



NARODOWE CENTRUM NAUKI

# **NCN Gender Equality Plan (2026–2029)**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The NCN Gender Equality Plan (2026–2029) (hereinafter referred to as the “Plan”) has been developed as a continuation of activities undertaken in previous years, aimed at supporting equality and inclusiveness both in employment policy and in the grant policy pursued by the agency.

The mission of the National Science Centre (NCN), as an executive agency established to support basic research, is to enhance the quality and effectiveness of research through a competitive grant-awarding system and to contribute to reinforcing the international position of Polish science. This mission is implemented through the funding of research projects and scientific activities awarded through calls for proposals. The NCN portfolio includes calls addressed to researchers at all stages of their careers, regardless of age, length of service or the institution in which they are employed. Recognising diversity of perspectives and experience as values supporting the development of science, NCN, through its practices, attracts researchers representing different social groups and actively promotes gender equality in Polish academic institutions, while also participating in international initiatives in this area. Ensuring equal opportunities in applying for NCN funding, while at the same time prioritising the criterion of scientific excellence in the evaluation of funding proposals, has been a fundamental principle of NCN’s activity since its establishment. As an employer, NCN follows the principle of equality both in the recruitment of job applicants and in its human resources policy.

Following the model of the Plan implemented in 2022–2025, the present edition integrates two aspects: the activities already undertaken by NCN and the existing mechanisms supporting gender equality (Part II: DIAGNOSIS), as well as initiatives and solutions planned for implementation, including specific actions and measurable indicators of their achievement (Part III: OBJECTIVES).

Both aspects are presented in the Plan through the prism of two dimensions of NCN’s functioning:

- as an institution (employer),
- as an executive agency funding basic research.

In the summary section, existing and planned measures are juxtaposed with the four mandatory areas and five recommended thematic areas of gender equality plans identified by the European Commission (EC).

This Plan fulfils the EC’s requirements for an effective gender equality plan by:

- engaging NCN staff and representatives of the NCN Council in its preparation and implementation,
- developing solutions tailored to the needs of the institution that strengthen gender equality and inclusiveness in the funding of basic research, taking into account NCN’s mission, objectives and operating conditions,
- addressing not only procedural and institutional measures, but also identifying areas of unconscious bias and undertaking actions aimed at shaping attitudes through deepening knowledge of equality, diversity and inclusion,
- creating a model that supports both the introduction of change and the consolidation of good practices within NCN, through analysis of existing procedures and practices, identification of areas requiring improvement, definition of objectives and actions, and establishment of indicators enabling the tracking of outcomes,
- supporting a process of continuous change through monitoring progress in the implementation of the objectives set out in the Plan<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality Plans, European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Directorate D — People, Unit D4 — Democracy and European values, Brussels 2021



Implementation of the Plan is scheduled for four years (2026–2029), with a review of the objectives, actions and level of achievement of the planned indicators to take place in 2029, with the possibility of continuing the Plan in subsequent years.

The Plan has been developed primarily on the basis of experience and conclusions drawn from the implementation of the previous 2022–2025 Plan, which made it possible to tailor actions to the actual needs of staff and to the specific nature of NCN as a funding agency. Its preparation was also guided by selected recommendations and guidelines of the European Commission and other European institutions, including the Communication Roadmap for Women’s Rights of 7 March 2025 (COM(2025) 97)<sup>2</sup> and the approach set out in the ERA Policy Agenda, covering gender budgeting, monitoring of activities and an intersectional perspective<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Roadmap for Women’s Rights, 2025

<sup>3</sup> ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027

## II. DIAGNOSIS

This diagnosis is intended to assess the level of gender equality at NCN, both in the area of employment (NCN as an employer) and in the funding of scientific research (NCN as an executive agency funding basic research). It includes an analysis of the structure of NCN staff, participation in recruitment and grant committees, and the extent to which a gender perspective is taken into account in funded projects. The diagnosis also takes into account the implementation of actions covered by the previous 2022–2025 Plan, which makes it possible to identify progress as well as areas requiring further activity. The analysis results form the basis for the development of measures in the new 2026–2029 Plan.

