



forScience

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION PLAN
FOR THE YEARS 2023-2026

Toruń, September 2023

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1. Introduction

The principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including on the basis of gender, lies at the heart of international law and constitutes one of the fundamental values of the European Union. The postulate of gender equality is also present in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. Legal regulations, however, are not the only reason for avoiding discrimination, including gender discrimination, in the forScience Foundation. Just as essential in the matter is our firm conviction that each and every person deserves respect and fair treatment and that individual identity, including gender identity, is a private matter, which – as long as it does not stand in conflict with the existing law – should not be judged or interfered with, be subject to discrimination or affirmation. As such, it must not be adopted as a criterion for decision-making, either. This belief has guided the forScience team since the beginning of the Foundation’s activity.

The Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan devised by the forScience team complies with the formal eligibility requirement for Horizon Europe funding and constitutes a step, however small, towards a fair and diverse society.

The starting point for the Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan was an analysis of the status quo within the forScience Foundation (based on the data from the years 2021 and 2022) and an attempt to reconcile the demands of the European Commission regarding the scope of equality plans with the limitations resulting from the Foundation’s current structure and the character of its activity. The effect of these efforts is a public document which sets the objectives of the forScience Foundation with respect to equality (including gender equality) and non-discrimination as well as the time frame

for the planned actions and the allocated resources. The Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan of the forScience Foundation assumes continuing awareness-raising of equality-related issues, which will in time enable more effective equality monitoring and more accurate interpretation of collected data. Progress in the implementation of the plan will be evaluated annually against set criteria and the results of the evaluation will make it possible for the forScience team to set new objectives, adapted to changing circumstances. The plan has been developed for the years 2023–2026. It is, however, an open document and, as such, will be reviewed and revised whenever necessary.

2. Status quo analysis

The forScience Foundation is a small NGO which brings together a handful of enthusiasts pursuing a range of disciplines and interests. What we have in common is a passion for the polar regions and a desire to engage in initiatives combining scientific research with practical work for the protection of the natural environment and cultural heritage.

2.1. Organisational culture and work-life balance

The forScience Foundation operates on the basis of its statute and individual grant agreements. The Foundation's core team consists of two people, who perform the everyday duties involved in running the Foundation, prepare grant applications, conduct fieldwork and produce project reports in their free time, mostly on the basis of volunteer agreements.

Additional team members are recruited only when required by the scope and character of planned activities. The type of agreements signed with individuals from outside the Foundation is determined by the tasks at hand. All agreements, however, are time-bound and remain valid for no more than a few months. At the moment, the Foundation does not offer long-term or permanent cooperation opportunities under employment contracts. As a result, it provides no parental leaves, dependent care provisions or other benefits, which those working under such contracts are entitled to.

In the case of subcontracting tasks under services agreements or specific work agreements, the Foundation offers flexible hours and a great deal of freedom in terms of workflow management, as long as the deadlines agreed upon in advance are met.

The situation looks somewhat different in the case of volunteers selected for project field teams. Due to the fact that the Foundation's projects are executed in remote areas of the Arctic, the usual standards regarding, among others, working hours and conditions are seldom applicable. All details, however, are made clear in volunteer recruitment adverts, so potential team members submit their applications fully aware of the conditions.

2.2. Equality, including gender equality, in leadership and decision-making

The core team of the forScience Foundation and, at the same time, the Foundation Board comprises two people – Adam Nawrot and Barbara Józwiak – who jointly manage the Foundation's activity as well as coordinate research projects and other initiatives, dividing all duties between the two of them according to individual expertise, skills and interests.

2.3. Equality, including gender equality, in recruitment and career progression

Additional team members are recruited only when the scope of planned projects or other initiatives exceeds the capabilities of the two-person core team. Due to the character of the Foundation’s activity, its areas of operation and the resulting safety issues, a careful selection and verification of candidates is a must. The recruitment process consists, therefore, of multiple stages. The call for volunteers is published on the Foundation’s website and on social media. Its content is crafted so that it clearly lays out key requirements, cooperation conditions and selection criteria. It also provides a fair description of the location where project tasks will be carried out. The received applications undergo an initial evaluation aimed at eliminating the applicants who do not meet the basic requirements. The remaining applications are evaluated independently by both board members against the set criteria. The candidates from the resulting candidate shortlists are invited to participate in group field meetings, in conditions resembling (as far as possible) those existing in the project’s target area. The ultimate make-up of the team is decided upon once the group meetings are over, on the basis of declared competences and actual outdoor abilities. Biological sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and age are not taken into account.

