COUNTER INTUITIVE INSTITUTE



STRATEGY 2030

SETTING UP THE FOUNDATIONS OF POSITIVE DISRUPTON

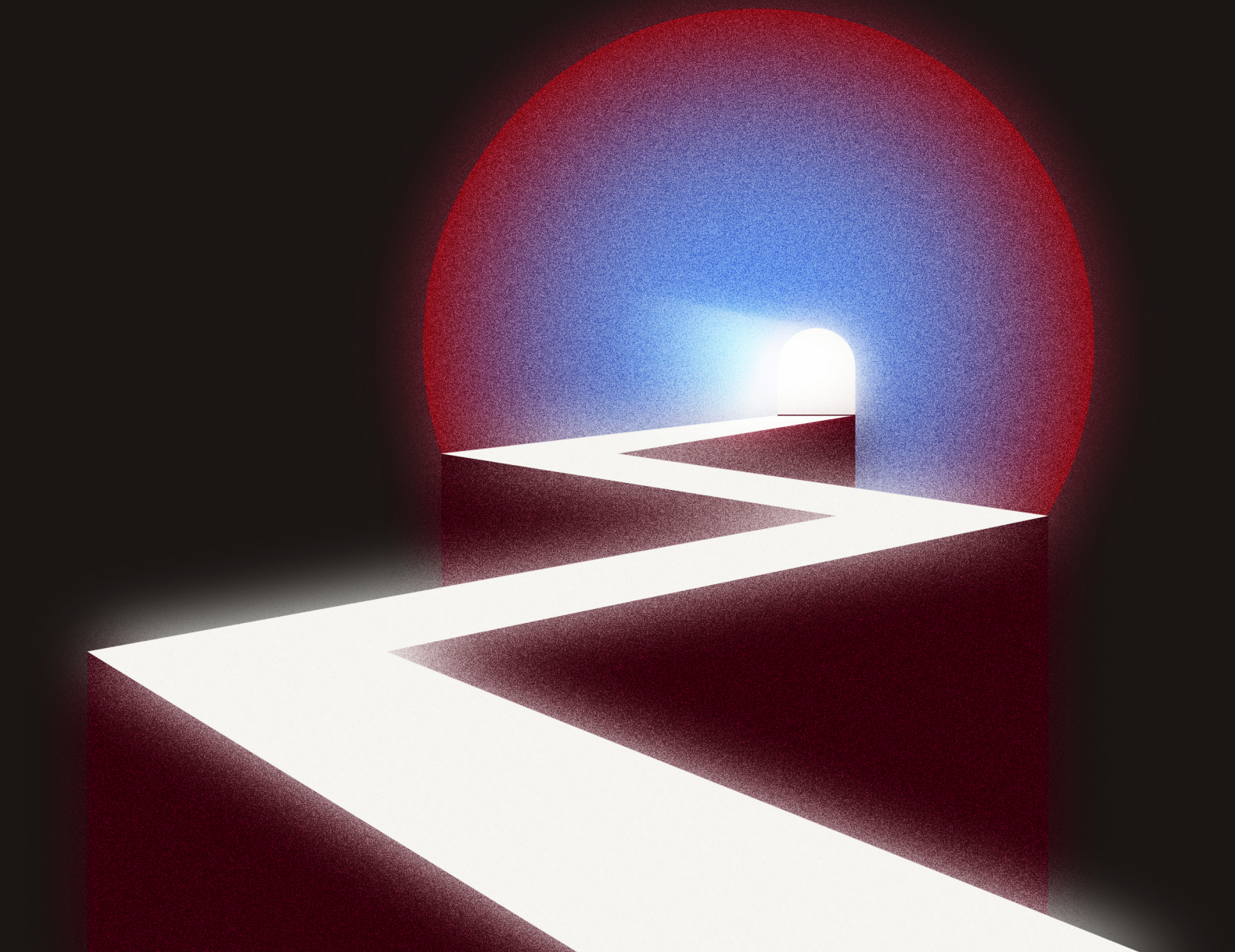
The Counterintuitive Institute is a pioneering, fully female-led research organisation, dedicated to challenging the status quo and driving positive societal change in a world of constant turbulence and deepening uncertainty.

VALUES

- People-centricity & Inclusivity
- Courage & Creativity
- Empathy & Ethics
- Purpose & Perseverance
- Counterintuitive Ideas

PURPOSE

We aim to set up a new solution-finding model for disrupting conventional thinking, policymaking, intervention formulation, and impact generation.



CONTENTS

List of abbreviations 4

CI Overview 5

1. Foreword by our Co-Founders 6

2. Driving positive disruption 8

3. 2030 Focus 10

4. CI Strategy 2030 12
   - 4.1 Core values 13
   - 4.2 2030 Strategic objectives 15
   - 4.3 Theory of change 18
   - 4.4 2030 Strategic areas of focus 24

5. Resources for impact 41
   - 5.1 Our team 42
   - 5.2 Our network 45
   - 5.3 Our policies and governance 46
   - 5.4 Our communications 48
   - 5.5 Our ways of working 50

6. Annual budgets 51

7. Acknowledgements 52

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI – Artificial intelligence

ALDA – Association for Local Democracy

CAIDP – Center for AI and Digital Policy

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CI – The Counterintuitive Institute

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

COFEM – Coalition of Feminists for Social Change

EIGE – European Institute for Gender Equality

EU – European Union

EQO – Equality Observatory

EWL – European Women's Lobby

FCP – Financial Conduct Protocol

GEP – Gender Equality Plan

IMISCOE – International Migration Research Network

MoU – Memorandum of Understanding

SGP – Society of Gender Professionals

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

WEF – World Economic Forum

COUNTER INTUITIVE INSTITUTE

OVERVIEW

The Counterintuitive Institute is a pioneering, fully female-led research organisation, dedicated to challenging the status quo and driving positive societal change in a world of constant turbulence and deepening uncertainty.

We work to fill the known and unsuspected gaps in evidence, policy, strategy, action, and impact by co-creating knowledge, co-constructing solutions from the ground up, and fostering broad-participation collaborations in Bulgaria, the EU, and beyond.

OUR PURPOSE

We aim to set up a new solution-finding model for disrupting conventional thinking, policymaking, intervention formulation, and impact generation. Our Counterintuitive objectives are to:

- **Disorder social inertia**
- **Challenge the status quo**
- **Start with the outcomes**
- **Engage all stakeholders**
- **Build solutions from the ground up**

OUR VALUES

Our values shape everything we do – from the way we work to the impact we create. They are rooted in the fundamental belief that the human dignity of all people at all places should be granted, secured, and protected rigorously and by all available means:

- **People-centricity & inclusivity**
- **Courage & creativity**
- **Empathy & ethics**
- **Purpose & perseverance**
- **Counterintuitive ideas**

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to challenge conventional thinking and create lasting societal change. As a fully female-led research organisation, we work with individuals, organisations, and communities to co-create solutions that address gaps in evidence and policy. By rethinking traditional approaches, we aim to develop impactful solutions that address real-world challenges through real-life experiences.

OUR VISION

Our vision is to grow into a purposeful organisation that has the position and authority to mobilise communities, amplify voices, and contribute to building a fairer world. As we evolve, we will continue to stay at the forefront, ensuring our work remains impactful and relevant in a constantly changing world.

1

FOREWORD BY OUR CO-FOUNDERS

We write our Strategy 2030 against the backdrop of a world grappling with profound turbulence and systemic risk. Conflict, disinformation, rising inequality, and the tightening grip of far-right populism cast long shadows across our lives. **For women in their diversity, the terrain remains particularly fraught – a challenging landscape where equality is promised much more often than it is delivered.**

The data tell a clear, sobering story. Thirty years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, women globally still hold only 64% of the legal rights of men. Political empowerment gaps remain wide, with women occupying just 23% of parliamentary seats, and only 4% of Fortune 500 CEOs' offices. Economic disparities fester, and despite technological advancements, gender gaps in high-tech sectors, AI, and digital participation persist. **Violence, both offline and online, remains a daily reality for too many.**

Yet, we believe in the possibility – and the necessity – of positive disruption. At The Counterintuitive Institute, ***driving positive disruption*** is our North Star. It guides our choices about where intervention is most urgently needed, how partnerships must be built, and which systemic levers must be moved. **We envision the Institute not simply as an organisation, but as a living instrument – a force to be wielded by communities who seek to democratise power, embed substantive equality, and drive forward feminist, rights-based transformations.**

This Strategy is a call to action: a deliberate roadmap for constructive, impactful, and meaningful change. Along the way, we will hold space for the counterintuitive – the ideas that raise eyebrows, raise oppositions, and raise spirits.