### 1. NCN as an employer

#### *Recruitment process*

The recruitment process at NCN is a multi-stage procedure, which makes it possible to thoroughly assess the organisation's needs and verify the competences of applicants. The recruitment process is coordinated by the HR specialist. At individual stages, other persons are involved in the process, jointly discussing specific tasks, expected competences and the planned remuneration. Recruitment is always open to all applicants, in accordance with the principles of equal treatment and respect for privacy. Vacancy announcements are published in the Public Information Bulletin (BIP) and on the NCN website, which ensures full transparency and equal access for all interested candidates. Each [advertisement](#) includes a detailed description of duties, requirements and employment conditions, as well as information on the expected end date of the procedure. After the recruitment process has been completed, the [results](#) are also published in the Bulletin of Public Information, in line with the principles of transparency and equal treatment. All job advertisements are formulated and reviewed for neutrality so that any person meeting the criteria has equal access to the recruitment process.

The HR specialist conducts an initial screening of candidates whose profile best matches the requirements of the position. The decision to invite candidates for interviews is made by the recruitment committee. Interviews are conducted by diverse recruitment panels composed of representatives of the HR and Payroll Team, persons with expert knowledge in the relevant field, and team leaders. Each interview is based on a set of questions assessing technical competences, ability to cooperate and alignment of values with the NCN's mission. Applicants are informed about the evaluation criteria and the expected timeframe for the decision. The recruitment panel assesses candidates according to established criteria, and all decisions are documented. Candidates receive transparent feedback — even in the case of a negative decision, areas for improvement are indicated.

Selected candidates receive an offer of employment with clearly defined employment conditions, benefits, scope of duties, development opportunities and expectations associated with the position. After the offer is accepted, the onboarding process begins, introducing new staff members to the organisational culture, values and operating principles of the institution. At the end of the recruitment process, candidates who took part in interviews receive brief and specific feedback. For NCN, it is important that every applicant has a positive experience of the recruitment process.

In this way, NCN seeks to demonstrate that recruitment conducted in accordance with the principles of equality and inclusiveness is not only about attracting suitably qualified staff, but also about ensuring transparency, diversity, data protection and support at every stage. The outcome is not only employment, but also the building of trust and long-term relationships — from the first contact to lasting cooperation.

*Employment structure and data supporting work–life balance*

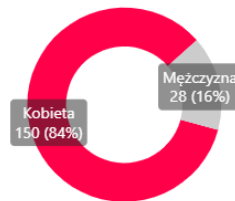
The data below illustrate the employment structure at NCN, as well as information the use of parental and care-related entitlements. Analysis of these indicators makes it possible to better understand the representation of women and men in different areas of the NCN’s activity and implementation of measures supporting work–life balance.

**Employment structure**

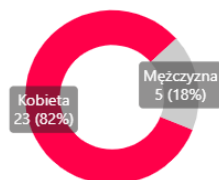
As of 30 September 2025, NCN employed 178 staff members, including 150 women and 28 men. Women therefore account for 84% of the workforce. This high share of women is reflected in NCN’s internal policies, which support work–life balance, promote flexible working arrangements and provide solutions facilitating the reconciliation of professional responsibilities with caring for children or other family members — regardless of gender.

Chart 1. Employment at the NCN office: overall and broken down by managerial and specialist positions.

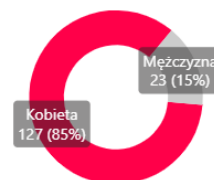
Zatrudnienie w biurze NCN (wszystkie stanowiska)



Zatrudnienie na stanowiskach kierowniczych w biurze NCN



Zatrudnienie na stanowiskach specjalistycznych w biurze NCN



*[Zatrudnienie w biurze NCN (wszystkie stanowiska) = Employment at the NCN office (all positions)*

*Kobieta = Woman, Mężczyzna = Man*

*Zatrudnienie na stanowiskach kierowniczych w biurze NCN = Employment in managerial positions at the NCN office*

*Zatrudnienie na stanowiskach specjalistycznych w biurze NCN = Employment in specialist positions at the NCN office]*

There are 23 women and 5 men employed in managerial positions. Women therefore constitute 82% of staff in managerial roles. Given that their overall share in the institution is 84%, this indicates that proportional gender representation is maintained at all levels of the organisational structure. In specialist positions, 127 women and 23 men are employed (as of 30 September 2025).



In line with the objective included in the previous edition of the Plan, transparency and accessibility of data are ensured through their publication on NCN website (gender distribution among NCN applicants and grant recipients, NCN Experts, and members of the NCN Council and Office). Data are updated on an annual basis.

### **Gender distribution in committees and working groups**

Various advisory committees and working groups operate at NCN and constitute an important element of the decision-making process.

They include both women and men, which supports representativeness and diversity of perspectives in decision-making.