So far, the forScience teams have been characterised by good gender balance (see: Table 1). It was, however, mostly by chance rather than through deliberate action on the part of the Foundation. The selection of candidates is, first and foremost, based on sex-independent abilities and expertise, so that the competences of the team match the tasks, including research tasks, undertaken as part of projects and other initiatives.

Table 1. The number of women and men participating in the Foundation’s activities in the years 2021 and 2022, divided into type of activity and agreement

	2021		2022	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Individuals engaged in the activity of the forScience Foundation	4	4	3	3
including persons responsible for:				
1. leadership and decision-making tasks	1	1	1	1
2. project tasks	3	3	2	2
3. tasks 1 and/or 2 on the basis of:				
› volunteer agreement	4	4	2	2
› specific work agreement	0	0	1	1
› services agreement	0	0	0	0

Gender balance seen in the above table indicates that recruitment and task distribution methods used in the Foundation make it possible to naturally achieve equal representation of men and women.

Because of budget constraints, development opportunities offered by the forScience Foundation are currently limited to developing competences and acquiring new skills through active participation in projects and other initiatives. Formal training sessions for team members have not so far been organised or financed by the Foundation. Thus, bearing in mind the short-term character of formal agreements signed with individuals from outside the forScience core team, cooperation with the Foundation has no direct impact on their career progression and should be seen more as a career break than a standard step towards professional advancement.

2.4. Gender dimension in research and teaching

Gender dimension has not as yet been purposefully pursued in the Foundation's projects. This was caused either by a lack of noticeable links between the issue of biological sex or gender identity and the thematic focus of research tasks at hand, or by the inaccessibility of relevant data. The forScience team is, however, fully aware of how unjustified exclusion of gender perspective from research activity may affect its results. Decisions for or against the integration of gender perspective into research questions are, therefore, made consciously and only after careful consideration.

The educational activity of the forScience Foundation, mostly in the form of workshops and lectures, is directed mainly at children and teenagers. The presenters make every effort to ensure that content and language used during presentations are inclusive and do not reinforce harmful stereotypes, including gender stereotypes. The same approach is adopted when presenting for older audiences.

2.5. Prevention of bias-motivated violence, including gender violence

Due to the character of projects and initiatives executed by the forScience Foundation, the well-being of all team members is a matter of high priority, not least because it has a direct impact on the entire team's efficiency and – in many cases – safety in the field. Taking into account the small size of individual teams (no more than 6 people), all issues are addressed right away, with dialogue used as the primary tool for resolving disputes. Individual approach to each case makes the interventions more effective, while at the same time helping to reinforce the atmosphere of mutual trust. No cases of verbal, emotional or physical violence have so far been noted.

Should significant changes occur in the Foundation's organisational structure, as a result – for example – of entering into long-term or permanent cooperation with additional people, appropriate policies will be established to make sure that equality standards and the well-being of the team are not compromised by the Foundation's growth.

3. Action plan for the years 2023–2026

The analysis of the available data clearly indicates gender balance in decision-making processes and activities related to the execution of statutory tasks. The same is true in respect to formal matters, such the types of signed agreements. It seems, therefore, justified for the Foundation to focus its efforts on maintaining the situation by raising the awareness of equality-related issues as well as honing communication methods and the recruitment process. Moreover, steps must be taken to enhance the effectiveness of in-house equality monitoring, as it may be that areas of concern have not been identified because of the insufficient quantity and quality of relevant data.

OBJECTIVE 1. Raising awareness of equality-related issues and reinforcing positive attitudes towards diversity

Action: Providing each member of the Foundation Board with at least one training course within every two-year period, online or in-class, on the topic of equality, unconscious bias (including gender bias) or similar

Target group: Foundation Board

Resources: Action financed with the Foundation's own funds or overhead resources

Measure of

success: Completion of at least one certificate training course by every board member between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2024 and between 1 January 2025 and 31 December 2026

Expected

- results:
- › Proper understanding of the idea of equality, including gender equality, and its significance, especially in the field of research and innovation
 - › Acquisition of knowledge needed to increase the inclusivity of in-house practices, especially with relation to recruitment → OBJECTIVE 3
 - › Acquisition of knowledge needed to more effectively prevent and respond to cases of violence (especially emotional violence) motivated by bias, including gender bias
 - › Acquisition of knowledge needed to enhance the effectiveness of equality monitoring within the forScience Foundation → OBJECTIVE 4
 - › Acquisition of knowledge needed to more easily recognize and identify significant links between gender issues and undertaken research topics → OBJECTIVE 5