Together, we are determined to bend the arc toward a fairer world – not just with our thinking, but with our actions.

ROSALINA TODOROVA, PHD
Co-President

LEDA KUNEVA
Co-President

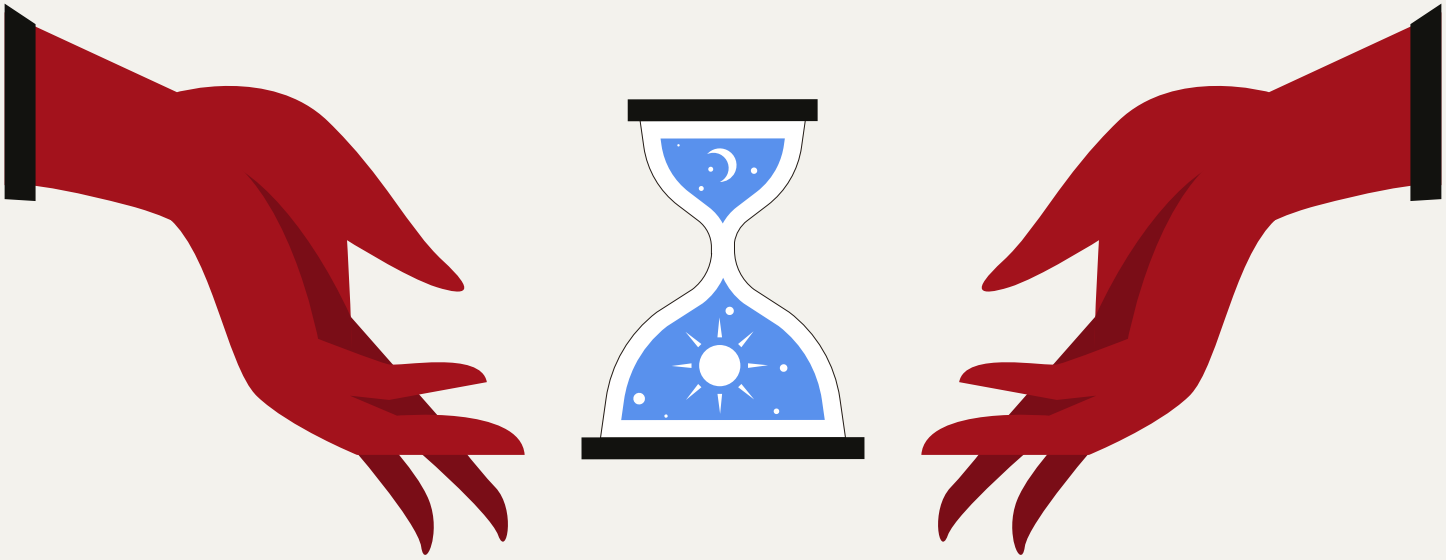
GERGANA TZVETKOVA, PHD
Co-President



2 DRIVING POSITIVE DISRUPTION

We walk the beginning of our path in a world that experiences constant turbulence and has the potential to become ever more hostile and divided. Our realities are marked by systemic risk, conflict, the rise of populist and far-right discourses, divisive and confusing information flows, increasingly digitalised living, and futures that seem less secure and more uncertain. **The female existence in this context is neither straight-forward, nor unproblematic. 30 years on from the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, women in their diversity are still not equal.**

- Women have **only 64% of the legal rights of men** (UN Women).
- **Only 23% of parliamentarians are women**, and **only 4% of CEOs** of Fortune 500 companies **are women** (UN Women).
- **The political empowerment gap** between women and men stands at **22.5% closed** (WEF).
- The economic **participation and opportunity gap** between women and men stands at **60.5% closed** (WEF).
- **Over 130 years are needed until the global economic gender gap is closed** – in Europe, 67 years are needed (Women Tech Network).
- **The global gender pay gap is estimated at around 20%.** Women earn 77 cents for every dollar men earn for work of equal value (UN).
- In the Global North/high-income countries, **women do over 2 times more unpaid work than men** (UN Women).
- **2 billion women had no social protection coverage at all in 2023** (UN Women).
- **Maternal mortality has remained almost unchanged** since 2015 with 223 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020 (UN Women).



- **1 in 3 women** in the EU have experienced **physical or sexual violence in their lifetime** (EIGE).
- **1 in 3 women** in the EU have been **sexually harassed at work** (EIGE).
- **53% of adult women** online have experienced some form of **technology facilitated gender-based violence at least once** (UN-Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office).
- **90-95% of all 'deepfakes'** concern material depicting nudity or sexually explicit activities – **the vast majority of those 'deepfakes' (90%) concern women** (EWL).
- **The internet use gender gap** stands at 12% – 277 million more men than women used the Internet in 2024 (UN Women).
- **Women made up only 32.8% of the total number of people employed** in the EU's high-technology sectors in 2022 (Eurostat).
- Women occupy only **22% of tech roles** across European companies (McKinsey).
- **12% of AI researchers are women,** and hold 22% of professional roles in the field (UNESCO).

However, we believe in our power to disrupt this trajectory. The drive for positive disruption helps us define where our work is most needed, what aspects of life need constructive change, and what goals we need to keep front-of-mind when designing our interventions, partnerships, initiatives, and methodologies. **We see The Counterintuitive Institute as an enabler for those who want to amplify democratic voices and bring substance to feminist power, and a tool for systematically questioning and improving structures, practices, and policies that underserve women in their diversity.**

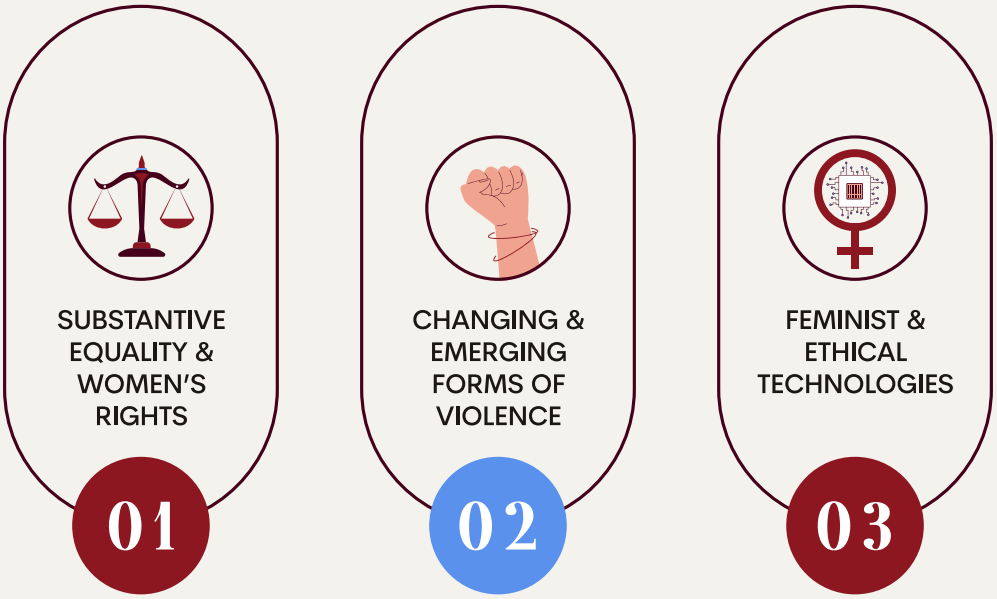
We drive positive disruption by taking leadership and wisdom from affected populations within a human-oriented, outcome-focused framework of action. **Our values of courage, empathy, purpose, and perseverance help us chart the way forward – towards a people-centric, dignifying and inclusive future.**

2030 FOCUS

The Counterintuitive Institute was founded in August 2024.
As a new organisation, we intend to spend the first 5 years of our existence on building a portfolio of impactful projects in our three key areas of action, while working on solidifying the capacities, capabilities, visibility, partner network, and authority of the Institute as a valuable and key part of civil society in Bulgaria, the European Union, and the world.