The composition of individual committees is as follows:

- Employee representatives: 2 women, 0 men,
- Employer representatives: 2 women, 0 men,
- Social committee: 3 women, 0 men,
- Committee for Equal Treatment, Prevention of Discrimination, Mobbing and Corruption: 6 members, including 4 women and 2 men
- Research Integrity Committee: 5 members, including 4 women and 1 man
- Gender Equality Plan Team: 10 members, including 8 women and 2 men

This structure is consistent with the overall employment situation at NCN, where women constitute the majority of staff, and reflects gender proportions across the organisation as a whole.

### **Use of parental leave entitlements**

Between 2011 and 2025, NCN granted:

- maternity leave: 11,720 calendar days
- parental leave: 15,590 calendar days
- childcare leave: 4,013 calendar days
- paternity leave: 168 calendar days

NCN applies a flexible approach towards pregnant employees and parents of young children. In practice, this includes the possibility of remote work or flexible working hours, as well as a supportive approach to sickness leave during pregnancy. Since 2011, the average number of days of sickness leave taken during pregnancy has been 183.1 days. Since 2011, nearly 130 children have been born to NCN employees.

### *Organisational culture and support for NCN staff*

NCN strives to build an organisational culture based on mutual respect, trust and equal treatment. The organisation ensures protection of employees against discrimination, unequal treatment and mobbing. For this purpose, internal procedures have been established, including the Internal Policy on Equal Treatment, Prevention of Discrimination, Mobbing and Corruption at NCN and the Ethical Principles for the Director, Deputy Director, Scientific coordinator and NCN employees. Their effective functioning is ensured through oversight both by the employer and by employee representatives. Dedicated bodies have been established for this purpose: the Committee for Equal Treatment, Prevention of Discrimination, Mobbing and Corruption and the Employee Representatives.

NCN seeks to create a working environment that supports diversity of life experiences and enables a balance between professional and private life. Recognising the importance of work–life balance, NCN has introduced in recent years a range of working arrangements and solutions facilitating the reconciliation of professional responsibilities with family and personal life. Particular attention is paid to supporting working



parents — through flexible working arrangements, solutions facilitating return to work after parental breaks and the possibility of adjusting working hours to family needs. At the same time, an important objective is openness to various life situations in which employees may require additional support (for example the need to care for a family member, rehabilitation, etc.).

NCN implements flexibility and openness through a range of measures, including:

- Flexible working hours – in accordance with NCN’s Work Regulations, staff may start work between 7:00 and 8:30, while staff in managerial positions may start between 7:00 and 10:00.
- Remote work – work outside the NCN’s office may be performed for two days in a five-day working week; the rules for remote work are defined in the NCN Remote Work Regulations introduced by Order No 29/2024 by the NCN Director. In exceptional situations (e.g. transport disruptions caused by construction works) and during selected periods of the year (summer holidays, winter break), remote work may be extended to three days per week.
- Additional remote work for parents – an employee who is a parent may apply for additional days of remote work; to work remotely to a greater extent, a request should be submitted to the immediate supervisor (no formalised procedure exists). This solution is intended to facilitate the reconciliation of parenthood with professional duties.
- Extended remote work in special circumstances – remote work to a greater or full extent than provided for in the Work Regulations is also possible where necessary due to caring responsibilities, participation in rehabilitation, recovery after a prolonged illness, etc.; each case is considered individually.
- Adjustment of annual leave dates to family needs of employees.
- Possibility of taking time off for personal matters and making up the time at any point during the settlement period.
- Additional training leave may be requested by employees.
- Employees commencing maternity leave receive a package for the newborn child; NCN also seeks to maintain ties with employees on parental leave by inviting them to joint events such as the company Christmas meeting or team-building events.
- Employees on parental leave retain access to benefits from the Company Social Benefits Fund, group insurance, sports card and private medical care.
- Employees on parental leave are included when NCN promotions and salary increases are considered.
- All employees at NCN may participate in training on topics such as work–life balance, reconciling professional and family life, time management, and building awareness of oneself and others. Training on stress management is attracting increasing interest among NCN staff. We employ many people at an early stage of their careers who are planning their professional development, and thanks to free access to commercial training and the possibility of proposing their own development ideas to their supervisors, they feel they have an influence on their own growth.

NCN also provides employees with access to a wide range of social benefits supporting both everyday needs and life situations requiring additional assistance, including:

- financial support for holidays,
- winter cost-of-living support,
- co-financing of studies, training and conferences,
- access to parking spaces for cars and bicycles,
- co-financing of private medical care,
- co-financing of the Multisport card,

- access to well-equipped kitchen facilities, including coffee, tea, milk, etc.

