

# Gender Equality Plan

The Netherlands Cancer Institute  
February 24, 2026

## 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 excellent care for every patient. 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 all solid cancers, both common forms of cancer (breast, colorectal, prostate, melanoma, and lung) and rarer ones. NKI 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 6 themes: fundamental research, immunology and cancer, precision medicine, image guided interventions, survivorship, and early detection. 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 approximately 3,500 employees of which 2,450 identify themselves as woman, 974 as man, and 2 as non-binary; in the research institute only we have 747 employees of which approximately 60% women and 40% men.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers from 2024

inclusion in the whole organization. A broader diversity and inclusivity plan, including gender and other components, for the whole organisation is available.



Prof. dr. Thijn Brummelkamp  
Scientific Director  
Member of the Board of Directors

### **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://eu-life.eu/research-excellence/projects-collaborations/libra>). 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, the previous GEP was developed. An updated version is presented here. 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 was an active associate member.

The NKI has signed the Charter Diversity of the Social and economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) in December 2024. This charter includes a plan of action.

This GEP is based on the guidelines provided by the EC, version October 2025.

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.

### **Gender equality resources**

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

Within the People & Organisation department our officers support diversity and inclusivity actions, including policy development and implementation. One officer has diversity and inclusivity as a specific focus point.

The NKI has appointed a roving scientist that can support women scientists in their research when they work less during certain periods (e.g. during and after pregnancy). Priority is given to support women scientists, but men can also request support when they take up paternity leave.

An important driving force for diversity and inclusivity in our organization are several bottom-up initiatives which take place. The NKI has a Diversity, Equality & Inclusivity (DEI) committee consisting of employees from different sectors of our organisation including PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, and technical support staff. 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 since several years they work together to promote DEI in our organisation.

Finally, the Director of Operations of the research institute supports the initiatives taken by the DEI committee and supports the initiatives outside the NKI (such as being a member of the EU-LIFE gender equality working group).

The Board of Directors and the Director of Operations have funding available to support actions proposed by the DEI committee 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, woman and non-binary employees to be able to monitor the gender balance.

Based on the data we have collected over the years we find that our main priority for stimulating gender equality within the research institute should be at the level of group leader. The NKI has currently 52 group leaders active in discovery and translational research and only 14 of them are women (27%). This number has been stable over the last few years but ideally we would like to see more women at this position. For postdoctoral fellows, PhD students and technical research staff there are more women than men.

At the Board of Directors-level, we have currently a 50:50 representation of men and women.

Active monitoring and reporting will be continued at the level of men and women 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 men and women 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 men/women cum laude thesis defences or the number of internal and external men/women speakers at our institute. All these data will help us to improve our gender equality.

Having a strict salary system with automatic annual increases up to a maximum per job type, prevents biased payment of men versus women. For this reason, the payment difference between men and women is not calculated each year.

## 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 in 2022, and now this same training is offered to individual researchers and to research groups. The response to this training is very positive.

The NKI offers an e-learning on diversity and inclusivity. This course is free of charge and offered to all employees (available in both Dutch and English).

Creating sex and gender awareness in planning and execution of research is a topic that receives 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 also 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.libra-sgr.eu/libra/login/index.php>).

## Thematic gender equality items

### *Work/private life balance and organisational culture*

A healthy balance between work life and private life is important. 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 in their private life such as taking care of children, elderly, and/or sick or disabled relatives, community activities, and finding time to rest.

