By encouraging risk-taking and creative thinking, the CoE can attract top-tier talent eager to work in an environment that values innovation and collaboration.

The CoE Director and Unit Heads will play a key role in fostering this innovation-driven culture, ensuring that employees have the resources and support needed to explore new ideas. The HR team will manage the reward and recognition systems, ensuring that innovation is consistently celebrated and encouraged.

4.4. Cultural Alignment with Organizational Values

For an organization to function effectively, its culture must be aligned with its core values and mission. At FOREST 4.0, ensuring that all employees understand and embody the Centre's values—such as sustainability, innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration—is essential for maintaining a cohesive and focused workforce.

The CoE will consistently communicate its mission and values to all employees, ensuring that they are reinforced at every level of the organization. This will be achieved through orientation programs for new hires, regular team-building activities, and leadership updates that emphasize the CoE's commitment to its goals. By integrating these values into daily operations, the CoE can ensure that employees are aligned with its broader mission.

To further embed the CoE's values, cultural workshops and training sessions will be provided, focusing on topics such as collaboration, environmental responsibility, and interdisciplinary research. These workshops will help align individual mindsets with the broader organizational culture, fostering a sense of pride and ownership over the CoE's work.

Additionally, celebrating both individual and team successes that align with the Centre's mission will reinforce the desired culture. Whether through public recognition, awards, or team celebrations, acknowledging contributions that embody the CoE's values will help maintain cultural alignment and encourage employees to continue working towards shared goals.

Focus Points:

- Aligning organizational culture with the CoE's broader mission ensures that all employees feel part of a shared journey towards achieving sustainable and innovative solutions.
- Reinforcing the Centre's core values through regular communication and celebration of success fosters a sense of pride and ownership among employees.

Leadership, particularly the CoE Director and senior management, will be responsible for consistently communicating the Centre's values and ensuring that they are integrated into all aspects of the organization's operations.

The organizational culture at the FOREST 4.0 CoE is designed to foster collaboration, innovation, and cultural alignment with the Centre's mission. By promoting cross-functional teamwork, maintaining open communication, encouraging creative experimentation, and reinforcing the CoE's values, the organization can build a cohesive and engaged workforce. Through these efforts, the CoE will create an environment where employees are motivated to push the boundaries of what is possible, driving both individual and organizational success. By cultivating a strong organizational culture, FOREST 4.0 will continue to lead in AI-IoT applications for sustainable forestry, advancing its mission to create a more sustainable future.

5. Retention and Talent Management

To ensure high retention rates, the HR team will focus on career development and maintaining a supportive work environment.

1. Training and Development:

1.1. Implement personalized development plans for each employee, offering opportunities for upskilling, mentorship, and academic growth.

2. Mobility and Promotion:

2.1. Foster internal mobility opportunities and a transparent promotion path based on merit and performance.

2.2. Offer international collaboration and mobility within European and global research networks.

In a competitive research environment such as the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence (CoE), retaining top talent and ensuring their long-term growth is essential to maintaining a sustainable and productive workforce. As the CoE focuses on integrating AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry, it is crucial to establish a talent management strategy that not only attracts high-caliber professionals but also fosters their development and ensures their retention. This segment outlines the retention and talent management strategy for FOREST 4.0, detailing how the CoE will build and sustain a motivated and

skilled workforce through professional growth opportunities, a supportive work environment, and career development pathways.

5.1. Career Development

Career development is central to talent management, as it ensures that employees feel they have a future within the organization. At the FOREST 4.0 CoE, the goal is to create a clear and supportive pathway for employees to advance in their careers, contributing to both their personal growth and the success of the CoE.

The CoE will implement a system of personalized development plans for each employee. These plans will be tailored to individual career aspirations and aligned with the CoE's research objectives. Employees will work closely with their supervisors to outline their career goals, identify areas for development, and map out a progression plan that includes opportunities for skills training, mentorship, and participation in high-impact research projects.

To support career advancement, the CoE will also offer a variety of professional development programs, including specialized training in AI-IoT technologies, sustainability practices, and leadership development. These programs will enable employees to expand their expertise, gain new skills, and prepare for higher-level roles within the organization. By offering continuous learning opportunities, the CoE can ensure that its workforce remains at the forefront of technological advancements in forestry and data management.