OBJECTIVE 2. Improving internal and external communication methods in keeping with the principles of equality and non-discrimination

- Action:
1. Using gender-neutral and socially-inclusive language in internal and external communication, including workshops and lectures run by the Foundation as well as all new materials, articles and announcements (including recruitment announcements → OBJECTIVE 3) published by the forScience Foundation on the Internet or in other media
 2. Reviewing the Foundation's statute in terms of language and, if needed, rephrasing passages potentially seen as non-compliant with the principles of equality and non-discrimination, including on the basis of gender

Target group: Participants of workshops and lectures run by the Foundation
Individuals interested in the Foundation's activity
Potential applicants for the Foundation's projects and initiatives

Resources: Actions carried out by the Foundation Board and collaborators

Measure of

success: Consistent use of gender-neutral and socially-inclusive language in materials published on the forScience Foundation's website from 1 January 2023 onwards

Publication of the revised version of the statute on the Foundation's website and sending the document to the National Court Register to be officially updated on 31 December 2023 at the latest (provided that changes have been introduced)

Expected

- results:
- › Reinforcement of mutual respect among individuals using the materials and participating in workshops and lectures of the forScience Foundation
 - › Reinforcement of mutual respect among individuals collaborating with the Foundation as well as current and future forScience team members

OBJECTIVE 3. Improving the recruitment process in keeping with the principles of equality and non-discrimination

- Action:
1. Careful phrasing of recruitment adverts for projects and other initiatives carried out by the Foundation, so that they clearly and precisely specify key requirements, cooperation conditions and selection criteria, without showing gender bias or reinforcing harmful stereotypes
 2. Justification of candidate shortlists including exclusively men or women if applications have been submitted by representatives of both sexes
 3. Sending feedback to all applicants rejected in the course of the recruitment process with reasons for their rejection

Target group: Potential and current applicants for the Foundation's projects and initiatives
Foundation Board

Resources: Actions carried out by the Foundation Board

Measure of

success: Publication of a recruitment advert phrased in keeping with the criteria specified in action description to mark the start of each recruitment process

Sending feedback to all applicants not later than 7 days after receiving their applications and after completing each subsequent stage of the recruitment process

Expected

- results:
- › Ensuring transparency of recruitment and, by the same token, reinforcing the atmosphere of mutual trust among current and potential forScience team members

- › Staying on friendly terms with rejected applicants and candidates to minimize negative emotions, which might affect their performance in and experience of future recruitment processes
- › Maintaining gender balance in forScience teams, as long as this does not entail discriminating against better qualified candidates

OBJECTIVE 4. Enhancing the effectiveness of equality monitoring

- Action:
1. Application of knowledge gained from equality-related training courses to more effectively collect sex-disaggregated data on individuals applying to participate in the Foundation’s projects and initiatives and/or entering into cooperation with the Foundation under civil-law agreements
 2. Preparation and publication of annual reports containing collected data along with data analysis, interpretation and potential implications for the content of the implemented plan

Target group: Foundation Board
Individuals interested in the Foundation’s activity

Resources: Actions carried out by the Foundation Board

Measure of

success: Report on the equality situation within the Foundation in a given year (prepared on the basis of collected data), published on the Foundation’s website no later than by the end of January the following year

Expected

- results:
- › Better understanding of equality situation within the Foundation
 - › Ability to more reliably evaluate progress in the implementation of the plan
 - › Ability to more thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of undertaken actions

OBJECTIVE 5. Including gender perspective in research projects when possible and justified

- Action:
1. Thorough evaluation of the significance of gender perspective for undertaken research topics at the stage of project conception and – if possible and justified – taking it into account when formulating research questions and at further stages of planning and executing research tasks
 2. Justification of decisions not to include gender dimension in research tasks carried out by the Foundation, unless gender dimension is considered in research tasks carried out as part of the same project by partner institution or institutions

Target group: Foundation Board
Stakeholders of executed projects
Individuals interested in the Foundation's activity

Resources: Actions carried out by the Foundation Board and collaborators

Measure of success: Incorporation of gender perspective into research projects executed by or in collaboration with the forScience Foundation from the year 2023 onwards

Justification, however brief, of decisions not to include gender dimension in research projects executed by or in collaboration with the forScience Foundation, made public in project materials on the Foundation's website

Expected results:

- › Improving the quality of research projects executed by the Foundation by consciously promoting multi- and transdisciplinary approaches
- › Avoiding bias and research errors
- › Supporting equality in the field of scientific research