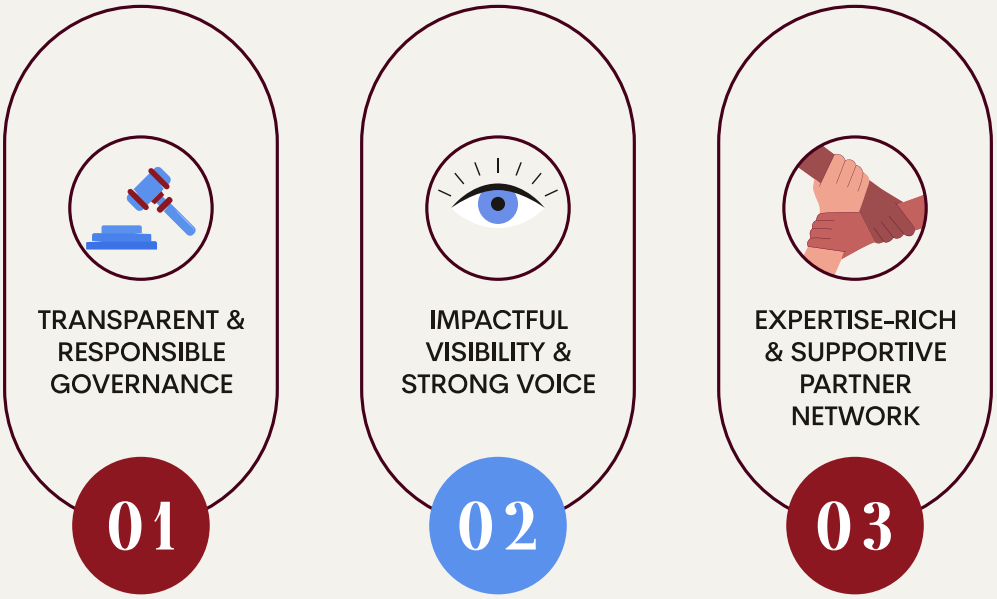
IMPACT PILLARS

Through our Impact Pillars, we intend to respond to the challenges facing women in their diversity and other underrepresented and underserved societal groups though research projects and initiatives that have clear positive outcomes.



ENABLING PILLARS

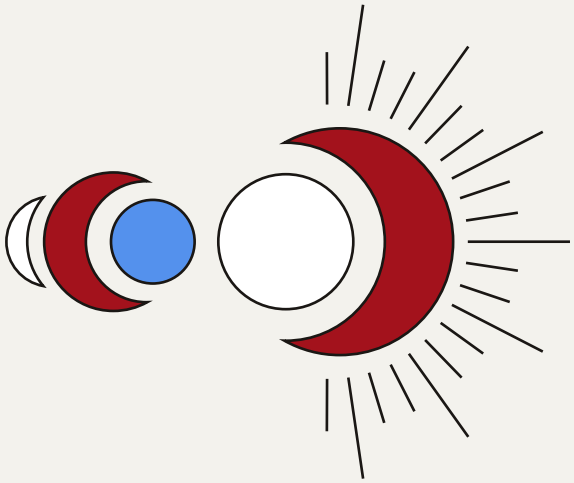
Through our Enabling Pillars, we intend to build the maturity of the Institute by constructing and operating an organisation that is ethical, transparent, responsible, decisive, people-centric, inclusive, and trustworthy, while acting as an amplifier of voices and perspectives from the bottom up.



CI STRATEGY 2030



4.1



CORE VALUES

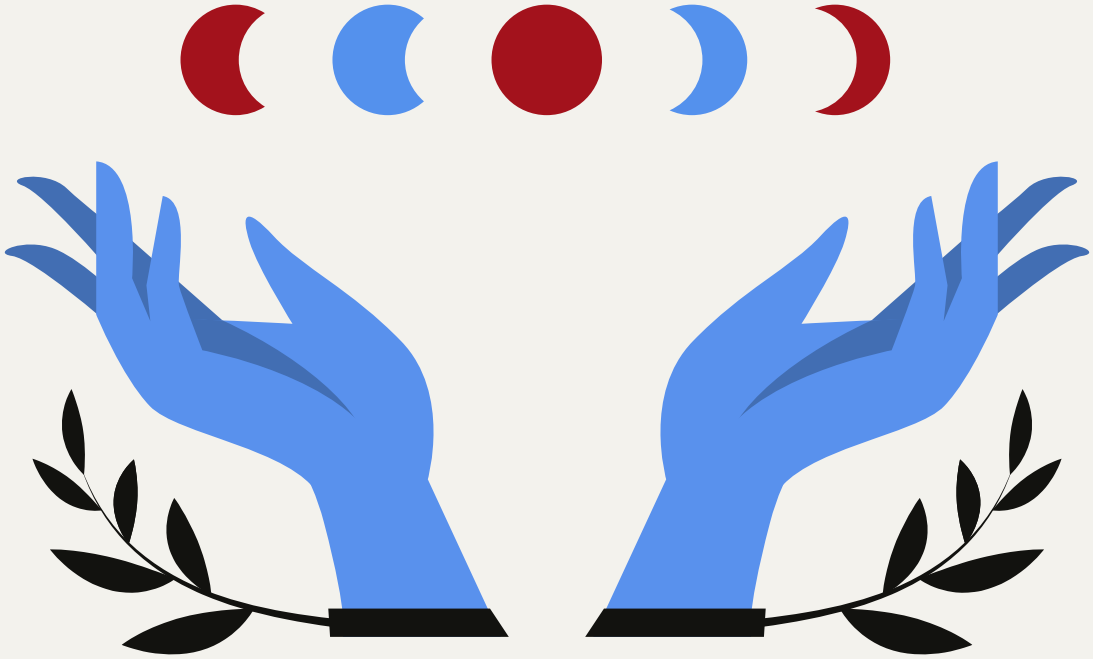
The value set of The Counterintuitive Institute is **the ethical compass that guides our work** and ensures that the initiatives we design, the research we conduct, and the connections and partnerships we build act **in accordance with our mission, purpose, and vision**.These provide a checklist for assessing all that we do and serve as a single source of truth about what is "right" for our organisation and what is not suitable. As such, they inform our choice of donors, partners, team members, external experts, sub-contractors, vendors, and participants – **in an organisational life cycle from idea-generation to impact monitoring and evaluation.**

We define our values as:

- **People-centricity & Inclusivity:** We are moved by the unfiltered experiences of people in their diversity as sources of knowledge and wisdom.
- **Courage & Creativity:** We are moved by the amazing women who support us every day and give us the courage to create, innovate, and grow.
- **Empathy & Ethics:** We are moved by our experiences as professionals, as citizens, and as women to always work from a place of empathy and ethical alignment.
- **Purpose & Perseverance:** We are moved by a strong commitment to our purpose and the realisation that change may be difficult, but it is a goal worth our perseverance.
- **Counterintuitive Ideas:** We are moved by the ideas that raise eyebrows, raise oppositions, and raise spirits.

OUR CORE VALUE COMMITMENTS:

- **Funding sources:** We will only **apply for and accept** funding from organisations that **are aligned with and/or do not conflict with our values.** We remain non-partisan and **will not accept any funding**, gifts, or in-kind support **from political parties.** Despite our non-partisan position, **we will not hesitate to speak out** against statements, actions, or policies that are autocratic, illiberal, discriminatory, or promote hatred. **We are committed to the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.**
- **Team, experts & partners:** We will **only collaborate** with individuals and organisations who can demonstrate **clear alignment with our values** and who uphold them in the way they work with us.
- **Ways of working:** We will integrate our values in every initiative, project, workstream and task we carry out, **ensuring that all work is meaningful and ethical.**
- **Governance:** We will **integrate our values** in our organisational policies, including how we form partnerships, conduct our operations, make financial decisions, and protect the integrity of the Institute.
- **Communication:** We will ensure that all communication, internal and external to the Institute, **embodies the spirit of our values.**

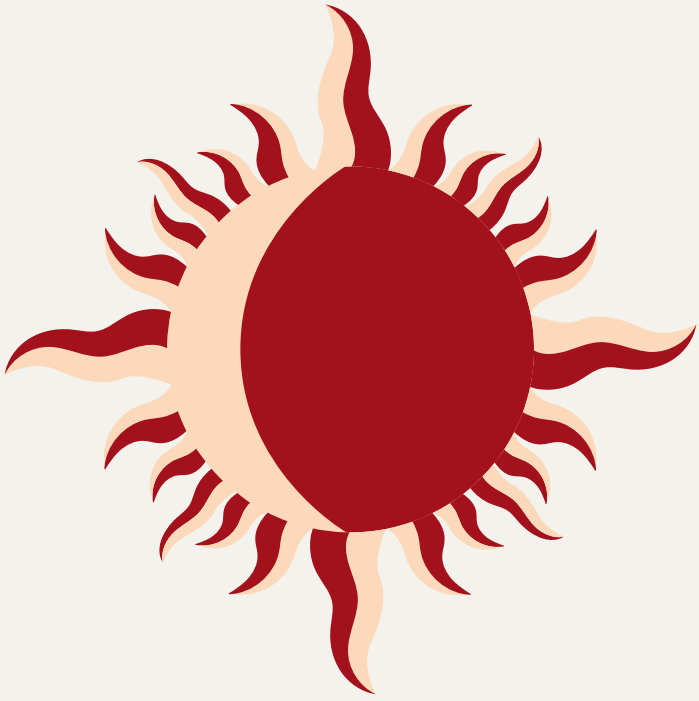


4.2

2030 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

To guide our journey toward 2030, we have identified **six strategic objectives** aligned with our Strategic Focus Pillars of **impact and enablement.**

These objectives reflect not only our ambitions but also the essence of our values – **placing people at the centre, staying ethically grounded, drawing strength from creativity and courage, and embracing counterintuitive thinking as a source of transformative change.** The objectives chart a course for how we will **grow, influence, and act with purpose** over the coming years.