### Actions

Topic	What	Who	When	Monitor
Roving scientist	NKI will offer support by the roving scientist for women (and if possible men) on a temporary research contract during	The roving scientist has been recruited and trained to have a broad skill set (not all skills can be covered by a	Continuous, with an evaluation in 2027.	The support provided by the roving scientist are recorded.

	pregnancy/maternity leave, illness and periods in which care is provided to relatives. With the roving scientist we hope to give women the opportunity to develop their career in periods when they are absent from work.	single person). All women scientists on a temporary contract can request support during periods of absence from the roving scientist (postdoctoral scientist have priority for support due to their employment contract and stage in their career. If capacity permits men can also request support.		
Leave of absence	There are several options and policies for parental leave and other forms of leave. The different forms of leave will be published on our intranet so that everyone can know and request leave when needed.	The People & Organisation department will ensure a correct overview of all forms of leave are available for any employee.	End of 2025 made up to date and with any change of law or collective labour agreement, the overview will be updated.	Our document management system will generate automatic alerts to check and if needed update the document.
Flexible working conditions	Working times are flexible at the NKI. A home working policy has been implemented and care-duties are considered when planning meetings.	People & Organisation department and supervisors.	Continuous	In employee surveys and during annual job evaluation interviews, the topic of flexible working conditions is addressed. The outcome of surveys is analysed and the extent to which job evaluation interviews are held is monitored (not the content).

Cultural change	To create and maintain an inclusive organisation that promotes gender equality, continuous actions should be taken to raise and maintain awareness. The DEI committee will organize several events each year, the rainbow flag is shown in front of the institute and the institute takes part in the Pride week.	The DEI committee will organize events throughout the year. The Director of Operations, with the support of the DEI committee and the communication department, will apply to take part during the Canal Parade.	Continuous	The activities of the DEI committee are recorded and an annual report is included in the institute's annual account.
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*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.

The Board of Directors has a balanced gender (2 women, 2 men).

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 Advisory Board (BVO) and the Heads of the Divisions	Management of the NKI.	Continuous	Fraction of elected women BVO members and fraction of women heads of divisions.
Review committees	The NKI regularly uses external	Management of the NKI.	Continuous	Fraction of women members

	peers for research evaluation. The representation of women peers within these committees should be balanced			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 seminars.
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 were used. Also in other forms of communication this will be the goal.	Communication	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
Number of group leaders	The NKI has less women group leader than men	Management of the NKI.	Continuous	Fraction of women and men group leaders.

	group leaders. Our aim is to have equal numbers. The text of the vacancy, the composition of the recruitment committee, the recruitment criteria and implicit biases can all influence the recruitment process.			
Career breaks	Career breaks (e.g. for care duties) are not negatively valued during research assessment (e.g. evaluation of junior group leader when they are up for tenure).	NKI management and evaluation committees	Continuous, when an evaluation takes place.	Fraction of women and men junior group leaders that progress to group leader.

*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	Organisers of the animal training program and the biostatistical course.	Continuous	-

	awareness. The topic is included in training programs.			
Experimental design integration sex and gender dimension.	When an animal experiment or an experiment with human subjects is designed, the sex dimension is included in the design (including statistics) of the experiment.	The researchers.	Continuous	The review committees of experiments involving animals or humans (or human material/data) check the sex and gender dimension of the proposed experiment as part of their standard review. No special monitoring is foreseen.

#### *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 behaviours, does it affect specific groups? These questions are important in order to specifically target certain groups with training and/or support.	People & Organisation officers	Continuous	As part of our annual report in which the number of cases are reported and if there is a trend.

	Signals from the organisation are taken seriously and they come together at the People & Organisation department and if such signals are noticed, they take action.			
Employee survey	If an employee survey is performed, social safety is a topic that is usually included and based on the answers (which are anonymous and aggregated), action will be taken.	People & Organisation officer and NKI management	When an employee survey is performed (not planned yet)	The outcomes of consecutive surveys are monitored for improvements and/or trends.
Active bystander training or other training/mentoring	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 if they would like to. The institute offers an active bystander training or other forms of group support or	Everyone (individually or as a group) is offered training, coaching and/or mentoring to create a safe work environment or address a situation which feels unsafe.	Continuous	-

	individual coaching.			
Confidential advisors	In order to allow anyone to report a situation of unwanted behaviours, the NKI as system in place of internal confidential advisors and external confidential advisors.	The Board of Directors, via the People & Organisation department, sees to an effective system of confidential advisors and the clear communication about their role and their availability/contact details.	Continuous	The number of cases are reported each year in the annual report of the institute.