#### *Summary of the results of the implementation of the 2022–2025 Plan in the area of employment policy*

Implementation of the NCN Gender Equality Plan (2022–2025) in the area of employment policy focused on building a supportive and engaging working environment and reinforcing a culture of equal treatment. Managers and staff involved in recruitment received training on equal opportunities and anti-discrimination, and training was also provided to employees as a whole (76% of staff were trained). An Internal Policy on equal treatment, prevention of discrimination and mobbing at NCN was introduced, and a committee responsible for its implementation and for receiving reports was established. At the same time, information activities were undertaken and the onboarding process was reinforced so that from the outset each newly recruited person had access to knowledge about the applicable equal-treatment rules and available forms of support. As regards the forecasted measures, only the training workshop for members of the Committee for equal treatment, prevention of discrimination and mobbing was not implemented; its organisation was postponed to the beginning of the next edition of the Plan. This resulted from the need to ensure coherence with the new cycle of measures and to draw on experience from previous training activities. Members of the Committee participated in other training addressed to a wider group of recipients. During implementation of the Plan and the training cycle provided for therein, the original concept of workshops combining equality and anti-mobbing themes was revised. This modification resulted in the planning of a broader training cycle devoted to these issues, addressed not only to Committee members but to all employees.

In summary, the 2022–2025 Plan included measures aimed at strengthening the equality culture at NCN and increasing awareness among management and employees regarding the prevention of discrimination. Some initiatives — particularly those related to training, communication and building a supportive working environment — are continuous in nature; they were initiated under the previous Plan, and their continuation and systematic monitoring are planned in the coming years. Based on experience to date and on the evolving needs of employees, new measures have also been planned to further reinforce equal treatment and to take diverse needs into account in employment policy.

## 2. Gender equality and inclusiveness in basic research funding across NCN

### *NCN's calls portfolio and the implementation and settlement of research projects*

Basic research funding is one of NCN's statutory tasks. In order to carrying out the task, NCN launches calls for proposals for fellowships, research activities and research projects. NCN's call portfolio constitutes a comprehensive and diversified support system enabling research funding at different stages of academic career development. Calls for proposals are addressed both to researchers at the beginning of their careers and to experienced researchers, which allows the call portfolio to be flexibly adapted to career stage and applicants' needs. Particular attention is paid to creating conditions conducive to the development of early-career researchers, who constitute a key group for shaping the future of Polish science. The portfolio includes, among others, programmes enabling the implementation of first research projects (PRELUDIUM), supporting scientific mobility (SONATINA), and enabling the establishment of research teams (SONATA BIS). NCN's flagship funding instrument is the OPUS call, addressed to all researchers regardless of their career stage. The principle of calibrating scientific achievements to applicants' career stage allows differences in experience to be taken into account and ensures fair assessment of proposals, promoting projects with the highest scientific potential. Importantly, proposal scoring uses a weighted-average system, which makes it possible to properly balance the importance of individual criteria depending on the type of call and the applicants' career stage. In calls addressed to more experienced researchers, greater weight is assigned to the principal investigator's scientific achievements, whereas in calls

addressed to early-career researchers the weight of this criterion is correspondingly lower. This differentiation enables fair review of scientific potential and ensures equal opportunities in applying for funding regardless of career stage. NCN's call portfolio also includes the MINIATURA call for a single research activity. The main aim of the call is to provide financial support for a research activity serving the preparation of a future research project to be submitted to NCN calls or to other national or international calls. MINIATURA creates an opportunity to begin independent research for researchers who have not yet received any grants, as well as to obtain funding for research activities for those returning to professional activity after a long-term break. The call enjoys considerable popularity because it enables applicants to gain their first important experience within the grant system. In previous editions of the SONATINA call, which supports scientific mobility through funding of foreign fellowships of 3-6 months, eligible costs included the cost of accommodation at the fellowship location for a minor child of the principal investigator or under the legal guardianship of the principal investigator, as well as the cost of the accommodation of a caregiver of the principal investigator who is the holder of a severe or moderate disability certificate (if any). This is how NCN seeks to support the mobility of researchers whose family or health situation might significantly impair it.