Focus Points:

- Align individual career goals with the CoE's strategic objectives to ensure both personal and organizational growth.
- Offer specialized training in AI, IoT, and sustainability to keep employees at the forefront of technological advancements.
- Ensure clear and attainable career paths to keep employees motivated and engaged in long-term career growth.

The CoE's career development efforts will be overseen by the HR Team, which will ensure that each employee's development plan is updated regularly and aligned with both individual goals and the CoE's broader mission.

5.2. Mentorship and Internal Mobility

Mentorship is a powerful tool for developing talent and ensuring long-term retention. At FOREST 4.0, mentorship programs will play a key role in helping employees navigate their career paths, particularly those who are new to the organization or transitioning to new roles within the CoE.

Experienced staff members will be paired with junior researchers and support staff to provide guidance, support, and career advice. This not only helps newer

employees acclimate to the CoE's culture and expectations but also fosters a sense of belonging and personal connection within the organization. Mentorship programs will also serve as a platform for knowledge-sharing, allowing junior staff to benefit from the experience of senior colleagues.

In addition to mentorship, the CoE will prioritize internal mobility as a means of retaining talent. Employees will have the opportunity to transition between different roles and departments, enabling them to broaden their skill sets and explore various aspects of the CoE's work. For instance, a researcher specializing in AI might transition to a project focusing on IoT applications in forest monitoring, thereby expanding their expertise and career prospects.

Focus Points:

- Senior staff will mentor junior employees, fostering a culture of knowledge-sharing and personal development.
- Encourage employees to transition between different roles or departments, broadening their expertise and enhancing engagement.
- Ensure that employees feel supported in their career transitions and growth within the organization.

The CoE's commitment to internal mobility will ensure that employees remain engaged and motivated, as they will have opportunities to grow and evolve within the organization. The HR team will manage the mentorship and internal mobility programs, ensuring that employees have access to the support and resources they need to thrive.

5.3. Reward and Recognition

A key element of talent management and retention is ensuring that employees feel recognized and appreciated for their contributions. At FOREST 4.0, a comprehensive reward and recognition system will be in place to motivate staff and acknowledge their achievements.

Performance-based rewards will be central to this system. Employees who meet or exceed performance targets - whether through research output, project milestones, or contributions to innovation - will be eligible for bonuses and other financial incentives. This ensures that high performers are rewarded for their efforts and that the CoE maintains a high standard of excellence in all its endeavors.

In addition to financial rewards, the CoE will emphasize non-financial recognition. This includes public acknowledgment of employee achievements through awards ceremonies, team celebrations, and regular recognition in internal communications. Recognizing both individual and team successes will foster a culture of appreciation and collaboration, motivating employees to continue performing at their best.

Focus Points:

- Offer financial incentives, such as bonuses, for employees who meet or exceed performance targets.
- Celebrate achievements through awards, team celebrations, and public recognition to foster a culture of appreciation.
- Combine both financial and non-financial rewards to maintain motivation and engagement across all employee levels.

The HR Team will manage the reward and recognition system, ensuring that it remains transparent, equitable, and aligned with the CoE's values. By offering both financial and non-financial incentives, the CoE will create a work environment where employees feel valued and motivated to contribute to the organization's success.

5.4. Work Environment and Culture

Retention is closely tied to the overall work environment and organizational culture. Employees are more likely to stay with an organization where they feel supported, respected, and part of a larger mission. At FOREST 4.0, the work environment will be designed to foster a sense of community and purpose, ensuring that employees remain committed to the Centre's goals.

The CoE will emphasize a culture of collaboration and innovation, where employees are encouraged to share ideas, take risks, and work together on interdisciplinary projects. This collaborative culture will be reinforced through regular team-building activities, cross-departmental meetings, and open forums for feedback and discussion. By promoting open communication and teamwork, the CoE will create a supportive environment where employees feel connected to their colleagues and the organization's mission.

In addition, the CoE will prioritize work-life balance as part of its retention strategy. By offering flexible working arrangements, such as teleworking and flexible hours, the CoE ensures that employees can balance their professional responsibilities with personal commitments. This flexibility will help reduce burnout and improve overall job satisfaction, making the CoE a more attractive place to work.

Focus Points:

- Encourage open communication and teamwork across departments to foster a sense of community and shared purpose.
- Provide flexible working arrangements to ensure employees can balance their professional and personal lives, reducing burnout.
- Reinforce the CoE's mission and values to create a sense of belonging and commitment among employees.

