

# VIB POLICY

# GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

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Since its inception, VIB has always focused on creating a stimulating and welcoming environment for everybody in the organization. People can work in an environment that is scientifically of the highest standard in life sciences. Scientists and supporting personnel can work in optimal conditions (infrastructure-wise), with state-of-the-art equipment and an array of supporting activities. Additionally, VIB cares for its people and wishes to offer a safe environment where everybody is treated equally and with respect. Everybody, regardless of gender, gender identity, nationality, ethnical background, religious or political convictions, age and position should be able to flourish and develop. In all, VIB wishes to build a culture where people feel they can bring their whole selves to work.

Within the framework of equality, VIB has, during the past years, prioritized on the topic of **gender equality** as we realized that the underrepresentation of female PIs was striking and no longer acceptable. Changing this balance for the better has proven not to be easy; it requires constant attention, bold action, and time! Nevertheless, VIB has succeeded in improving the representation of women in the PI community from 15% in 2018 to 29% in 2021. We are fully aware that 29% is not sufficient and we will continue our efforts to reach the level of 50 % within the coming years.

Below is an overview of the various initiatives that are currently standard practice at VIB or are intended to be implemented soon.

## **Balance between work and private life**

The VIB policy wishes to strengthen an organizational culture that recognizes the importance of a solid balance between work and private life.

Current initiatives:

- People can work from home (if the job allows it) up to 2 days a week (in non-covid circumstances)
- We aim to provide childcare on campus
- We offer flexible working hours, aligned with school timing for children and traffic
- We aim to avoid organizing meetings outside the normal working hours
- We encourage parental leave for fathers
- We motivate the PIs to allow 'time to de-connect' for all team members. People should feel comfortable with not checking e-mails 24/7. We advise our leaders to inform their team that they do not expect immediate response to their e-mails sent beyond the normal working

hours. (Situations like 'submitting a paper before a deadline or a grant' can be exceptions to this rule).

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

- VIB will continue its efforts to increase the number of female group leaders and center directors, through considerate recruitment processes (see next item). The overall and basic requirement remains the scientific quality of the research so far, the future perspectives offered by the lines of research and the ability to successfully lead a research group with an eye on well-being of all team members
- VIB will also continue its efforts to obtain a gender balanced line-up of speakers in conferences, members of the board of directors and members of various committees
- VIB offers ample support and financial benefits to its research centers in their commitment to find and hire female group leaders. This has resulted in an almost doubling of the number of female leaders since 2018 (from 15% in 2018 to 29% beginning 2022).

## **Gender balance in recruitment and career development**

### ***Recruitment***

VIB wishes to be an attractive employer to everybody, regardless of the position in the organization. That's why VIB carefully considers on how to make itself known to the outside world. Therefore, the whole recruitment process is always subject to the following leading principles:

- All ads consist of a clear description of the job purpose, key responsibilities, desired qualifications, skills and knowledge, relevant experience and other aspects that are needed to be able to fulfill the position successfully
- The job description and the required profile of the candidates are written in a gender-neutral and inviting language.
- We strive for gender balance in all selection panels
- We engage in active scouting and contacting potential female candidates for vacant PI positions
- We carefully investigate the CVs and take the impact of periods of childbirth or other caring activities on scientific output into account when comparing candidates.
- The shortlist of candidates for leading positions is gender balanced. If not, the procedure is put on hold until this balance is achieved
- During the selection process both the 'potential' of the candidate and the past performance (publications, research grants) are considered

### ***Career development***

- VIB will be implementing mentoring programs for starting PIs
- VIB offers leadership development programs and individual coaching sessions and workshops for all staff in a 'people management' position.
- VIB offers training in self-confidence (mainly aimed at women)
- We widely advertise our training and development opportunities
- Salary scales are gender neutral and totally transparent
- VIB wishes to increase the visibility of women by ensuring gender balance in the VIB-wide scientific talks program, in career talks, VIB conferences, in the VIBnews, presenting their work in the yearly International Advisory Board .... In the framework of conferences and the

scientific talks program, VIB assures a 50/50 gender balance for invited speakers on the shortlist.

### ***Evaluation and promotion***

- When evaluating or assessing the research output of a PI, VIB takes maternity, paternity, and parental leave periods into consideration
- We strive for gender balance in evaluation and assessment panels

### **Gender dimension in research**

As from 2022, VIB will continue to encourage the awareness of gender dimension in research. This topic will be incorporated in the VIB training program and newcomers will be encouraged to follow the dedicated online learning at the start of their VIB journey. A training plan will be rolled out by the training unit of VIB HQ.

The goal is to be able to assess whether and how gender and gender analysis will be considered in the research output of VIB. We will need to find methodologies whereby gender aspects and analysis will become a normal aspect of the research outcomes.

### **Gender related harassment**

VIB will uphold a zero-tolerance policy for discriminatory behavior such as harassment and bullying and therefore developed a policy that is aimed at everybody, regardless of gender, gender identity, nationality, ethnical background, age, religious and political beliefs, and position in the organization. This means that all forms of (sexual) harassment and micro aggressions will never be tolerated. The policy can be found on VIB's intranet, and it informs everybody about the steps to take when confronted with any form of harassment and about the action VIB will take.

Not looking the other way when confronted with unacceptable behavior towards colleagues is an important weapon in our struggle against this behavior. Therefore, VIB will start with 'Active bystander workshops, enabling everybody to come forward and to speak up, or at least do something when victimized or when witnessing any kind of unacceptable behavior.

On the same line, VIB created a code of conduct to be read and signed by everybody entering the organization, irrespective of his or her position. This code of conduct will be rolled out in the course of 2022. It includes VIB's commitment in providing a safe, positive, welcoming, and inclusive workplace and it describes the expected behavior of all VIB staff.

### **Monitoring and data gathering**

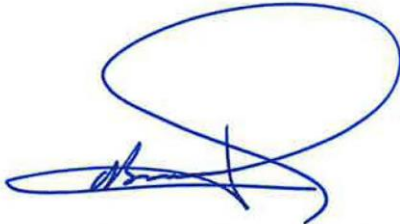
VIB is equipped with an efficient data warehouse that is directly linked to the personnel database. The HR dashboard, originating from the data warehouse, is fueled daily and provides up-to-date information about, amongst others, the gender parity at all functional levels at VIB. This provides us with the necessary tools to constantly monitor the gender situation within VIB, per research center, per position, age, ...

*Our statement on gender balance is fully supported and endorsed by VIB's management who is convinced that diversity in all its forms and at all levels in the organization will help in creating a welcoming, safe, and supportive working environment.*


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