IMPACT PILLARS

Substantive Equality & Women's Rights

Strategic Objective:
By 2030, co-create and launch the foundational initiative around which The Counterintuitive Institute was first conceived by its Co-Founders – The Equality Observatory (EQO), with the goal of continuously monitoring society in its various spheres, areas, and modalities of existence and establish whether and how it is moving towards substantive equality.

Integrated Values:
People-centricity & Inclusivity, Counterintuitive Ideas, Purpose & Perseverance

Changing & Emerging Forms of Violence

Strategic Objective:
By 2030, develop and sustain publicly accessible databases on changing and emerging forms of violence, alongside thematic, targeted resources such as policy positions and briefs, training and capacity-building materials, awareness-raising knowledge bases, and research, in collaborating with local, regional, and international partners.

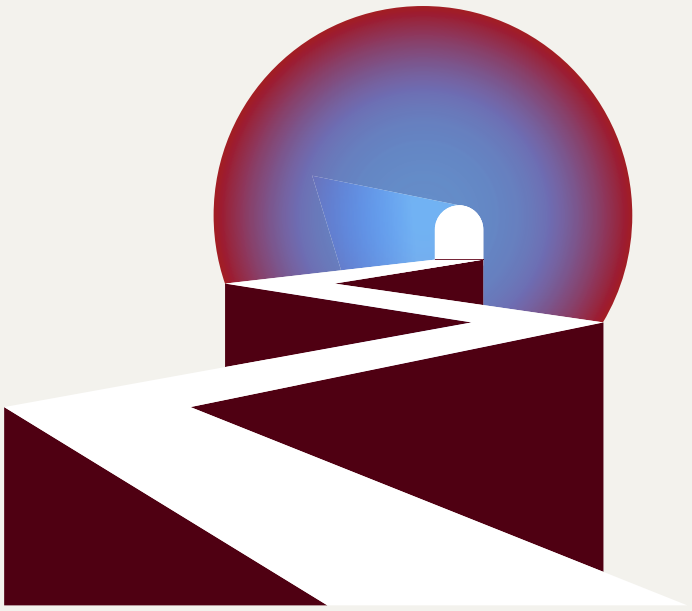
Integrated Values:
Empathy & Ethics, People-centricity & Inclusivity, Courage & Creativity, Purpose & Perseverance

Feminist & Ethical Technologies

Strategic Objective:
By 2030, position the Institute as a valuable feminist and ethical tech knowledge source and policy influencer through partnerships with diverse likeminded organisations on co-developing research outputs, policy briefs, or frameworks that directly inform and shape the tech industry, digital rights, and ethical practices in Bulgaria and the EU.

Integrated Values:
Courage & Creativity, Counterintuitive Ideas, Empathy & Ethics, People-centricity





ENABLING PILLARS



Transparent & Responsible Governance

Strategic Objective:
By 2030, set up and operationalise an external Advisory Board and establish a transparent, participatory, and ethical governance model that is evaluated through annual Advisory Board reviews and shared openly with peer organisations as a replicable model for small, mission-driven institutions.

Integrated Values:
Empathy & Ethics, People-centricity & Inclusivity, Purpose & Perseverance



Impactful Visibility & Strong Voice

Strategic Objective:
By 2030, build a distinctive, values-driven public voice that earns decision-maker trust and visibility on strategic platforms, with a focus on sharing lessons learned, amplifying counterintuitive ideas, and common-goal initiatives across Bulgaria and the EU.

Integrated Values:
Counterintuitive Ideas, Courage & Creativity, Purpose & Perseverance



Expertise-rich & Supportive Partner Network

Strategic Objective:
By 2030, develop and maintain a dynamic network of at least 100 partners, focused on mutual learning, co-creation, and collaboration, with at least 30% of partnerships resulting in shared projects, knowledge exchange initiatives, or advocacy efforts.

Integrated Values:
People-centricity & Inclusivity, Purpose & Perseverance, Courage & Creativity



4.3

THEORY OF CHANGE

Impact	Mobilised communities and amplified voices for a fairer world					
Strategic focus	**Impact Pillars: responding to challenges**			**Enabling Pillars: building organisational maturity**		
Strategic pillars	Substantive Equality & Women's rights	Changing & Emerging forms of violence	Feminist & Ethical technologies	Transparent & Responsible governance	Impactful visibility & Strong voice	Expertise-rich & Supportive partner network
Strategic objectives	EQO established and piloted	Public databases and resources available	CI as a valuable source of knowledge and policy change	Holistic and replicable governance model established	Decision-maker trust and organisational authority earned	Wide, impactful network formed and operational
Far-star (long-term) positive dis-ruption	Positive influence on national and EU policy landscapes in the area of equality. Positive influence on the private and non-governmental sector in adopting and/or supporting substantive equality principles. Standardisation and systemic embedding of substantive equality indicators into national statistics, policy frameworks, and monitoring systems.	National legislative and policy frameworks adapted to counter new manifestations of violence. Strengthened preventive and protective measures rooted in evidence-based understanding of violence trends, with tangible societal outcomes.	Adoption of feminist and ethical tech standards in national legislation, EU digital strategies, and industry self-regulatory codes. Measurable cultural and regulatory shifts promoting inclusive, equitable, and rights-respecting digital ecosystems in Bulgaria and Europe.	Influence on sectoral standards for transparent and ethical governance. Strengthened legitimacy and resilience of rights-based organisations. Improved reputation of the non-governmental sector in Bulgaria. Integration of non-West-centric perspectives.	Greater influence on policy agendas, public debates, and funding priorities across key sectors. Mainstreaming of feminist, counterintuitive, and evidence-based perspectives in national and EU-level public discourse.	Establishment of a resilient, cross-sectoral partnership ecosystem Creation of sustained channels for knowledge transfer, capacity building, and advocacy amplification.

Near-star (short-term) positive disruption	Increased awareness and understanding among key decision-makers across sectors and domains. Increased availability and public access to high-quality data on equality. Specific vertical/ topic area acceptance and embedding of recommendations. Partnerships with academia, civil society, policymakers and the private sector to leverage EQO findings.	Policymakers, advocates, and communities utilising the Institute's databases as a key source. Increased awareness among relevant stakeholders of newly emerging forms of violence, especially digital, institutional, and gender-based violence. Increased public access to accurate, high-quality databases and knowledge resources documenting these new forms of violence.	Increased awareness and integration of feminist and ethical technology principles among relevant stakeholders. Availability of co-developed, high-quality research outputs, policy briefs, and ethical frameworks. Acceptance and embedding of ethical tech recommendations. Strategic partnerships with feminist tech groups, research centres, policymakers, and private sector actors.	Increased internal accountability, transparency, and ethical robustness of The Counterintuitive Institute's governance practices. Strong trust among partners, funders, and the broader community in the Institute's decision-making and operational integrity. Early uptake of governance learnings by peer organisations through open sharing of the model, tools, and experiences.	Recognition among decision-makers and peer organisations as a credible, bold, and values-driven voice. Broadened audiences engaging with counterintuitive ideas and systemic change narratives. Increased visibility of The Counterintuitive Institute.	Expansion of The Counterintuitive Institute's partnerships. Increased volume of collaborative outputs, including co-designed projects, joint research, advocacy initiatives, and mutual learning. Strengthened ecosystem around feminist, rights-based, and innovative systemic change work.