The HR team will be responsible for maintaining a positive work environment and ensuring that the organization's culture remains aligned with its values of collaboration, innovation, and sustainability.

5.5. Monitoring and Adaptation

Talent management and retention strategies must be dynamic, evolving with the needs of the workforce and the organization. To ensure that its retention efforts remain effective, the FOREST 4.0 CoE will continuously monitor key indicators such as employee turnover, job satisfaction, and performance metrics.

Regular employee surveys and feedback sessions will provide insights into the effectiveness of the CoE's retention strategies. By gathering input from employees, the CoE can identify areas for improvement and make adjustments to its policies and programs as needed. For example, if feedback indicates that employees are seeking more professional development opportunities, the CoE can expand its training programs to meet those needs.

Focus Points:

- Use employee surveys and feedback sessions to identify areas for improvement in talent management and retention strategies.
- Monitor key metrics such as turnover rates, job satisfaction, and performance to evaluate the effectiveness of retention programs.
- Continuously adapt the talent management strategy based on employee feedback and performance data to meet evolving needs.

Additionally, the HR team will track the success of the career development, mentorship, and internal mobility programs to ensure that they are providing employees with the support they need to succeed. By continuously adapting its talent management strategies, the CoE will remain a dynamic and attractive workplace for top talent.

The retention and talent management strategy at the FOREST 4.0 CoE is designed to ensure that the organization attracts, develops, and retains top talent in AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry. By offering personalized career development plans, fostering a culture of support through mentorship and internal mobility, and recognizing employee achievements, the CoE will create an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to contribute to the Centre's mission. Through continuous monitoring and adaptation, the CoE will maintain its position as a leader in forestry innovation, ensuring long-term success for both the organization and its workforce.

6. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

A strong focus on gender equality and diversity will be integrated into all HR practices.

1. Gender Equality and Equal Opportunity:

1.1. Ensure all recruitment and promotion processes are gender-neutral and offer equal opportunities.

1.2. Implement gender equality measures to meet European Commission standards and priorities.

2. Inclusivity Training:

2.1. Provide training on anti-discrimination, diversity, and inclusive practices for all employees.

Fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence (CoE) is crucial to building a well-rounded, innovative, and forward-thinking workforce. A DEI strategy ensures that all employees, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to contribute, grow, and thrive within the organization. DEI initiatives will not only promote fairness and equality but will also enhance creativity and collaboration by bringing diverse perspectives to the CoE's research efforts. This section elaborates on the specific steps, processes, and responsibilities involved in implementing a robust DEI strategy at the CoE.

6.1. Implementing Equal Employment Opportunity Policies

The foundation of a strong DEI strategy is the implementation of equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies that ensure all employees have access to the same opportunities for hiring, promotions, and professional development, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or background. At FOREST 4.0, these policies are essential for creating an inclusive hiring process that reflects the diverse talent pool needed for interdisciplinary research in AI, IoT, and sustainability.

To achieve this, the CoE will develop clear, structured EEO policies that promote fairness at every stage of the employment process. This will involve reviewing and revising job descriptions and postings to ensure they are free of biased language and clearly outline qualifications based solely on skills and experience. The CoE's HR team will work to eliminate any implicit biases in recruitment, utilizing standardized interview questions and diverse hiring panels to assess candidates based on their fit for the role rather than demographic factors.

Focus Points:

- All employees must have equal access to job openings, promotions, and professional development.
- The CoE will focus on creating non-discriminatory hiring practices to attract a diverse pool of candidates.

Additionally, all staff, especially those involved in recruitment and management, will undergo mandatory EEO training to raise awareness about biases and to ensure adherence to non-discriminatory hiring practices. These steps will be supported by regular audits of recruitment practices and ongoing monitoring to ensure compliance with EEO standards. The HR Team will be responsible for implementing and overseeing

these processes, ensuring that fairness and inclusivity are built into the CoE's hiring and employment policies.

6.2. Promoting Gender Equality

Ensuring gender equality is a key priority for FOREST 4.0, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields such as AI and IoT. The CoE is committed to closing the gender gap in leadership and technical roles, ensuring that women have equal opportunities for career advancement.

The first step in promoting gender equality at FOREST 4.0 is to establish gender-neutral job descriptions and ensure that hiring practices are free from bias. The CoE will conduct gender pay gap audits to identify and address any discrepancies in compensation, ensuring that men and women are paid equally for equal work. Furthermore, the CoE will introduce leadership development programs specifically aimed at women in STEM, providing targeted mentorship, training, and sponsorship opportunities to help them advance into senior roles.

