Gender Equality Plan NWO-D

Date: 23 February 2022

1. Introduction

NWO facilitates world-class scientific research. This research has scientific and societal impact. One aspect of this is encouraging an inclusive science culture with an eye for diversity in the broadest sense of the term. In other words: diversity in cultural, ethnic and/or religious background, in gender, sexual orientation, ability to work/health, age, talents and qualities. It is important that science is conducted by people with different backgrounds and areas of experience. A diversity in perspectives ensures innovative and creative research. Furthermore, trust in science is increased if there is a better representation of society in research.

Gender equality, equal opportunities, academic freedom and social safety in science are important themes that are high on the agenda of the political and public debate in the Netherlands. The European Commission has also set itself the objective of facilitating gender equality in European research. For example, the European Commission has made gender equality plans compulsory for funding from Horizon Europe, the framework programme for research and innovation.

The responsibility and contribution of NWO towards improving diversity and inclusion (D&I) in science is twofold:

✓ NWO has the responsibility, position and means to exert influence on encouraging inclusion and diversity in the scientific community. By encouraging diversity and inclusion in the primary process of NWO, determining a clear own course and setting criteria for the scientific community, NWO can bring its weight to bear on improving diversity and inclusion in science. We do this with the so-called D&I granting policy of NWO.

✓ In addition, we have the D&I employer’s policy by means of which NWO strives to be an inclusive organisation with a diverse workforce. Facilitating scientific research and increasing scientific and societal impact, in brief, the success of NWO, stands or falls with the quality, dedication and diversity of our employees. We strive to realise a work environment in which there is room for diversity, everybody feels comfortable, safe and valued.

2. Our approach

The theme diversity and inclusion has been high on the NWO agenda for many years. We adopt a positive approach for which we focus on the added value of diversity and inclusion. To achieve our ambitions, we have adopted an integral approach and work at the cultural, institutional and individual levels. The ultimate aim is to realise a sustainable embedding of diversity and inclusion within NWO in both the granting- and the employer’s policy.

The Implementation Plan Diversity Policy was approved in 2018. This integral plan contains objectives for the NWO and ZonMw granting policy, and for the NWO-D and NWO-I employer’s policy. Many objectives from this plan have been realised in recent years. An updated plan is now being worked on with the aim of a) properly embedding the policy in the current organisation structure, and b) adapting the policy to internal and external developments. In doing so, the lessons learned from the past were, of course, incorporated. However, the finishing line is not yet in sight, even with this updated plan. For NWO, diversity and inclusion are challenges that require ongoing attention and demand continuous development and monitoring of new initiatives, responding to changes in society and the scientific field. Monitoring takes place based on the data reported on, and the produced plans are monitored annually.
NWO has made this commitment visible to society at large by signing the Diversity Charter of SER Diversity at Work and the Declaration of Amsterdam. In 2020, the National action plan for more diversity and inclusion in higher education was launched in close collaboration with various parties, including NWO. In addition, NWO is also a member of Workplace Pride.

3. How does NWO promote gender equality?

3.1. Resources
As stated, NWO focuses on diversity and inclusion in the scientific community as well as on diversity within its own workforce. Both of these pillars have an NWO-wide programme led by a programme coordinator. Both pillars are secured at the highest level within the NWO Executive Board and the NWO Team of Directors.
- The D&I granting policy has started and (partially) completed projects aimed at inclusive assessment, collaboration and communication, diversity and target groups, and the positioning of NWO in the field. Each project has a project leader.
- The employer’s policy is implemented by a workgroup in which HRM, communication and the D&I networks (LGBTI+) are represented.