Drivers of change	Leveraging an interdisciplinary research team MoUs with universities, public institutions, companies, and CSOs for data sharing and joint analysis. Open-data systems and progressive indicators of equality beyond traditional metrics.	Open data and civic tech tools facilitating broader information access. Growing networks of feminist, human rights, and digital rights organisations willing to collaborate on knowledge generation. Solidifying existing partnerships with local-level organisations and expanding such relationships in Bulgaria, the EU, and globally.	Increasing public and policy debates around digital rights, AI ethics, and technology's societal impact. Availability of EU digital policy frameworks (e.g., AI Act, Digital Services Act) creating entry points for feminist and ethical perspectives. Growth of feminist and rights-based tech advocacy networks across Europe and globally.	Governance best practices and innovation in the CSO sector. Cooperation and knowledge sharing with established funders and donor organisations. Acceleration of open governance and radical transparency movements. Increased importance of risk management and ethical resilience in uncertain contexts.	Growing appetite among media, funders, and policymakers for credible perspectives. Opportunities created by EU priorities. Rising importance of civil society voices in shaping the future of tech, equality, and rights fields.	Recognition among stakeholders that complex societal challenges require collaborative and cross-sectoral approaches. Availability of EU and international funding instruments favouring partnerships and consortia. Rising interest in co-production of knowledge and solutions.

Methods & approaches	Participatory and co-creative research methodologies, including own methodology formulation. Modular piloting of EQO in different thematic areas and sectors. Annual EQO Summits to discuss and refine findings with stakeholders.	Co-design of indicators and monitoring. Applied research and participatory data gathering methods. Policy-oriented publications. Advocacy campaigns. Thematic conferences, participatory events, and practitioner workshops.	Collaborative research approaches. Development of case studies, ethical design frameworks, and policy recommendation papers. Policy engagement. Hosting expert convenings, workshops, and roundtables.	Setting up an external Advisory Board. Annual internal governance self-assessments and external Advisory Board evaluations, with transparent publication of findings. Public sharing of the governance model and lessons learned.	Development of a comprehensive communications and visibility strategy. Strategic participation in key national, regional, and EU events, conferences, and networks. Storytelling approaches that centre lived experiences.	Systematic partner mapping and stakeholder engagement strategy. Creation of participatory spaces. Visibility initiatives that highlight joint successes and celebrate collaborative achievements.

Resources for impact	**Multidisciplinary Core Team:** A highly skilled team bringing together expertise across research, policy, advocacy, communications, technology, and organisational development.
	Partnerships and Network Memberships: Long-standing relationships with donors, civil society organisations, academic institutions, private sector actors, and active membership in relevant regional and international networks.
	Ethical Governance and Internal Policies: Key operational policies already in place, such as a Gender Equality Plan and a Financial Conduct Protocol, demonstrating ethical foundations and organisational maturity.
	Strategic Communications and Design Capabilities: In-house capacity to create professional, values-driven communications and visual outputs, coupled with a strong existing online presence
	Fully Digital, Agile Operational Model: A flexible, location-independent operational model that enables fully digital collaboration, knowledge management, and delivery.

4.4

2030 STRATEGIC PILLARS IN FOCUS

IMPACT PILLAR 1:

SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY & WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Achieving substantive equality requires a transformative approach that moves beyond formal rights into lived realities.

The Counterintuitive Institute's work in this Impact Pillar seeks to embed the principles of substantive equality into policy, practice, and societal consciousness, generating systems-level change across Bulgaria, Europe, and globally.

> *"We believe equality must be felt, not just declared. Through The Equality Observatory, we are building the evidence and momentum needed to move from words to real change."*
>
> – Leda Kuneva

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE EXPANDED



By 2030, co-create and launch the foundational initiative around which The Counterintuitive Institute was first conceived by its Co-Founders – The Equality Observatory (EQO), with the goal of continuously monitoring society in its various spheres, areas, and modalities of existence and establish whether and how it is moving towards substantive equality.

SUB-OBJECTIVES

- Develop progressive equality indicators, beyond traditional metrics
- Ready the EQO methodology for piloting across different sectors (e.g., education, employment, digital)
- Publish regularly updated EQO data with thematic actionable recommendations
- Begin to host Annual EQO Summits to engage stakeholders and refine strategies

KPIS / INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- EQO sustainably financed for the first two 4-year implementation periods
- EQO platform built and operational by 2028
- EQO piloted in at least 1 key sector (preferably the tech sector) or domain by 2030
- Partnerships formed with at least 10 civil society organisations, research / academic institutions, private companies and/or public bodies
- EQO indicators included into at least 2 own or external statistical frameworks or shadow reports





- **Increased awareness and understanding** among key decision-makers across sectors
- **High-quality, accessible equality data** widely available
- **Recommendations** embedded in specific policy verticals
- **Robust partnerships** with academia, civil society, and the private sector

- **Positive influence** on national and EU policy landscapes
- **Standardisation** of substantive equality indicators
- **Systemic embedding** of equality monitoring into national statistics and frameworks
- **Substantive equality principles** adopted in private sector practices

ETHICAL COMMITMENTS

- Prioritise participatory and co-creative research processes
- Ensure representation of marginalised and underrepresented groups in indicator development
- Maintain open access to data and findings
- Uphold data ethics and informed consent in all research activities
- Support the Bulgarian tech sector by holding an open tender for platform development and maintenance

IMPACT PILLAR 2:

CHANGING & EMERGING FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Violence evolves – and so must the tools to address it.

By building innovative, participatory knowledge systems, The Counterintuitive Institute is reshaping how societies understand, prevent, and respond to emerging forms of violence, particularly those amplified by technology and structural inequality.

> *Emerging forms of violence demand emerging forms of resistance. We are committed to creating the tools our societies need to name, understand, and dismantle violence in all its evolving shapes.*
>
> – Gergana Tzvetkova

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE EXPANDED

By 2030, develop and sustain publicly accessible databases on changing and emerging forms of violence, alongside thematic, targeted resources such as policy positions and briefs, training and capacity-building materials, awareness-raising knowledge bases, and research, in collaborating with local, regional, and international partners.

SUB-OBJECTIVES

- Co-develop new indicators for emerging violence (e.g., cyber and technologically facilitated violence, coercive control)
- Create thematic databases accessible to policymakers, advocates, and the public
- Produce policy briefs, reports, and legal reviews based on database findings
- Build and join/support advocacy campaigns targeting institutional change and early intervention
- Actively contribute to public and civil society consultations and networks to influence policy and discourse

KPIS / INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- Launch of at least 3 thematic datasets by 2030
- At least 5 policy briefs and/or thematic reports published by 2030
- Citations or references of Institute datasets in national or EU policy documents
- At least 10 training or capacity-building sessions delivered based on database/ dataset findings

NEAR-STAR POSITIVE DISRUPTION

- Policymakers and communities using databases as primary resources
- Heightened stakeholder awareness of digital, institutional, and gender-based violence
- Increased public access to high-quality knowledge resources

FAR-STAR POSITIVE DISRUPTION

- National legislative and policy frameworks adapted to address new forms of violence
- Strengthened evidence-based prevention and protection measures
- Tangible societal outcomes such as reduced incidence and earlier interventions

ETHICAL COMMITMENTS

- Ensure survivor-centred approaches in all data collection and publication
- Engage gatekeepers when they are the most appropriate intermediary for target communities
- Communicate clear protocols for data security and responsible sharing
- Partner only with organisations that uphold human rights and feminist principles

IMPACT PILLAR 3:

FEMINIST & ETHICAL TECHNOLOGIES

Technology is never neutral.

By embedding feminist and ethical perspectives into digital rights, design practices, and regulatory frameworks, The Counterintuitive Institute is working to reshape the technological landscape to be more inclusive, equitable, and rights-respecting.

> *"The future of technology must be feminist. Feminism is not an ideology, it is a way of thinking and a commitment to pursue justice, responsible innovation, and democracy."*
>
> – Gergana Tzvetkova

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE EXPANDED

By 2030, position the Institute as a valuable feminist and ethical tech knowledge source and policy influencer through partnerships with diverse likeminded organisations on co-developing research outputs, policy briefs, or frameworks that directly inform and shape the tech industry, digital rights, and ethical practices in Bulgaria and the EU.

SUB-OBJECTIVES

- Co-develop high-quality research outputs and ethical tech frameworks
- Build partnerships with feminist tech groups, research centres, private companies, and policymakers
- Actively contribute to EU-level digital rights and tech ethics dialogues
- Host convenings, workshops, and expert advisory groups connecting feminist and tech communities

KPIS / INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- Co-development and publication of at least 5 key research outputs and/or ethical tech frameworks by 2030
- At least 3 policy recommendation reports contributing into national or EU-level policy documents
- Participation in at least 10 national, regional, and EU tech ethics fora or consultations
- Establishment of at least 5 strategic partnerships with feminist tech groups and research centres





- Greater awareness and integration of feminist and ethical tech principles
- Availability of co-developed research and policy frameworks
- Embedding of recommendations in tech governance spaces

- Adoption of feminist and ethical tech standards in national legislation, EU strategies, and industry codes
- Measurable cultural and regulatory shifts toward inclusive and rights-respecting digital ecosystems

ETHICAL COMMITMENTS

- Uphold feminist principles of inclusivity, transparency, and agency in all tech-related work
- Advocate for and model responsible, rights-respecting data and AI practices
- Centre voices from marginalised communities in digital rights discussions
- Refuse collaborations with or funding from actors or sectors perpetuating harm, bias, exclusion, or unethical tech or research practices



ENABLING PILLAR 1:

TRANSPARENT & RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE

Transparent, accountable governance is essential to the credibility, legitimacy, and resilience of mission-driven organisations.