Focus Points:

- Ensure that women are represented in leadership roles and in technical fields such as AI and IoT, which are traditionally male-dominated.
- Ensure that men and women receive equal pay for equal work, and that compensation is based on merit and performance.

The CoE will also set measurable targets for gender representation in leadership and technical roles, regularly tracking progress towards these goals. A dedicated HR team member will be responsible for implementing these initiatives, monitoring progress, and reporting on achievements. In addition to internal efforts, the CoE will actively participate in external partnerships and networks that promote gender diversity in technology and research.

6.3. Creating Inclusive Workspaces and Ensuring Accessibility

An inclusive workspace is one that accommodates the needs of all employees, including those with disabilities or unique personal circumstances. At FOREST 4.0, this means designing accessible physical spaces and offering flexible working arrangements to meet the diverse needs of its staff.

To start, the CoE will conduct regular accessibility audits of its facilities to ensure that the physical workspace is accessible to employees with disabilities. This includes installing ramps, elevators, and accessible restroom facilities where necessary. In addition to physical accessibility, the CoE will offer flexible work options, such as teleworking and flexible hours, to accommodate employees with caregiving responsibilities or other needs.

Inclusivity extends beyond physical accessibility. The CoE will also focus on promoting inclusive language and practices in everyday communications and policies. This includes ensuring that all employees feel respected, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion. Regular training programs will be conducted to raise awareness of the importance of inclusivity and to promote a culture of respect and collaboration.

Focus Points:

- Ensure that both the physical workspace and the work culture are accessible to everyone, regardless of their abilities or background.
- Offer flexibility in work schedules and locations to accommodate the diverse needs of employees.

The responsibility for ensuring accessibility and inclusivity will rest with both the HR team which will work to address any physical or cultural barriers that may prevent employees from fully participating in the workplace.

6.4. Inclusivity Training and Cultural Awareness

Inclusivity training is an important component of the DEI strategy at FOREST 4.0, as it helps employees understand and appreciate the diverse backgrounds and perspectives within the organization. The CoE will offer unconscious bias training to all staff, particularly those in leadership and hiring roles, to help them recognize and mitigate biases that may influence decision-making.

In addition to bias training, the CoE will host cultural competency workshops to promote a deeper understanding of the diverse cultures, experiences, and identities of its employees. These workshops will foster a more inclusive and respectful work environment by encouraging employees to engage with and learn from each other's perspectives.

To further promote inclusivity, the CoE will organize Diversity Days and cultural events that celebrate the diverse backgrounds of its employees. These events will provide opportunities for staff to learn about and appreciate different cultures, creating a stronger sense of community and belonging within the organization.

Focus Points:

- Equip employees with the knowledge and tools to identify and address unconscious biases, promoting fairness and equity in decision-making.
- Foster a culture of respect and appreciation for diversity through regular training and cultural competency workshops.

The HR team will be responsible for organizing these training programs and events, ensuring that inclusivity and cultural awareness are an ongoing focus within the CoE's organizational culture.

6.5. Monitoring and Evaluation of DEI Initiatives

To ensure that the DEI initiatives are effective and that progress is being made, the CoE will implement a robust system of monitoring and evaluation. This will involve establishing key DEI metrics, such as workforce diversity ratios, gender pay gaps, and representation in leadership roles. These metrics will be tracked and reported on regularly to ensure transparency and accountability.

The CoE will also conduct annual DEI audits to assess the effectiveness of its policies and initiatives. These audits will identify areas where improvements are needed and provide actionable insights to inform future DEI strategies. Employee feedback will be a critical part of this process, with regular surveys and focus groups used to gather input on the inclusivity of the workplace and the impact of DEI initiatives.

Focus Points:

- Use data to track the success of DEI initiatives and ensure continuous improvement.
- Regularly communicate progress to all employees and hold leadership accountable for achieving DEI goals.

The HR team will be responsible for collecting and analyzing this data and will ensure that the findings are used to improve existing programs and policies. By regularly assessing and adapting its DEI strategy, the CoE will be able to create a workplace that is not only diverse but also inclusive and equitable for all employees.