For both pillars, capacity is available for the development, implementation, embedding and monitoring of the D&I policy. Besides making time and people available, there is also a budget for various projects that contribute to more insights into the boundary conditions for diversity and inclusion in the scientific field and the best way to facilitate diversity and inclusion in the scientific field. NWO aims to gradually embed these projects in all of its funding instruments. The following initiatives are currently in progress:

1. We are developing measures that counteract implicit associations related to women and minorities during the assessment of scientific research. We are doing that by modifying the assessment criteria in NWO calls, improving texts and the choice of words to remove barriers for various target groups and improving our expertise in this. The budget for this is €1,400,000, of which €700,000 has been awarded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW).
2. To encourage women in the natural and engineering sciences, a temporary budget of €2,500,000 per year has been made available by the Ministry of OCW. To encourage researchers who have a migration background, a budget of €2,500,000 per year has been made available as well.
3. To encourage women in the Talent programme (Aspasia), a structural budget of €3,000,000 per year is being made available by the Ministry of OCW.
4. Mosaic is a PhD grant programme aimed at the in the Netherlands underrepresented group of graduates with a migration background from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean region, Central and Southern America and Turkey. It is a science-wide programme; every research subject is eligible for funding. A total of €4,000,000 is available for a follow-up to the programme: Mosaic 2.0.
5. The goal of the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH) is to achieve equal representation of women in the university community. This network receives a basic grant from NWO.

3.2. Data collection and monitoring
Information about diversity and inclusion within NWO is collected and reported on in various ways.

Annual external reports
As an employer, NWO annually reports on the male-female ratios of its own workforce and governance positions, as well as of the grants applied for and awarded (such as the Talent Scheme, the Open Competition and the Dutch Research Agenda).
NWO also supplies data to the European research project CRITERIA that is realised by the Research on Research Institute.
Internal reports
From 2022 onwards, diversity aspects of the workforce such as male/female ratio, but also salary, part-time factor and age will be reported on and analysed in a personnel dashboard and presented in the departments each trimester. In addition, attention for diversity is also embedded in the planning and control cycle reports at all levels (from departments to Executive Board). As part of the granting policy, a D&I data dashboard is also being developed in which all available data will be made more comprehensible to facilitate its use. The recurring employee survey is an important benchmark moment for the measurement of inclusion, well-being and social safety of employees.

Ahead of the signing of the Declaration of Amsterdam, NWO already completed the benchmark of Workplace Pride last year to gain more insight into the quality of the organisation’s LGBTI+ policy. The benchmark proposes practical improvements and provides insight into how the organisation scores compared to similar organisations. One of the points for improvement that emerged from this is the strengthening and supporting of structures that contribute to the inclusion of LGBTI+ employees on the work floor. In addition, it will be investigated whether the employment conditions are inclusive for all groups of employees.

All of these figures will ensure a better insight into diversity and therefore provide valuable information for targeted initiatives to increase diversity and inclusion.

3.3. Training and capacity building
To facilitate diversity and improve the inclusivity experienced in the organisation, it is important that all its employees are involved in the process. Awareness will be increased by involving many employees in the projects and campaigns. By devoting attention to implicit bias and training employees to recognise this, everybody becomes more aware of these predilections and employees are also enabled to help each other in this regard. This process has two pillars as well, namely the employer’s policy and granting policy. In recent years, many results have already been achieved. The current overview can be read on the NWO diversity and inclusion webpage.

Several recent and impactful changes/interventions that tackle implicit bias have been highlighted below:

- The uniform narrative CV was introduced in all NWO Talent Programmes. With this, the assessment focuses more on quality and (sustainable) impact and less on quantity and prestige.

- In 2020, NWO developed policy for inclusive assessments and introduced information videos for selection committee members and referees to optimise the process of assessing research proposals. We want to expand the often limited ideal image about what makes a good researcher or a good proposal by making implicit bias explicit. Via videos, fact sheets and webpages, we also provide tools to make the overall assessment process more inclusive. The video for committee members will be shown at each committee meeting or consultation of committee members. Policy officers who supervise those committee meetings have followed the training ‘An inclusive assessment process’ so that they have the knowledge and tools they need for this task. Nine NWO employees have been obtained the skills to train fellow policy officers.