The implementation and settlement of research projects is based on principles of transparency, responsibility and partnership between NCN and beneficiaries. Projects funded by NCN must be carried out in accordance with the funding agreement, while allowing the possibility of introducing changes, provided they are well-justified by the scope of the research and the tasks planned in the project and contribute to achieving its objectives. NCN shows understanding and flexibility towards various life situations that may affect project implementation. The validity of changes is assessed during the project's final settlement or audit. Projects may be extended by over 12 months beyond the original project end date upon NCN's consent. In well-justified cases, for example related to the principal investigator's personal or family situation, NCN also agrees to extend the deadline for submission of the final report, which is usually 60 days from the project end date.

#### *Proposal evaluation procedure and work of Expert Teams*

#### **Regulatory provisions supporting gender equality and equal treatment in the evaluation process**

Both in documents and in practice, the principle of gender equality is taken into account in the evaluation of funding proposals submitted to NCN.

One of the major challenges in the evaluation procedure is the review of the principal investigator's research achievements. NCN makes every effort to ensure that the review is fair and based on the quality of achievements, their international recognition and their impact on science. In line with DORA recommendations, the review is qualitative in nature; bibliometric indicators such as the Hirsch index or journal impact factors are therefore not taken into account. In response to the expectations of the research community, NCN has enabled researchers — following solutions used by the European Research Council — to extend the eligibility period for applying for NCN funding to account for career breaks. This period may be extended by the duration of long-term (over 90 days) documented sickness benefits or rehabilitation benefits related to incapacity for work. In addition, the period may be extended by the number of months spent on childcare leave granted under the Labour Code, and in the case of women — by 18 months for every child born or adopted, if this method of indicating career breaks is more favourable. Career breaks also allow extension of the period from which scientific achievements are reported (including publications and leadership of research projects). Taking career breaks into account also allows extension of the eligibility period for employment in post-doc positions. NCN has also introduced a principal investigator's scientific track-record survey in the form of a narrative CV. In this section of the proposal form, applicants are requested to present key information concerning their career path, scientific or artistic activity other than publications or grants, other research achievements and any other relevant

circumstances so that the Expert Team can reliably assess achievements in the context of career stage. Applicants receive a recommended CV template, although its use is not obligatory. The current CV concept is based on freedom of expression. As part of the implementation of the previous Plan, a minor modification was introduced to the recommended track-record template by adding in the instructions an item entitled “Other key information impacting the evaluation of the academic and research career”. Applicants for research projects thus have the possibility to include, in the narrative CV, information which – in their view – may be relevant to assessing their career path, for example concerning professional activity outside academia, long-term breaks in research activity or other circumstances affecting the pace of research development.

In calls, attention is paid to ensuring that the principle of gender equality is taken into account not only in proposal evaluation and access to funding but also in the design of research itself. Where the nature of a research project justifies analysis of gender-related differences and determinants, applicants are encouraged to consider this aspect at the stage of research concept and methodology. This constitutes one of the elements assessed under the scientific quality criterion. The adoption of revised evaluation criteria providing for sex and gender identity of the research subjects was part of the implementation of the previous Plan and has applied to calls announced since March 2022. Annual evaluations of the review process conducted among NCN experts involved in it (including in 2022–2024) indicate that this element of assessment did not pose any difficulty. Experts reported no doubts or comments regarding this provision. Building awareness of the importance of integrating the gender perspective into scientific projects among researchers is an ongoing process. At present, knowledge in this area varies, and the degree to which this aspect is included in projects appears to depend largely on the research field and teams’ experience. Therefore, the current Plan includes communication activities aimed at increasing awareness in this area, as well as the inclusion of additional provisions emphasising the importance of this element in call documents and training as an integral part of highest-quality research.

### **Gender equality in the proposal evaluation procedure and Expert Team meetings**

NCN’s standard proposal evaluation procedure consists of a two-stage merit-based evaluation preceded by an eligibility check. The only current exception is the MINIATURA call, where the merit-based evaluation is single-stage. Ensuring quality as well as the reliability and impartiality of the evaluation process lies within the remit of NCN Discipline Coordinators (hereinafter referred to as “Coordinators”). The Coordinators’ tasks include the verification of individual reviews drafted by Expert Team members and external reviewers for any discriminatory content. Verification is carried out at several stages, namely before the Expert Team meeting at Stage I of the evaluation (verification of the content of individual reviews prepared by Expert Team members), then during Expert Team meetings at Stages I and II of the evaluation, as well as in relation to the content of reviews drafted by external reviewers at Stage II of the evaluation. The Coordinator is required to draw Expert Team members’ attention to any contents that may raise doubts as to their discriminatory nature.