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategy at the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence is designed to create a fair, supportive, and innovative workplace where every employee has the opportunity to thrive. Through the implementation of EEO policies, gender equality initiatives, inclusive workspaces, and ongoing training, the CoE will build a culture of respect, fairness, and collaboration. Continuous monitoring and evaluation will ensure that progress is being made and that the organization remains committed to its DEI goals. By prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion, FOREST 4.0 will foster a work environment that enhances creativity, innovation, and employee satisfaction.

7. Risk Management and Compliance

To ensure that HR practices are fully compliant with Lithuanian labor laws and EU regulations.

1. Risk Management:

1.1. Regularly assess and mitigate risks related to employment laws, discrimination, and health and safety.

2. Compliance with European Charter:

2.1. Adhere to the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct to ensure best practice in recruitment and working conditions.

For an organization as innovative and research-intensive as the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence, managing risk and ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements are critical to the long-term success and sustainability of the organization. Given the CoE's focus on AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry, the risks associated with research, data security, and workplace safety must be carefully managed to protect both the organization and its employees. The following segment outlines the risk management and compliance strategy for FOREST 4.0, detailing specific steps, processes, and responsibilities to mitigate risks, ensure compliance, and create a safe and secure work environment.

7.1. Risk Identification and Assessment

The first and most critical step in risk management is the proactive identification and assessment of risks. For an organization like FOREST 4.0, which operates at the intersection of cutting-edge technology and environmental sustainability, risks can arise from a wide range of sources - ranging from data security threats to workplace safety hazards during forestry fieldwork.

To mitigate these risks, the CoE will conduct comprehensive risk assessments across all operational areas. This process will involve identifying potential threats in the areas of research integrity, data security, workplace safety, and regulatory compliance. Risks will be classified based on their likelihood and impact, with high-priority risks receiving immediate attention. By creating a structured framework for assessing and categorizing risks, the CoE can ensure that it addresses the most critical issues before they escalate.

Focus Points:

- Identifying and assessing risks before they escalate is essential for maintaining the CoE's operational integrity.
- Immediate attention will be given to high-priority risks that could compromise the CoE's research or employee safety.

The process of risk identification will not be limited to internal assessments. FOREST 4.0 will also collaborate with external experts - such as legal advisors, data security professionals, and environmental consultants - to gain a comprehensive understanding of the risks it faces. Quarterly reviews of the risk register will ensure that emerging risks are captured and addressed promptly. This proactive approach will not only protect the CoE's research operations but also ensure that it remains resilient in the face of changing external conditions.

7.2. Legal and Regulatory Compliance

Given the CoE's international collaborations and its focus on innovative research, ensuring legal and regulatory compliance is crucial. Compliance failures, whether related to data protection, workplace safety, or intellectual property rights, can lead to significant

financial penalties, legal disputes, and reputational damage. As such, FOREST 4.0 must establish robust compliance frameworks that adhere to local, national, and EU regulations.

One of the primary areas of concern for the CoE is data privacy, particularly given its focus on AI-IoT research. The CoE will be fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), ensuring that all personal data collected during research is handled securely and ethically. This includes implementing data protection protocols, conducting regular data audits, and training staff on GDPR requirements.

In addition to data protection, the CoE will implement policies to comply with workplace safety regulations, particularly for employees engaged in forestry fieldwork, which may involve exposure to hazardous environments. These policies will be in line with both local safety laws and European Union workplace safety standards, ensuring that all employees are protected in their work environments.

Focus Points:

- Protecting data privacy is crucial for maintaining trust in the CoE's research and operations, especially in the field of AI-IoT.
- Ensuring compliance with safety and environmental regulations will be critical to the CoE's fieldwork and forestry operations.

To maintain ongoing compliance, the CoE will conduct internal audits and engage external legal advisors to review its operations. These audits will help identify any gaps in compliance and ensure that the CoE is up to date with evolving legal requirements. The establishment of a Compliance Officer and a Legal Team will ensure that legal risks are minimized and that the CoE remains aligned with all relevant laws.

7.3. Workplace Safety and Risk Mitigation

Ensuring a safe workplace is an essential component of the CoE's risk management strategy. Employees at FOREST 4.0, particularly those involved in field research and laboratory work, may face certain risks that require the development of strict workplace safety protocols. Protecting the safety of its employees is not only a legal obligation but also a key aspect of maintaining the trust and engagement of the CoE's workforce.