- Based on the same rationale, NWO as an employer will introduce a more inclusive manner of recruitment and selection. The recruitment and selection process provides many opportunities to realise a diverse and inclusive NWO. We want to be able to reach everybody on the labour market and ensure that everybody feels welcome to apply for jobs at NWO and contribute to the results achieved by NWO. Furthermore, we will actively search for people and talents that add to the current workforce. Reducing implicit bias is particularly important in the recruitment process. Everyone involved in recruiting and selecting new employees is trained, starting with the HRM team. In line with this, the language used to recruit new personnel in the labour market is also being examined.
- Line managers play an important role in the culture within the organisation by creating a safe and stimulating working environment for all employees and by setting a good example. In 2021, NWO started a leadership programme in which all line managers will work together on their development. One of the objectives is to give managers tools for creating and/or maintaining a safe and inclusive work environment at all levels of the organisation, and between the different levels of the organisation.

- The inclusive ‘NWO celebrates ...’ calendar is an initiative to increase the involvement and awareness of all employees in the area of D&I. It is a calendar on which all national and international special days are noted: days that we can celebrate together as NWO employees. We hope this will help us get to know each other better and acquire more knowledge about days that we ourselves are not used to celebrating so that we can open up the conversation about which (festive) days are special for us and why.

- We organise all NWO events as inclusively as possible. In addition, the theme D&I also takes centre stage during several employees’ events, such as a Connect meeting for all employees around the theme Implicit Bias.

- At NWO, we strive to provide employees and visitors with the resources and facilities they need. Examples are wheelchair accessibility, milk expressing/breastfeeding rooms and prayer/quiet rooms or the hiring of an interpreter.

- More attention has been accorded to the LGBTI+ community at NWO in recent years. This has mainly taken shape in the LGBTI+ contact persons’ consultation, joining Workplace Pride (with the organisation of a Workplace Pride Tech conference in the autumn of 2021), network meetings and attention for Coming Out Day. In the coming years, the network function will therefore be expanded, a more inclusive culture will be built, and barriers to expressing your LGBTI+ identity will be removed. At the offices of NWO, it will be investigated whether it is possible to realise at least one gender-neutral toilet or block of toilets at a comfortable walking distance from the workstation.

3.4. Work-life balance and the culture within the organisation.

NWO believes it is important that all employees can do their work in a motivated manner during their entire career and, therefore, in various stages of their lives. Every employee should enjoy working at NWO. We call this ‘sustainable deployability’. To our mind, a good work-life balance is an important condition to achieve this. We offer a wide range of possibilities for realising a work-life balance in different situations or stages of life. Depending on individual circumstances (‘stages of life’), employees can have a greater need for more time for their private lives. Schemes have been included in the collective labour agreement (CAO) for the temporary or more long-term adjustment of working hours. In addition, the CAO contains various forms of special leave for specific events, including paid parental leave for parents, foster parents and adoptive parents. If a business trip must be made, the employer will reimburse incidental childcare costs. There is paid care leave for colleagues who need to care for a sick relative. It is also possible to temporarily fulfil a less demanding position if somebody’s circumstances necessitate that.

For older employees, we have the Generation Plan Scheme, which offers employees who are less than five years from their state pension age the possibility to work for one or two days less per week (with the partial preservation of salary). In addition, the ABP pension scheme gives the possibility to fully or partially retire from the age of 60 years onwards.

Attention for employees’ work-life balance consists not just of schemes but is also embedded in our way of working and culture. Examples of this are the recurring employee survey, the leadership programme and the interviews that are part of the Performance and Appraisal cycle.
Just like many other organisations, NWO has developed a model for hybrid working. Principles have been formulated that form a basis for making work agreements about hybrid working. As a result of hybrid working, work and private life will increasingly overlap. This can ensure a better balance in all of a person’s responsibilities. At the same time, it is also the responsibility of NWO as an employer, and of each employee, to make good agreements so that all employees can do their work as well as possible, depending on the circumstances.