At The Counterintuitive Institute, we see governance not just as an internal mechanism but as a contribution to the broader movement for ethical, participatory, and radical transparency in civil society.

> *"Our internal structures must embody the world we are trying to create — one rooted in accountability, participation, and trust."*
>
> – Rosalina Todorova



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE EXPANDED

By 2030, set up and operationalise an external Advisory Board and establish a transparent, participatory, and ethical governance model that is evaluated through annual Advisory Board reviews and shared openly with peer organisations as a replicable model for small, mission-driven institutions.

SUB-OBJECTIVES

- Establish a diverse and independent Advisory Board by the end of 2026
- Formalise an annual self-assessment and external review governance cycle from 2027
- Develop and publish a transparent governance handbook and toolkits by 2028
- Organise annual governance-sharing events and knowledge exchanges starting in 2028

KPIS / INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- Advisory Board established with a minimum of 8 members from diverse sectors and geographies
- 100% of annual self-assessments and external evaluations completed and publicly shared
- At least 1 knowledge-sharing toolkit or report published by 2030
- Governance model included in the internal operations of at least 2 other peer organisations

NEAR-STAR POSITIVE DISRUPTION

- Increased internal accountability and operational resilience
- Visible trust among partners, funders, and community
- Uptake of governance learnings by peer organisations

FAR-STAR POSITIVE DISRUPTION

- Influence on sectoral standards and expectations for transparent and ethical governance
- Improved reputation of the non-governmental sector in Bulgaria and the EU
- Ensured integration of non-West-centric perspectives and disruption of established patriarchal governance models

ETHICAL COMMITMENTS

- Guarantee independence, diversity, and transparency in all relevant operations, including the Advisory Board
- Ensure decision-making processes are participatory and inclusive
- Share successes and failures openly to build a learning ecosystem
- Commit to non-hierarchical, feminist, and flexible governance principles

ENABLING PILLAR 2:

IMPACTFUL VISIBILITY & STRONG VOICE

In a crowded and noisy landscape, building a distinct, values-driven voice is crucial.

Through strategic visibility, The Counterintuitive Institute aims to amplify counterintuitive ideas, evidence-based insights, and feminist, rights-based narratives, reshaping policy debates and public conversations nationally and across Europe.

> *Visibility without values is just noise. We choose to be loud about what matters.*
>
> – Leda Kuneva



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE EXPANDED

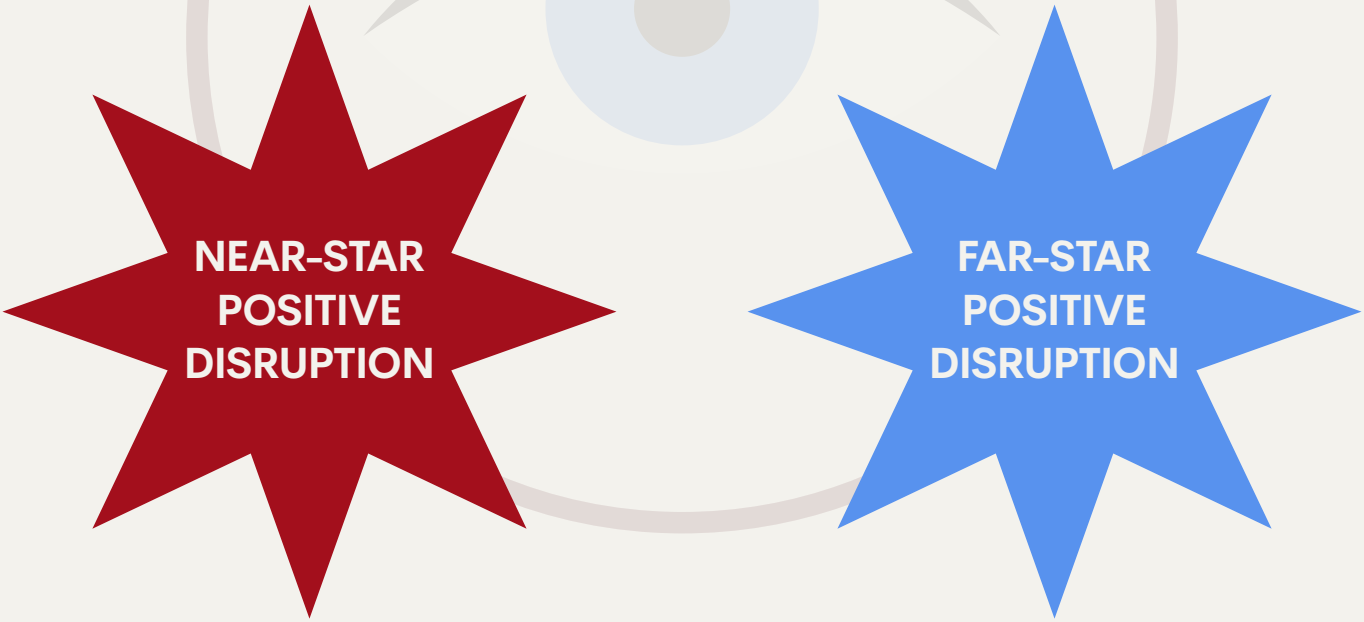
By 2030, build a distinctive, values-driven public voice that earns decision-maker trust and visibility on strategic platforms, with a focus on sharing lessons learned, amplifying counterintuitive ideas, and common-goal initiatives across Bulgaria and the EU.

SUB-OBJECTIVES

- Develop and implement a comprehensive communications and visibility strategy by the end of 2026
- Position Institute Co-Presidents on ethical media and policy platforms
- Hold an annual conference starting in 2025
- Organise annual "Counterintuitive Ideas" forums and public dialogues starting in 2028
- Actively contribute to national and EU policy conversations and strategic debates

KPIS / INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- At least 5 media placements (interviews, articles, features) annually from 2028
- Participation in at least 5 national or EU-level conferences, policy consultations, panels, events, or debates each year
- Organisation of annual public events with increasing participation targets (+15% year-on-year)
- Growth of online community by 20% annually



- Recognition among decision-makers and peer organisations as a credible, bold, and values-driven voice
- Broadened audiences engaging with counterintuitive narratives

- Mainstreaming of feminist, counterintuitive, and evidence-based perspectives in national and EU-level discourse
- Greater influence on policy agendas and funding priorities

ETHICAL COMMITMENTS

- Centre authenticity, inclusivity, and evidence in all communications
- Avoid amplification of harmful or divisive narratives for visibility gains
- Prioritise real people's lived experiences and voices alongside expert analysis
- Maintain transparency about affiliations, partnerships, and funding sources

ENABLING PILLAR 3:

EXPERTISE-RICH & SUPPORTIVE PARTNER NETWORK

Systems change is a collective endeavour.

Building strong, values-aligned partnerships rooted in mutual learning and co-creation is vital for achieving lasting impact. The Counterintuitive Institute envisions a dynamic ecosystem that enhances collective power across feminist, rights-based, and ethical tech agendas.

> *True transformation happens when we stop competing for change and start building it together.*
>
> – Rosalina Todorova

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE EXPANDED

By 2030, develop and maintain a dynamic network of at least 100 partners, focused on mutual learning, co-creation, and collaboration, with at least 30% of partnerships resulting in shared projects, knowledge exchange initiatives, or advocacy efforts.