The CoE will implement workplace safety protocols that cover both office and fieldwork environments. For employees engaged in forestry research, this will include measures for managing environmental hazards, safe equipment use, and emergency response procedures. In addition, the CoE will conduct mandatory safety training for all employees, focusing on key areas such as first aid, hazard identification, and proper use of personal protective equipment.

To further ensure safety, the CoE will develop emergency preparedness plans for fieldwork and laboratory settings. These plans will outline specific actions to be taken in the event of accidents, natural disasters, or other emergencies. Regular safety audits and inspections will be conducted to identify potential hazards and ensure that all safety

measures are being followed. An incident reporting system will allow employees to report safety concerns or accidents, ensuring that any issues are addressed swiftly.

Focus Points:

- The safety of employees is paramount, particularly for those involved in fieldwork or using hazardous materials.
- Being prepared for emergencies ensures that employees can respond quickly and effectively to incidents, minimizing harm.

The Health and Safety Officer will oversee the implementation of these protocols and ensure compliance with all safety regulations. By prioritizing workplace safety, the CoE will protect its employees while maintaining the integrity of its research operations.

7.4. Intellectual Property (IP) and Research Integrity

As a research institution focused on innovation, protecting intellectual property (IP) and maintaining research integrity are key priorities for the CoE. The institution's research will lead to the development of new technologies, data systems, and methodologies, making it crucial to safeguard these innovations through robust IP management.

The CoE will develop an intellectual property policy that clearly outlines the ownership and protection of innovations arising from its research. This policy will cover areas such as patent filing, licensing agreements, and copyright protections, ensuring that the CoE's research results are protected from unauthorized use or exploitation. The CoE's legal team will work closely with researchers to secure patents and ensure that IP rights are respected.

Alongside IP protection, the CoE will establish a framework for research ethics and integrity. This framework will ensure that all research is conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, particularly in areas involving sensitive data or environmental interventions. An Ethics Committee will be formed to review and approve research proposals, ensuring that they comply with both internal and external ethical standards.

Focus Points:

- The CoE must protect its research and innovations to ensure that it can leverage its intellectual property effectively.
- All research must adhere to the highest ethical standards, particularly when dealing with sensitive data or environmental research.

By safeguarding its intellectual property and ensuring research integrity, FOREST 4.0 can maintain its reputation as a leader in innovation while protecting the valuable outputs of its research. The Legal Team will be responsible for overseeing these efforts, ensuring that the CoE's research remains both ethical and protected.

The risk management and compliance strategy at the FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence is designed to ensure the safety, integrity, and legal compliance of the organization's operations. By proactively identifying risks, adhering to legal and regulatory requirements, ensuring workplace safety, and protecting intellectual property, the CoE will mitigate potential threats and create a secure environment for its research. Through regular audits, training, and ongoing risk assessments, the CoE will remain resilient and compliant as it continues to push the boundaries of AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry.

8. Policies and Timeframes

Subsection	Policies to be drafted/implemented	Timeframe
Recruitment Planning	1. Strategic Recruitment Plan: Align job descriptions and recruitment timelines with CoE's AI-IoT and forestry research objectives.	Year 1 (Priority): First 6 months to draft; full implementation by Month 12.
Recruitment Channels and Advertising	1. Diverse Recruitment Channel Policy: Utilize EURAXESS, LinkedIn, ResearchGate, and university networks to attract international candidates.	Year 1 (Priority): First 6 months for drafting; full rollout by Year 1.
	2. Diversity-Focused Advertising: Emphasize gender equality, inclusivity, and innovation in job ads.	Year 2: Drafted and implemented by Year 2.
Selection and Screening	1. Fair Selection Policy: Standardize selection criteria, ensuring adherence to the European Charter for Researchers and promoting diversity.	Year 1 (Priority): Drafted within first 6 months; full implementation by Year 1.
Onboarding Process	1. Comprehensive Onboarding Program: Provide mentorship, career growth opportunities, and relocation support for international hires.	Year 2: Drafted within Year 1; implementation in Year 2.
Monitoring and Reporting	1. Recruitment KPI Monitoring: Establish KPIs (time-to-hire, diversity, cost) and track them through regular reports to the Governing Board.	Year 3: Drafted and implemented by Year 3.
Performance Reviews	1. Annual Performance Review Policy: Link individual goals with the	Year 2 (Priority): Drafted by the end of Year 1, implemented Year 2.