Gender equality and inclusiveness are highlighted both in the documents and materials concerning the evaluation of research proposals and during trainings and briefings for Expert Teams delivered by Coordinators. Across these activities it is emphasised that scientific excellence is the main criterion for the merit-based evaluation of proposals; however, awareness of and sensitivity to equality-related issues is important to ensure fair and unbiased assessment. Experts are encouraged to apply principles conducive to impartiality and inclusiveness including, in particular, avoidance of biases and stereotypes on the grounds of age, gender, ethnicity, culture or lifestyle of applicants. Experts are asked to review proposals according to applicants’ career stage and experience, rather than solely on the basis of absolute achievements. In addition, the use of gender-neutral and inclusive language in assessments and communication is recommended. An important element of evaluators’ ethics is also refraining from making

assumptions or judgements concerning gender roles, identity or applicants' personal circumstances. Such an approach supports an evaluation environment based on equality, respect and essential criteria. Scientific coordinators ensure that the training materials they present to and share with Expert Teams are up to date and accurate. As part of the implementation of the previous Plan, the Guide for Experts evaluating grant proposals for the National Science Centre was updated, among other things. The Guide contains detailed information on the evaluation of proposals submitted to NCN, emphasising the principles of equal treatment. In response to needs related to Expert Team meetings, a training video was also produced, which presents in a concise and straightforward manner how the review process for proposals submitted to NCN should be conducted. The training content was supplemented with information on the integration of gender equality and equal treatment in the evaluation of proposals by Expert Teams. In accordance with the Code of Ethics for Experts of the National Science Centre<sup>4</sup>, individual expert reviews are prepared in compliance with the principle of confidentiality and the protection of personal data contained in the proposal. An expert is required to comply with ethical principles at every stage of the review and to disclose any conflict of interest arising from kinship, scientific collaboration, personal relationships, different scientific views, or involvement in the preparation of a proposal. If a conflict of interest arises, the expert is required to notify the Coordinator immediately. The Coordinator may exclude the expert from the proposal review in the event of a justified suspicion of biased conduct. The expert may be partial or fully excluded, depending on the circumstances. Pursuant to the Code of Conduct, Expert Teams are required to refrain from any references in their reviews to age, nationality, gender or other aspects of private life disclosed in the proposals. The language of individual reviews should be objective and analytical and should not contain colloquial, offensive or ambiguous wording. Another important aspect of gender equality in NCN's proposal evaluation procedure is the effort to ensure a balanced gender distribution in the composition of Expert Teams. Expert Teams are appointed by the NCN Council with the involvement of Coordinators. NCN seeks to ensure that evaluation panels are as diverse as possible not only in terms of gender but also in terms of geographical origin and age of members. Alongside experienced experts, researchers at earlier stages of their research careers are also invited. Despite their young age, they already have significant research achievements and a PhD degree. This approach supports the exchange of perspectives and increases the representativeness of the review process. However, scientific excellence and competence in the relevant research field remain the key criterion for expert selection; therefore, full gender balance or other forms of diversity are not always possible, especially in disciplines with unequal gender distribution in employment. Among the reasons for declining participation in Expert Team meetings, indicated to the same extent by women and men, the most common are teaching commitments, conference travel or other professional duties, as well as personal reasons such as illness of a close relative. Aware of these constraints, NCN takes measures that may facilitate participation in panel work. Some meetings are held remotely, which supports the reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities. NCN also strives to ensure that women more often take on the role of Chairs of Expert Teams, which helps to increase their visibility and influence in decision-making processes.

#### *Information, promotion and reporting at NCN*

##### **Monitoring of data and reporting**

Information on the participation of women and men in NCN calls is included in the "Annual Reports" and statistical reports published each year online. The activity of women and men is presented in percentage terms within the groups of Humanities, Social Sciences and Art Sciences, Life Sciences, and Physical Sciences and Engineering, as well as for each NCN call. The publications also include detailed, gender-disaggregated data, covering the number of submitted proposals, information on the amount of funding

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<sup>4</sup> Ethical Principles for Experts of the National Science Centre

requested in each call, and the number of projects recommended for funding and the amount of awarded grants. The summaries also include data on the gender distribution in Expert Teams, teams evaluating final reports, and the NCN Council.

The most recent summary (Annex 1) includes cumulative data for domestic calls concluded in 2011–2025. The results of the analyses indicate a persistent trend reflected in a slight predominance of men among applicants and awardees. In 2025, the numerical success rate for men was 16%, whereas for women it was 14%. By call type, PRELUDIUM is the only call in which women account for a larger share of proposals recommended for funding (56% women, 44% men). At the same time, MAESTRO is the call in which men account for the highest percentage of awardees (14% women, 86% men). Men also statistically request higher amounts in submitted projects. There are clear differences in the gender distribution among proposals recommended for funding depending on the group of disciplines. Women more often become awardees in the Life Sciences (56%), whereas men have a larger share among proposals funded in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Art Sciences (54%) and in the Physical Sciences and Engineering (70%).