SUB-OBJECTIVES

- Conduct continuous partner mapping and strategic engagement exercises
- Formalise collaborative agreements (e.g., MoUs, joint action plans) with at least 10% of network partners
- Host regular partner meetings to foster learning and shared advocacy
- Create participatory spaces and platforms for knowledge exchange and joint innovation

KPIS / INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- Partnership network of at least 100 organisations established and active by 2030
- At least 30% of partnerships producing shared outputs (projects, research, advocacy)
- At least 10 multidisciplinary and/or cross-sectoral joint initiatives launched by 2030

NEAR-STAR POSITIVE DISRUPTION

- Expansion of The Counterintuitive Institute's partnerships
- Increased volume of collaborative outputs and joint initiatives

FAR-STAR POSITIVE DISRUPTION

- Establishment of a resilient, cross-sectoral partnership ecosystem amplifying collective impact on equality, rights, and ethical tech agendas nationally and in Europe

ETHICAL COMMITMENTS

- Ensure equity and transparency in all partnership arrangements
- Prioritise partnerships with feminist, rights-based, and ethical organisations
- Centre mutual benefit, shared learning, and accountability in collaborations
- Commit to decolonising partnership practices and avoiding extractive relationships

RESOURCES FOR IMPACT

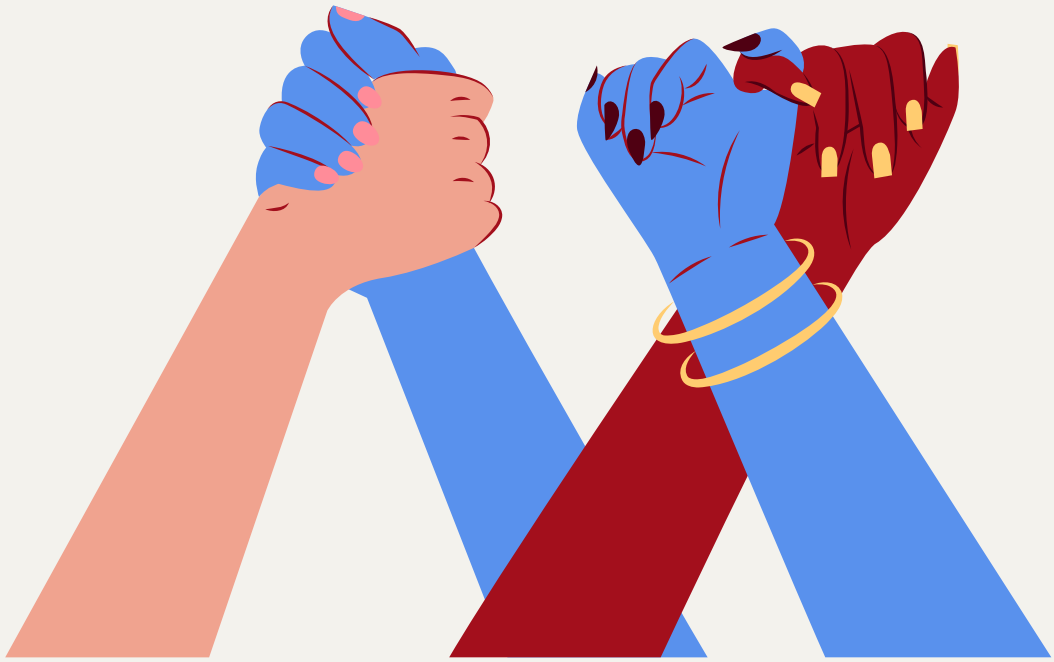
At The Counterintuitive Institute, our ability to drive positive disruption is grounded in a carefully cultivated ecosystem of people, partnerships, practices, and principles. These core resources not only help us unlock our strategic objectives but also embody the future we want to create – a future in which communities are mobilised, voices are amplified, and the world is a fairer place.

5.1

OUR TEAM

The Counterintuitive Institute's core team consists of **experts in sociology, human rights, international law, policy, and impactful communication** with long-standing experience in **creating and running challenging projects** at various scales.

Over the years, we have worked together on a number of **highly impactful national and international projects** in each of our focus areas.
We draw inspiration from each-other, we rely on each-other's skills, and we bring the best of our capabilities to CI!



OUR CO-FOUNDERS & CO-PRESIDENTS



GERGANA TZVETKOVA, PHD

PhD in Politics, Human Rights and Sustainability (Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa (cum laude)

13+ years of experience in qualitative research, project management, and non-profit organisation management.

Expertise: human rights, gender-based violence, gendered disinformation, public policy analysis, foreign policy analysis



ROSALINA TODOROVA, PHD

PhD in Sociology (Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohrodski", BG)

10+ years of experience in theoretical and empirical research on topics of inequality and social dynamics.

Expertise: inequality, stratification and social structuring, gender and racial exclusion, minority rights, post-socialist and regional studies



LEDA KUNEVA

MSc in Human Rights (London School of Economics and Political Science, UK)

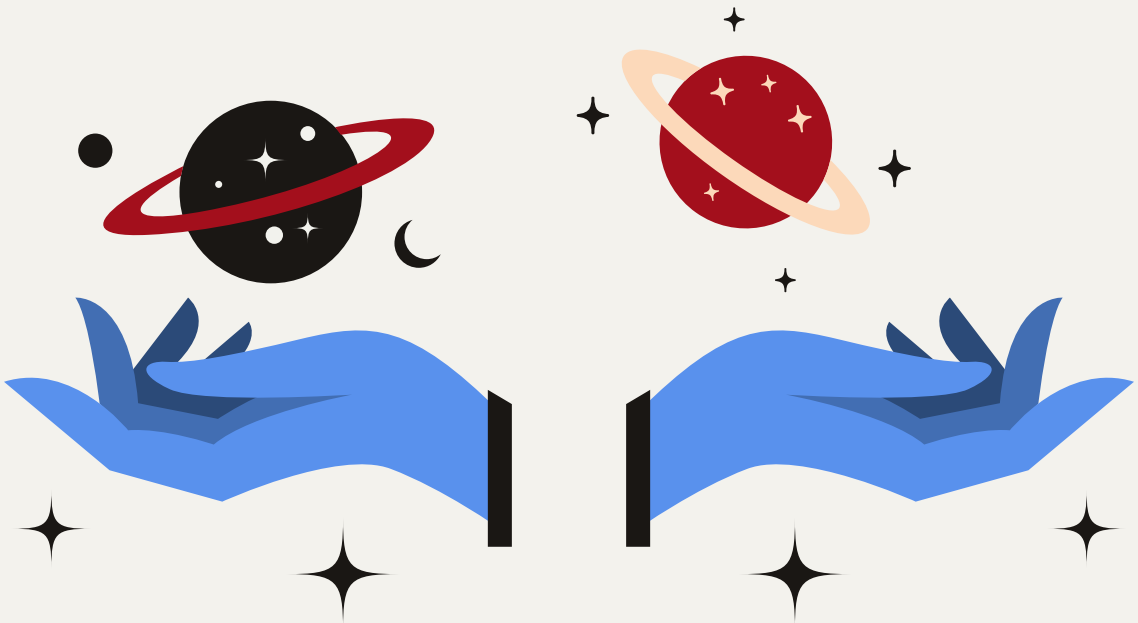
6+ years of experience in mixed methods and co-creative research, public deliberation, Horizon project management, and consultancy

Expertise: human rights, digital & AI ethics, gender-based and domestic violence, migration, policy influence

OUR STEERING COMMITTEE

Our voluntary Steering Committee is made up of **seven women from diverse backgrounds** and different professional expertise.

They support our work with **essential functions, guidance, and support** that ensure the smooth running of our work and operations.



5.2



OUR NETWORK

The Counterintuitive Institute is anchored within a web of valuable partnerships, collaborations, and network memberships. Our relationships with donors, civil society peers, academic institutions, and private sector allies enable mutual learning, innovation, and collective action. Active participation in regional and international networks strengthens our reach, influence, and ability to mobilise cross-sectoral impact, while ensuring we remain deeply connected to movements for rights, equality, and systemic change.

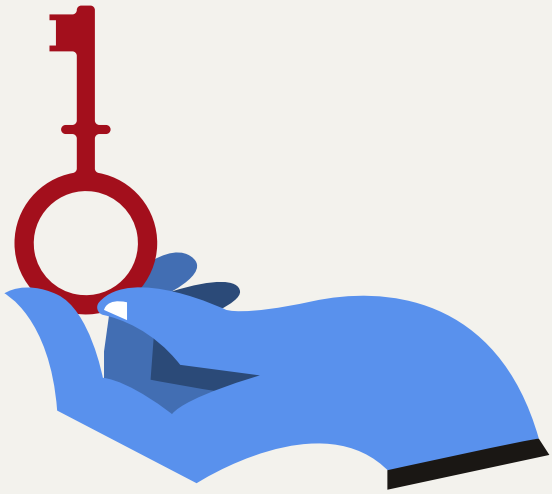
Since 2025, we are members of:

- The Bulgarian Platform of the European Women's Lobby (EWL)
- The European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)
- The Grantee Community of the Bulgarian Fund for Women
- The Coalition for Independent Technology Research
- The Fundamental Rights Platform of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Our team is also part of:

- The United Nations Network on Migration
- The Society of Gender Professionals (SGP)
- The Center for AI and Digital Policy (CAIDP) Alumni Network
- The International Migration Research Network (IMISCOE)
- The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM)

5.3



OUR POLICIES AND GOVERNANCE

Robust ethical governance underpins everything we do. With key frameworks such as a Gender Equality Plan and Financial Conduct Protocol already in place, our governance practices reflect our commitment to transparency, integrity, and participatory leadership. We continuously strive to operationalise feminist and rights-based principles internally, ensuring that our governance model not only sustains our mission but serves as a replicable example for peer organisations.

