

# Gender Equality Plan

The Netherlands Cancer Institute  
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## Introduction

The management of the Netherlands Cancer Institute (NKI) firmly believes that a diverse and inclusive organization in which everyone can contribute because everyone feels safe, respected and valued helps to achieve our mission: A cure for every cancer and the best possible care for cancer patients. One aspect of diversity and inclusivity is sex and gender; there are however other components which are equally important such as age, ethnicity, religion, disability, education, and national origin. In this document we only focus on sex and gender.

The NKI is a OECD accredited Comprehensive Cancer Centre combining a research institute and a hospital both focusing on cancer under one roof with one board of directors. The hospital provides treatment, and care for cancer patients, rehabilitation for patients and their relatives via our Centre for Quality of Life, and early cancer detection through the Centre for Early Detection. The hospital treats the most common forms of cancer (breast, colorectal, prostate, melanoma, and lung) and is a centre of expertise for several rare cancer types. The hospital also provides training for specialized oncology doctors, nurses and paramedics. The research at the NKI covers the whole spectrum of cancer research from discovery (fundamental) research via translational research to clinical research and research into (cost) benefits of new treatments. The research portfolio consists of 5 themes: fundamental research, immunology and cancer, precision medicine, image guided interventions, and survivorship. A sixth theme, early cancer detection, is likely to start soon. The hospital and research institute are supported by staff departments covering human resources, finance, quality, safety, IT, catering, cleaning, security, logistics and purchasing. The organization has in total 3,314 employees of which 77% are women and 23% are men; in the research institute only we have 59% women and 41% men.

As an eligibility criterion for the European Commission for funding via the Horizon Europe program, every organization should have a Gender Equality Plan (GEP). As Horizon Europe is supporting research this GEP will focus on our research institute and not cover aspects of gender inclusivity and diversity in our hospital although actions described in this GEP also contribute to improving gender diversity and inclusion in the whole organization. A broader diversity and inclusivity plan, including gender and other components, for the whole organisation is available.

## **GEP development at the NKI**

The NKI has an extensive tradition of developing and implementing gender equality policies and measures. NKI was one of the members of the EC-funded LIBRA consortium (<https://www.eu-libra.eu/>). As a member of this consortium the NKI performed an initial assessment, developed a GEP, implemented actions, and was assessed for its improvements on gender equality at the end of the project. Using this experience and the tools that were provided and developed during the LIBRA project, this GEP was developed. During the preparation we benefitted from the vast experience and know-how available within the EU-LIFE consortium with its dedicated working group on gender equality (<https://eu-life.eu>) in which the NKI actively participates and within the ACT Life Science Community of Practice (<https://lifescicop.act-on-gender.eu/>) in which the NKI is an active associate member.

This GEP is based on the guidelines provided by the EC ([Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans](#)) and the national action plan of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/09/01/nieuw-nationaal-actieplan-voor-diversiteit-en-inclusie>).

During the execution of the LIBRA project a quantitative and qualitative assessment was performed by an independent not-for-profit organization (ASDO; <http://www.asdo-info.org>), which provided a wealth of information about the state of gender equality at the NKI in 2015. This included the existence, availability and quality of policies, procedures, and sex and gender segregated data. It also involved a questionnaire to all NKI employees on different topics such as work-life balance, career development, and the sex-dimension in research involving humans, animals, and material and data derived from them.

This GEP also benefited from data obtained during employee satisfaction surveys performed at our institute over the past few years. These surveys also included items on work-life balance, (sexual) harassment, career development, and policies.

Recently, a new survey, the Nederlands InclusiviteitsMonitor (<https://www.nederlandseinclusiviteitsmonitor.nl/>), was performed among our employees. This survey is developed by Utrecht University and measures the level diversity and inclusivity within the organization. The outcome helped to develop this GEP.

Based on the experience and the data collected during the LIBRA-driven GEP, the outcome of the different surveys, and discussion within our organization, a new GEP was developed which is presented in this document.

## **Gender equality resources**

The NKI has allocated several resources to develop and implement this GEP.

The NKI appointed a dedicated person, Migaisa Poeketi, as ambassador for Inclusivity & Diversity. She reports directly to a member of the Board of Directors.

The NKI developed a dedicated program on Culture & Behaviour, led by Carola van Rijn, to stimulate a culture in which gender equality is promoted. This program also covers other aspects but it focusses on diversity and inclusivity.