NCN emphasises the importance of maintaining gender balance in Expert Teams, both those evaluating proposals and those evaluating final reports, while the quality of research achievements and the candidates' competences remain the priority. For years, the percentage share of women in Expert Teams evaluating proposals has remained at around 30%. In the teams evaluating final reports, this indicator is slightly higher (by 7 percentage points).

NCN provides on its website a tool enabling users to generate statistical summaries of concluded calls on their own. It allows users to prepare summaries taking into account criteria such as: discipline group, panel, year, call type, type of institution, academic degree or title, and voivodeship. The tool makes it possible to identify trends and may therefore serve as an effective instrument for verifying the assumed objectives and the policy implemented by NCN.

In 2021, NCN conducted a survey on men and women in science. Researchers at all career stages, from all academic institutions in Poland, were invited to take part, regardless of whether they had ever applied for an NCN grant. Nearly 6,000 people completed the survey. The survey results provide an important point of reference and reflection for issues related to women's and men's experiences in applying for NCN grants and other national and international grants, experiences in the working environment, and challenges arising from combining professional and family responsibilities. The report is available on the NCN website<sup>5</sup>.

### **Promotional and communication activities in support of equality**

NCN undertakes activities promoting equality, diversity and inclusiveness in the academic community and the grant system. In all its communication and promotional activities — including the organisation of panel discussions, debates and scientific events — NCN ensures the presentation of diversity in terms of gender, age and geographical origin of participants, promoting inclusiveness and broad representation of the research community. Profiles of awardees of calls funded by NCN are presented on the NCN website. The database is continuously expanded, and the featured projects concern research carried out by representatives of both genders. Annual information brochures and NCN's annual reports include examples of funded projects while maintaining an appropriate balance in the presentation of women and men. In its communication activities, NCN consistently uses feminine forms in Polish (feminatives) — in materials on the website, in social media and in press releases — emphasising that science is co-created by women and men. At the same time, NCN draws attention to the broader dimension of diversity in the

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<sup>5</sup> Women and men in science. NCN survey results, February 2022

research community, presenting in its materials people of different ages, at different career stages and representing different research institutions.

As part of its communication initiatives, NCN runs the #RozmowaNCN series, in which interviews with women and men conducting breakthrough research and achieving significant successes are published regularly. The selection of interviewees is made while maintaining fair proportions, in order to promote scientific achievements regardless of gender. This approach is subject to regular reflection and discussion in order to avoid a potential risk, namely reinforcing a stereotypical message. Therefore, communication activities are designed to show diverse career paths, experiences and research areas, highlighting both individual achievements and the collective nature of scientific work. In this way, an image of an academic community is built that values diversity of perspectives and equal access to development opportunities.

A series of interviews with female leaders in quantum research was another important element of public awareness building of gender equality in research promoted by NCN. The QuantERA network, coordinated by NCN, actively supports equal participation of women and men in research teams. The interview series was conducted by the Spanish partner of the QuantERA programme. The interviews were also published on the NCN website.

In 2023, the NCN [podcast](#) was launched with the episode “Women and men in science”. To date, more than 20 episodes have been released, addressing both issues related to the grant system and topics important to the academic community. The podcast creators seek to ensure a balanced presentation of the scientific achievements of women and men, highlighting diverse perspectives and experiences in science.

In previous years, NCN also ran an annual mini-campaign entitled “Women in Science Week”. Posts published on social media presented profiles of female researchers, NCN grant awardees, the projects they were carrying out, and examples of good practice aimed at equalising opportunities for women and men in science. NCN engages in and partners events that address equality-related topics. In 2023, NCN co-organised the [conference](#) “Scientific excellence has no gender”. NCN representatives also took part in the [event](#) “Perspektywy Women in Tech Summit 2024”. NCN attaches great importance to ensuring a balanced representation of women and men at all events.