	CoE's strategic objectives, using pre-defined KPIs.	
Professional Development	1. Continuous Development Plan: Provide training in AI-IoT, forestry, and sustainability with a focus on career progression.	Year 2: Drafted in Year 1, implemented in Year 2.
Reward and Compensation	1. Performance-Based Reward System: Link financial incentives (bonuses, awards) to research output and interdisciplinary collaboration.	Year 3: Drafted in Year 2, fully implemented by Year 3.
Work-Life Balance and Well-being	1. Flexible Work Arrangement Policy: Introduce teleworking and flexible hours to support work-life balance.	Year 1: Drafted and implemented by the end of Year 1.
	2. Health and Safety Policy: Implement protocols for mental and physical well-being in compliance with EU regulations.	Year 2: Drafted and implemented by Year 2.
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)	1. Equal Employment Opportunity Policy: Ensure fair and non-discriminatory recruitment and promotion processes.	Year 1 (Priority): Drafted in the first 6 months, implemented by Year 1.
	2. Gender Equality and Pay Gap Audit Policy: Conduct regular gender pay audits and ensure equal representation in leadership roles.	Year 2: Drafted and implemented by Year 2.
Risk Management and Compliance	1. Data Protection and GDPR Compliance: Implement data protection protocols, ensuring GDPR compliance in research involving personal data.	Year 1 (Priority): Drafted and implemented by the end of Year 1.
	2. Workplace Safety and Emergency Preparedness Policy: Establish safety protocols and emergency preparedness for fieldwork and labs.	Year 2: Drafted in Year 1; implemented by Year 2.

9. Conclusions and Key Takeaways

The comprehensive HR strategy outlined for FOREST 4.0 Centre of Excellence (CoE) aims to build a high-performing, diverse, and engaged workforce that aligns with the Centre's ambitious goals of advancing AI, IoT, and sustainable forestry. Each component of the strategy - from talent acquisition to performance management, retention, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) - is designed to support the CoE's mission by creating a dynamic and inclusive workplace where employees can thrive.

9.1. Key Takeaways

1. Talent Acquisition and Recruitment:

1.1. The CoE's talent acquisition efforts will prioritize attracting top talent in AI, IoT, and sustainability, with a clear emphasis on international recruitment and diversity. By leveraging multi-channel recruitment strategies and ensuring transparency in the selection process, the CoE will be able to build a talented and diverse workforce aligned with its long-term research goals.

2. Performance Management and Development:

2.1. A performance management framework that aligns individual employee goals with the CoE's strategic objectives will foster continuous growth and accountability. The inclusion of personalized development plans, regular performance reviews, and career advancement opportunities will ensure that employees remain motivated and engaged while contributing to the organization's success.

3. Retention and Talent Management:

3.1. Retention efforts will focus on providing opportunities for professional development, mentorship, and internal mobility, ensuring that employees have a clear path for growth within the organization. The reward and recognition system will incentivize high performance and foster a culture of appreciation, further enhancing employee retention.

4. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):

4.1. The CoE's commitment to DEI is embedded in its recruitment, retention, and workplace practices. By implementing EEO policies, gender equality initiatives, and inclusivity training, the CoE will create a fair and inclusive workplace where employees from all backgrounds can succeed. The ongoing monitoring of DEI metrics will ensure that progress is continuously made towards creating a diverse and equitable workforce.

5. Risk Management and Compliance:

5.1. The CoE's approach to risk management and compliance ensures that legal and regulatory requirements are met, employee safety is prioritized, and research integrity is protected. By proactively identifying risks and establishing frameworks for compliance with laws such as GDPR, the CoE will create a safe and secure environment for both employees and research activities.

9.2. Conclusion

The HR strategy at FOREST 4.0 is a comprehensive plan that emphasizes talent management, development, and inclusion, with a clear focus on aligning the workforce with the Centre's ambitious research goals. By building a supportive, innovative, and diverse work environment, the CoE will be able to attract and retain top talent, drive groundbreaking research, and maintain its position as a leader in sustainable forestry and AI-IoT applications.

As the CoE continues to evolve, the HR strategy will remain dynamic and adaptable, ensuring that it can meet the changing needs of the organization and its workforce. By fostering collaboration, ensuring compliance, and maintaining a strong commitment to DEI, FOREST 4.0 will be well-positioned to achieve its vision of a more sustainable future driven by innovative research and technology.