An important driving force for diversity and inclusivity in our organization are several bottom-up initiatives which take place. The NKI has a Diversity & Inclusivity committee consisting of PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, technical support staff and group leaders initiated by group leader William Faller. They are organized in three working groups: awareness, action and policy. They meet regularly and analyse, develop and implement different actions. This committee was initiated by employees of the research institute. In the hospital a similar activity has started, and with the help of the Diversity & Inclusivity ambassador these two committees have joined forces. This committee has been an important sounding board during the development of the GEP and will play an important role in the execution.

Within the human resources department our officers support diversity and inclusivity actions, including policy development and implementation.

Finally, the Director of Operations of the research institute, Henri van Luenen, supports the initiatives taken by the ambassador and the committees and supports the initiatives outside the NKI (such as being a member of the EU-LIFE gender equality working group and being an associate member of the ACT Community of Practice).

The Board of Directors and the Director of Operations have made funding available to support the actions proposed by the different bodies to support the GEP.

## **Monitoring and data**

The NKI actively collects data on all employees. Per position within the organisation we record the number of man and woman employees to be able to monitor the sex balance. An option to also report on gender, or at least to expand the options beyond male or female, is under investigation.

Based on the data we have collected over the years we find that our main priority for stimulating gender equality should be at the level of group leader. The NKI has currently 52 group leaders active in discovery and translational research and only 16 of them are women (31%). This number has been stable over the last few years but ideally we would like to see a more even distribution. For postdoctoral fellows, PhD students and technical research staff we have more women than men.

Active monitoring and reporting will be done at the level of male/female group leaders and the processes that could influence this ratio. For instance, sex-segregated data during recruitment of new group leaders will be collected and used to improve the recruitment procedure. To this end the number of man and woman applicants for a group leader position will be monitored as well as the number of men and women applicants that get short listed for the position and for the interview. Possible biases can be detected and corrected during the process and over time.

Other indicators that we identify over time will also be used, like the number of man/woman cum laude thesis defences or the number of internal and external man/woman speakers at our institute. All these data will help us to improve our gender equality.

## **Training**

The NKI provides training that addresses gender equality issues. For instance the NKI promotes the use of unconscious bias awareness trainings. During the LIBRA project, the whole research staff was invited to take the Implicit Association Test developed by Harvard (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>). Its results were communicated afterwards to the entire organisation.

For an inclusive work environment it is important that every employee and guest feels safe. To that end all group leaders have done the Active Bystander Training (<https://www.activebystander.co.uk/>) during the 2-yearly NKI research retreat, and now this same training is also offered to individual researchers and to research groups. The response to this training is very positive.

As part of the Culture & Behavioural program and this GEP other training modules will be offered. Also during our Postdoctoral Career Development program courses on work-life balance and different academic trajectories are offered. During our Leadership program for group leaders several aspects related to gender equality are also addressed such as work-life balance, creating a safe work environment and biases.

Creating sex and gender awareness in planning and execution of research is a topic that deserves extra attention in our organization. During some of our introductory modules we already provide reflections on this subject; for instance during the course on animal experiments and in our courses on statistics. The aspect of sex and gender in our research is being critically reviewed by our ethical committees on animal experiments and clinical trials. If needed they request the researcher to adapt their research plan to take sex and gender better into account.

Researchers can train themselves using the e-learning in sex and gender dimension in biomedical research developed during LIBRA by the European Institute of Oncology (<https://www.eu-libra.eu/work-packages/integrate-sex-gender-dimension-research>; <https://www.libra-sgr.eu/libra/login/index.php>).

## Thematic gender equality items

### *Work-life balance and organisational culture*

The culture at the NKI should support women and men equally and all staff should be properly supported during their work at the NKI and to advance their careers. This should happen alongside their other obligations such as taking care of children, elderly, and/or sick or disabled relatives, community activities, and finding time to rest. A healthy work-life balance is a prerequisite.

### Actions

Topic	What	Who	When	Monitor
Work-life balance course	Continue the 1) Work-life balance module during the Postdoctoral Career Development	The courses are for 1) postdocs (and late year PhD students) and 2) group leaders. They are	Continuous	Measure participation.

	Program and 2) the Leadership program.	organized by 1) postdocs under the supervision of the dean and by 2) Human resources.		
Leave of absence	The policies for parental leave and other forms of leave will be reviewed and if appropriate modifications will be proposed.	The Diversity & Inclusivity committee has taken the initiative.	End of 2022 the review will be completed.	-
Flexible working conditions	Working times are flexible at the NKI. A home working policy has been implemented. An evaluation of this policy will be performed.	Human resources.	Summer 2023 (one year after implementation).	Extend of working from home in combination with satisfaction.