And this theme is not just of significance to our employees. We also feel that it is important to consider the work-life balance of the researchers who submit a proposal to us. NWO has established compensation schemes to ensure that applicants who, due to various external causes (such as pregnancy, child leave, care leave, illness or certain force majeure situations) experience problems in submitting a proposal or completing the selection procedure, also have an equal chance of obtaining a grant from NWO.

3.5. Gender equality in leadership and decision-making.

In the section ‘Training and capacity building’, the NWO leadership programme for all line managers has already been described. Gender diversity was one of the conditions for the procurement of the leadership programme and its actual content. One of the sessions concerns diversity and inclusion, and implicit bias. This session is not limited to theoretical insights, but mainly concerns applying the material in practice and the fact that by helping each other line managers can exert an influence on the leadership.

NWO already places a strong emphasis on gender diversity in research committees. This will be further expanded for the referees who we request to participate in assessment procedures.

3.6. Gender equality in recruitment and career development.

Research has revealed that though organisations claim that they want to select the best candidate, in reality, preference is often given to the person with whom they (unconsciously) experience ‘the best click’. In this way, candidates from underrepresented groups often do not get the benefit of the doubt because a ‘click’ is more likely felt with candidates similar to ourselves. In the section Training, it has already been explained that NWO is introducing a method for the inclusive recruitment and selection of new colleagues. HRM takes those involved, including line managers and recruitment committee members, through all stages of the process. The aim is to realise a more inclusive workforce by:

- Removing implicit bias from the entire recruitment and selection process.
- Ensuring an inclusive recruitment by means of an inclusive vacancy text.
- Making the recruitment process as structured and therefore as objective as possible.
- Ensuring that NWO is as accessible as possible in terms of facilities.

For several years now, NWO has organised the biannual career event Insight Out for women in the natural and engineering sciences, with the help of input from the Dutch Network of Women Professors, ECHO, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Young Academy, the PhD Network Netherlands (PNN), POSTDOCNL and the Young Academy Europe.

For the granting policy, we offer funding instruments for women in science, such as the Aspasia programme. The aim of this programme is to help accelerate the process of female researchers becoming associate or full professors. And NWO will focus even more strongly on increasing the proportion of women in its committees and boards as well.

3.7. Integrating the gender dimension in the content of research and education.

In 2022, NWO will launch the call ‘Advancing Equity in Academia through Innovation’. This funding instrument intends to contribute to a cultural change in the academic world and to create a sustainable pathway for equality and inclusion of underrepresented ethnic groups that can be applied to other underrepresented groups as well. At present, we have not (yet) added any gender dimension to the content of research.
3.8. Measures against gender-related violence, including sexual intimidation

NWO wants to be an inclusive and diverse organisation, which is only possible if we create an open, safe and positive working environment with each other. Over the past year, everybody at NWO-D has followed the training ‘Working together with trust’. During this, employees set out to make (un)desirable behaviour discussable and to practise desirable behaviour.

If a form of undesirable behaviour is nevertheless experienced despite our efforts, then there are various ways to make this undesirable behaviour known, with the help of an escalation ladder: direct feedback is given as much as possible and if that is not feasible, the incident can be discussed with a line manager, HRM, or an independent confidential adviser. There is always the possibility to submit a formal complaint, see NWO Implementing Regulation 12. We have improved the communication with respect to complaints procedures, and we have worked on further professionalising the role of the confidential advisers.

Finally, in the previously mentioned employee survey, attention is devoted to signalling undesirable behaviour in its various forms. Line managers will be equipped to make this theme discussable in their teams.

NWO also wants to create an open, safe, diverse and inclusive environment for its researchers. Researchers have been provided the possibility to submit a complaint via the NWO Scientific Integrity Desk. NWO is considering ways in which it can further ensure a safe working environment as well. The advisory report ‘Breeding ground and prevention of undesirable behaviour in academia’ of the committee of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences will provide guidance in this regard.