CI GENDER EQUALITY PLAN (GEP)

With the launch of the Horizon Europe funding programme in 2021, a new eligibility criterion was introduced, namely that public bodies, such as research funding bodies, national ministries and other public authorities, including public for-profit organisations, public and private higher education institutions, and public and private research organisations applying for Horizon Europe funds are required to have a GEP in place.

Our Gender Equality Plan is a public, leadership-endorsed document that commits resources to gender equality, ensures gender-disaggregated data collection and monitoring, and mandates training on gender equality and unconscious bias for staff and decision-makers. It outlines concrete measures and targets across work–life balance, leadership and recruitment, integration of gender in research and teaching, and prevention of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

Progress against our GEP is evaluated annually starting in 2025 with results included in the public annual reports of the Institute starting in 2026. It is also reviewed on a three-year basis, with the first review due in 2028.

CI FINANCIAL CONDUCT PROTOCOL (FCP)

The Counterintuitive Institute's Financial Conduct Protocol (FCP) describes key internal processes that take place within the organisation and serves as a single point of truth about financial decisions. It covers areas such as worker hourly, daily, and monthly rate formulation, external expert rates, annual budgeting for the organisation, good governance of financial decisions, and other matters as needed. The FCP is binding to all legal representatives of CI and any third parties legally authorised by the legal representatives to act on their behalf and/or on behalf of The Counterintuitive Institute on matters of financial significance. Amendments to the FCP may be recommended by the legal representatives and are subject to Steering Council decision for adoption, according to the procedures described in the organisation's Charter.

Our Financial Conduct Protocol takes into account our public purpose and our values and obligations as a non-profit organisation to provide transparent and evidence-based remuneration decision-making.

By 2030, we commit to develop the following additional policies:

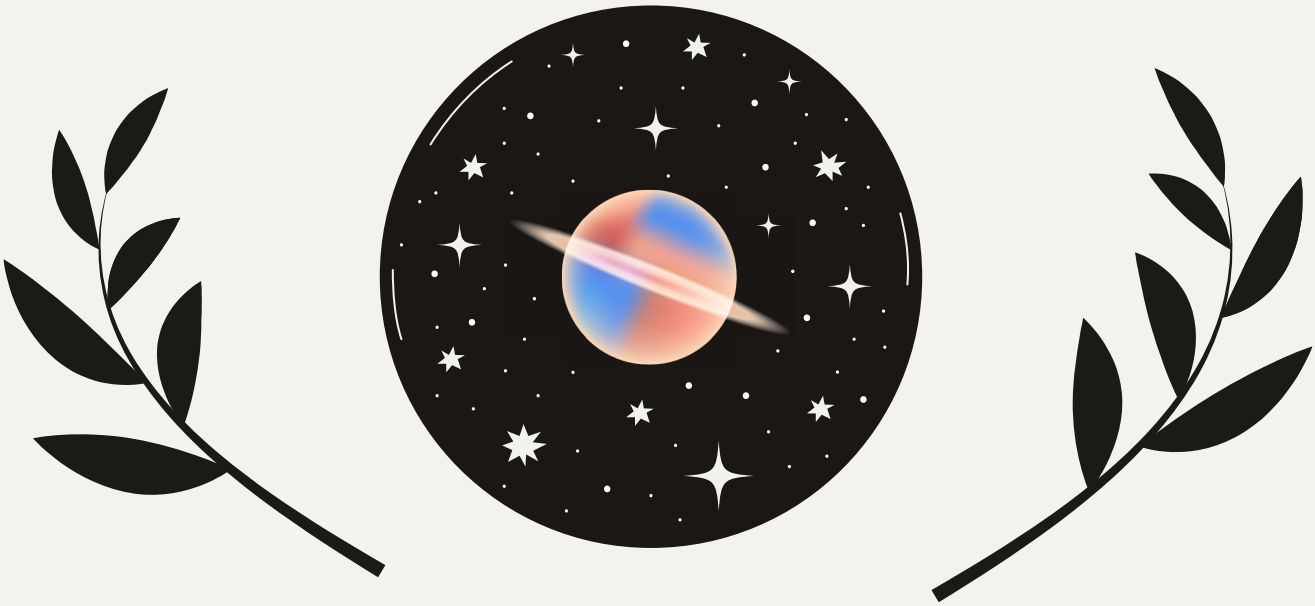
- **Ethical Code of Conduct (by 2026)**
- **Child Protection Policy (by 2027)**
- **Working with Vulnerable Communities Policy (by 2027)**
- **Data Protection and Privacy Policy with associated instruments (by 2026)**
- **Anti-Corruption and Conflict of Interest Policy (by 2026)**
- **Risk Modelling Framework and Safety Protocol (by 2030)**

5.4

OUR COMMUNICATIONS

Strategic, values-driven communications are essential to how we build trust, visibility, and influence. With strong in-house capabilities in design, storytelling, and strategic messaging, coupled with an established online presence across social media and web platforms, The Counterintuitive Institute crafts narratives that challenge, inspire, and mobilise. Our communications centre lived experiences, amplify counterintuitive ideas, and connect knowledge to action in ways that resonate across diverse audiences.

Starting in 2025, we are present on LinkedIn, Instagram, and Bluesky. We are also actively building our organisational website.



PLATFORM EVALUATION CRITERIA

When deciding whether to join, continue on, or leave a platform, we evaluate:

1. Alignment with Human Rights and Ethics: Does the platform demonstrate respect for fundamental rights (e.g., privacy, non-discrimination, free expression and the dignity of all people) to a sufficient level?
2. Impact on Democratic and Civil Spaces: Does the platform contribute positively or negatively to democratic participation, informed debate, and civil society resilience?
3. Audience and Reach: Does the platform allow us to effectively reach and engage our priority audiences without compromising our ethical standards?
4. Community Safety and Harm Mitigation: Does the platform have credible measures in place to reduce harassment, disinformation, and exploitation?
5. Support for Open and Decentralised Alternatives: When feasible, how do we support platforms that promote open-source, decentralised, community-owned models?



5.4

OUR WAYS OF WORKING

Operating as a fully digital, flexible organisation enables The Counterintuitive Institute to work seamlessly across borders, time zones, and contexts.

Our adaptive operational model prioritises collaboration, responsiveness, and inclusivity, making it possible to assemble diverse teams, mobilise rapidly around emerging issues, and maintain organisational resilience. Rooted in a culture of trust, care, and accountability, our ways of working reflect both our strategic ambition and our ethical commitments.



ANNUAL BUDGETS

At The Counterintuitive Institute, our annual budget formulation is a strategic and participatory process aligned with our Theory of Change, Strategic Objectives, and Values.

Each year, we build our budget by first mapping required resources against the activities planned under each Impact and Enabling Pillar, ensuring a clear link between financial planning and the achievement of near and far-star disruptions. Budget lines are informed by our core capacities – multidisciplinary team expertise, network partnerships, digital operations, governance policies, and communications strategies – and prioritised based on potential for systemic change, ethical considerations, and sustainability. We maintain dedicated allocations for cross-cutting commitments such as gender equality, capacity building, communications, and platform integrity, and regularly review expenditures through the lens of risk management, transparency, and people-centricity. All budget drafts are developed collaboratively, validated by our Co-Presidents and the Steering Committee, and published internally alongside key performance indicators to foster accountability and learning.

We commit to provide comparisons between our planned and actual annual budgets in our public yearly reporting.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Counterintuitive Institute's 2030 Strategy is the result of collective imagination, determination, and shared commitment to a fairer, more inclusive world. We extend our gratitude to our Steering Council, whose leadership, wisdom, and belief in our counterintuitive ideas have guided every step of this journey.

We are equally indebted to our vibrant partner network – a spectrum of allies across civil society, academia, the private sector, and philanthropy – who continually challenge, inspire, and collaborate with us.

Finally, we thank the communities and movements who, through their lived experiences, ideas, and demands for justice, have been the true compass of our work. It is their voices we seek to amplify and their aspirations we are committed to serving, with empathy, courage, and perseverance.

This Strategy belongs to all of us. Together, we drive positive disruption!

COUNTER INTUITIVE INSTITUTE

STRATEGY 2030

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