### *Gender balance in leadership and decision-making*

Our institute has less women group leaders than men group leaders. This difference cannot be explained by the number of women and men postdoctoral fellows as in that category, and at the PhD student level, women outnumber men. Other factors play apparently an important role. Recruitment is an important aspect (see next item) but other factors might also play a role. One such factors is the gender balance in leadership and decision-making. We aim to include equal numbers of women and men in the different bodies within our institute, taking into account the fact that the lower number of women group leaders should not be overloaded with committee work due to the fact that they are a smaller group.

### Actions

Topic	What	Who	When	Monitor
Committee composition	The composition of all committees is constantly reviewed in order to have a balanced composition. This holds especially for the Internal	Management of the NKI.	Continuous	Fraction of elected women BVO members and fraction of women heads of divisions.

	Advisory Board (BVO) and the Heads of the Divisions			
Review committees	The NKI regularly uses external peers for research evaluation. The representation of women peers within these committees should be balanced	Management of the NKI.	Continuous	Fraction of women members of review committees
Speakers	During conferences and meetings organized by the NKI a balanced number of women speakers should present their research.	Conference organizers and the invited speakers committee.	Continuous	Fraction of women speakers for the Friday seminars.
Recognition of additional work	Researchers are evaluated on their research, but their role in committees, board, etc. should be recognized and valued as well. This is indicated in the evaluation protocol of the NKI.	Management of the NKI.	Continuous	-

*Gender equality in recruitment and career progression*

Our institute should ensure that women and men get equal chances to develop and advance their careers. This is only possible if the recruitment process is designed in such a way that (implicit) biases and other obstacles are removed.

Actions

Topic	What	Who	When	Monitor
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Number of group leaders	The NKI has less women group leader than men group leaders. Our aim is to have equal numbers	Management of the NKI.	Continuous	Fraction of women and men group leaders
Implicit bias	The text of the vacancy , the composition of the recruitment committee and the recruitment criteria can all bias the recruitment process. The NKI purchased a licence to correct gender bias texts (Develop Diverse), the recruitment committee members follow a unconscious bias training and the recruitment procedure is gender neutral (including a gender balanced committee).	Management of the NKI.	Continuous	-
Career breaks	Career breaks (e.g. for care duties) are not negatively valued during research assessment.	Recruitment committee.	Continuous	-
Use of gender balanced language and pictures	Text and images used by our organization should be gender balanced. The NKI website has been built again from scratch and gender inclusive language and inclusive pictures	Communication	Continuous	-

	were used. Also in other forms of communication this will be the goal.			
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*Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content*

Many aspects of cancer are sex-related, for instance the development of human prostate cancer. Sex of the patient, tumour material and/or animals models is often noted and considered while planning and executing experiments. However, awareness of sex and gender differences should be included in our research and in our training curriculum.

Our research review committees, such as the medical ethical committee, the animal welfare committee, and our research council, take sex and gender into consideration when reviewing research proposals. It is also part of (introductory) courses.

**Actions**

Topic	What	Who	When	Monitor
Training on sex and gender in research	Researchers should be aware of sex and gender differences in their research. Training will be offered to them to create better awareness.	PhD student dean	Continuous	-

*Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment*

A safe work environment is essential for diversity and inclusivity. The NKI strongly opposes to (sexual) harassment, bullying and other inappropriate behaviour. Our Culture & Behaviour program addresses many aspects of such behaviour.

The NKI has a policies in place which should protect anyone from inappropriate behaviour. The NKI also has a confidential advisor that can support employees that encounter such behaviour. Furthermore, through our active bystander training we empower everyone to take action when they experience or observe inappropriate behaviour.

**Actions**

Topic	What	Who	When	Monitor
Inappropriate behaviour	How often does it happen, are there clusters of such	Human resources	Continuous	A yearly report on the number of



	behaviours, does it affect specific groups? These questions are important in order to specifically target certain groups with training and/or support.			cases and if there is a trend.
Active bystander	One way to create a safe environment in which inappropriate behaviour is immediately addressed, is through active bystanders. The training has been given to all group leaders but should also be followed by other members of our community	Everyone should follow the course initiated by the group leader and supported by Human resources	Continuous	50% of the employees should have done the course by mid-2023.