

Date: 09/10/2023

Approved by the Executive Committee

EMSP Gender Equality Plan (First stage)

2023-2025

The aim of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) of the European Multiple Sclerosis Platform is to ensure equal opportunities for all its employees, and more specifically employees focused on research.

We proceed from the principles of gender equality in all our activities without compromising on competence and quality.

We wish to support all employees, irrespective of gender (as well as sexual orientation, nationality, age, and other individual characteristics), and believe that our work and research will benefit the society the most if the background of the employees/researchers involved in conducting research is as diverse as possible, and if the aspects of gender have also been taken into account in the work being carried out.

The current state of gender equality in Belgium, has not reached the equality of men and women in terms of their position and opportunities. There exists a great gender imbalance across academic positions, the proportion of women in the decision-making bodies regarding research policy is modest, and considerably more men apply for and receive research grants than women. To improve the indicators of gender equality, it is imperative to tackle these issues systematically.

The aim of this GEP is to pay more attention to the aspects of gender in all its activities, and thus contribute to promoting gender equality in the workplan and the Belgian research landscape.

The responsibility of promoting gender equality is shared by the governance bodies of the organisation as well as the management.

This first Plan is based on an internal assessment of the current state-of-play, and it will be further developed in collaboration with the EMSP Executive Committee, the management, and the employees.

Specific activities for achieving the set objectives and the employees responsible for them shall be agreed upon and their implementation monitored by the Executive Committee of the organisation. The Plan has been approved by the Executive Committee of the European Multiple Sclerosis Platform and it will be revised upon further consultation in 2024.

Subsequently, the objectives and underlying principles of the Gender Equality Plan, as well as the measures which will be proposed and adopted by the management to meet the set objectives, have been listed.

The five main objectives are as follows:

- work-life balance and organisational culture;
- gender balance in leadership and decision-making;
- gender equality in recruitment and career progression;
- integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content;
- measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

General measures that will be undertaken as a first step (2023-2025):

To make fair and inclusive decisions, gender awareness, incl. awareness of possible problems caused by unconscious bias, is of utmost importance for the Executive Committee, the management, and the employees of EMSP. Increased awareness helps to prevent discrimination and ensures making fairer decisions. Gender awareness also contributes to achieving the main objectives of the EMSP's Gender Equality Plan.

- A gender equality audit will be implemented to assess the situation;
- Gender equality issues will be introduced and discussed in the Executive Committee of EMSP and among the staff. For ensuring a better understanding of gender equality among the employees as well as among the members of the Executive Committee, we will:

- Improve our competences regarding gender equality, incl. by participating in training courses.
 - Integrate the aspects of gender into the training courses we organise, if applicable.
 - Assemble existing and compile new need-based information materials on gender equality, incl. materials on the importance of considering unconscious bias and on integrating the gender dimension in research.
 - Share our experiences, good practices, and developments regarding gender equality within our organisation.
- The internal regulation of the organisation and other documents will be reviewed to reflect non-discrimination as a principle, to ensure that non-sexist language is adopted in all internal and external documents;
 - Training and capacity-building seminars will be carried out;
 - A more detailed GEP will be developed.

Objective 1: Work-life Balance

A respectful, open, and welcoming organisational culture is sensitive to a variety of gender identities and does not consider women and men as homogeneous groups. A key component of the transformation of an organisation's culture for advancing gender equality is work-life balance. Work-life balance is relevant for both women and men and involves ensuring that all staff are properly supported to advance their career alongside personal responsibilities that they may hold outside of the workplace, including caring responsibilities.

EMSP acknowledges that the staff have responsibilities and commitments outside of their work and sets within its working conditions reasonable tools to enable the staff to balance their work and home lives within EMSP operational requirements and policies. This framework includes the different leaves (Parental, medical, educational, etc.). These are explicitly mentioned in the Work Regulations. In addition, a remote working structure has been established.

EMSP commits to closely monitoring the workload and support its staff when required.

Actions in relation to organisational culture may include measures to ensure that all staff feel valued and welcomed at work:

- EMSP has updated its internal rules and procedures to include measures to better accompany its employees in ensuring work-life balance.
- Regular monitoring of the employees will be conducted through individual yearly assessments and adjustments are proposed when needed.

Objective 2: Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

Although the proportion of women among the personal of nonprofit organisations such as EMSP in Brussels, seems to be higher than men, EMSP will ensure that the gender balance is maintained among the members of its decision-making bodies, advisory bodies, and management team. For this purpose, EMSP will:

- Consciously pay more attention to gender when searching for new member in leadership and decision-making positions.
- Prefer a candidate of underrepresented gender if the candidates are of equal standing.
- Ask other organisations responsible for nominating the candidates to be part of our decision-making bodies to also nominate candidates of underrepresented gender to convene decision-making bodies with a greater gender balance if needed.
- Compile statistical overviews and guidelines highlighting the aspects of gender in the process of searching for the members of the different committees and decision-making bodies to acknowledge the issue more widely.

Objective 3: Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

EMSP is to improve gender balance among the applicants for its staff members. To achieve a greater gender balance among the applicants, we will:

- Present the information regarding Open positions in an inclusive and gender-neutral manner.
- Present gender-disaggregated data of the applicants to the decision making personal and bodies.
- Draw the attention of the decision-makers to possible unconscious bias and to the importance of considering the aspects of gender.

EMSP supports equal treatment of all people, refraining from any form of discrimination based on gender (also from indirect discrimination, which occurs when seemingly neutral rules give an advantage to some researchers or target groups). Among other things, we pay particular attention to the impact that being on parental leave has on one's career. To ensure equal treatment, we will:

- Examine our rules and regulations to make sure that they ensure equal opportunities for everyone.
- Take into consideration a justified leave of absence from work, such as a parental leave, military service, health condition, etc. in the preparatory materials relating to making decisions.
- Adhere to the principles of equal treatment and proceed only from established criteria when making decisions.

Objective 4: Inclusion of the gender dimension into research and teaching content

EMSP will emphasise the issue of gender imbalance among the MS research community and other research fields in which EMSP will be involved during information days and other meetings with the target groups and their representatives to raise the awareness of gender imbalance among potential applicants and their institutions.

EMSP will communicate and share information with the researchers and R&D institutions with whom it is involved on the gender dimension and its impact in research.

We will remain gender-aware in all our channels of communication and will:

- Monitor our use of language and refrain from reproducing gender stereotypes.
- Monitor the representation of men and women in illustrative materials.
- Proceed from the principles of gender diversity when writing press releases, news, profile articles, etc.
- Try to ensure gender balance among the speakers at EMSP public events, if at all possible. As is the case with decision-making bodies, we consider the representation of the underrepresented gender of at least 40% to be a good gender balance.
- Emphasise the need to underline the aspects of gender in various materials and statistics: the data, wherever possible, will be disaggregated by gender.

Objective 5: Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

EMSP is responsible for providing a safe and healthy working environment, by preventing as far as reasonably practicable, any work-related risk to the safety and health of workers.

EMSP will:

- Ensure that relevant information and training, including policies relating to harassment and dignity at work that set out expectations for the behaviour of staff and managers are shared and implemented.
- Actively use and encourage use of inclusive language around the organisation in relation to gender but also other forms of identity and diversity;
- Adopt and implement, a workplace policy on violence and harassment;
- Take into account violence and harassment and associated psychosocial risks in the management of occupational safety and health;
- Identify hazards and assess the risks of violence and harassment, with the participation of workers and their representatives, and take measures to prevent and control them.