### *International initiatives*

NCN actively participates in international initiatives aimed at supporting scientific research and strengthening cooperation between research funding agencies from different countries. NCN is not only a partner in many such undertakings, but often also acts as a leader in European programmes, contributing to the development of shared standards and good practice in the funding of basic research. The principles of gender equality and equal treatment are an important element of these collaborations. Within individual international programmes, they are implemented in line with partners’ arrangements, while maintaining the shared objective of ensuring transparent and fair proposal evaluation procedures. A model example of this type of activity is the QuantERA programme, launched in 2016 and coordinated by NCN, which currently brings together more than 40 agencies funding research in quantum physics, operating in more than 30 countries (including non-European countries). Activities aimed at gender balance constitute an important element of one of the pillars of QuantERA’s mission: building a sustainable and socially responsible quantum ecosystem. Gender equality is taken into account when developing the evaluation criteria for calls and in the operation of evaluation panels. Guidelines in this area are systematically appended to call documents. The programme also tracks national mechanisms and public policies. Gender balance is also monitored as part of project implementation review. Moreover, QuantERA, as part of its support for women’s participation in quantum physics, often engages in external cooperation (for example with The Quantum Flagship EDI Working Group or GENDERACTIONplus) and runs social campaigns to

increase the visibility of female researchers in the heavily male-dominated world of quantum science and, more broadly, the Physical Sciences.

#### *NCN Award*

The NCN Award was established by the NCN Council in 2013 as a distinction for researchers employed in Poland with significant research achievements in basic research. The award of PLN 50,000 is granted annually to representatives of three discipline groups: Humanities, Social Sciences and Art Sciences, Life Sciences, and Physical Sciences and Engineering.

During the implementation of the previous Plan, following one of its objectives, the NCN Council amended the Award Regulations. New Regulations were introduced, with the most significant modification relating to the age criterion for candidates who may be nominated for the award. Previously, chronological age applied (up to the age of 40); now academic age applies (up to 12 years from the PhD award date). Career breaks of candidates have been taken into account. Since 2013, the NCN Award has been granted thirteen times. Among the 39 awardees, there are eight women, four of whom received the award in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Art Sciences group, three in the Health Sciences, and one in Physical Sciences and Engineering. This shows that an effective strategy to encourage talented female researchers to apply for the Award has not been implemented. In the Humanities, Social Sciences and Art Sciences, the share of women among awardees is higher; in Life Sciences it is lower; and in Physical Sciences and Engineering it is very low. These results point to areas where it would be worth strengthening measures supporting female participation in research and innovation.

#### *Summary of the results of implementing the 2022–2025 Plan in the area of grant policy*

The implementation of the Plan in 2022–2025, as regards NCN as a basic research-funding agency, produced a number of positive outcomes in terms of strengthening gender equality and diversity in grant processes.

As part of the measures undertaken during the period of the Plan, regulatory changes were introduced in grant policy to increase equal opportunities in applying for research funding. The proposal form was improved in the section concerning the principal investigator's track record so that it better reflects individual research career paths. The proposal evaluation criteria were amended to include sex and gender identity of the objects studied, and the NCN Award Regulations were updated to include career breaks within the eligibility period for applying for the Award.

Another key area of progress was the strengthening of equality-related aspects in training materials and communication with experts. The content of trainings and materials for experts was updated so as to more clearly emphasise the importance of equal treatment in and non-biased approach to the proposal evaluation procedure. In briefings and trainings delivered by coordinators, increasing emphasis is placed on the relationship between awareness of equality issues and the fairness and objectivity of project assessment.

As part of the implementation of the Plan, communication and promotional activities were carried out to support the idea of equality and diversity in the scientific community. These included, inter alia, the publication of profiles and interviews with female and male researchers, in line with the principles of gender representation, as well as information campaigns on social media.

Thanks to these initiatives, understanding of and emphasis on gender equality in research funding processes have increased, providing a solid foundation for further action. In the coming years, as part of the implementation of the 2026–2029 Plan, NCN plans to continue and further develop these activities, strengthening competences, tools and systemic solutions supporting equality and diversity in science.



### III. OBJECTIVES

#### 1. NCN as an employer

*Objective 1: Raising anti-bullying and anti-discrimination awareness throughout the organisation*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<p><b>1.1.</b> Delivery of an in-person training session for the Committee for Equal Treatment, Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Mobbing on recognising cases of discrimination and mobbing, the organisation of meetings, responsibilities of Committee members, conducting intervention conversations, and good practices</p>	Committee for Equal Treatment, Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Mobbing	First quarter of 2026	HR and Payroll Team	Number of trained persons (6 members of the Committee)
<p><b>1.2.</b> Delivery of an online training session for the management staff on distinguishing mobbing, discrimination and sexual harassment, and on counteracting unethical phenomena in the workplace</p>	Management staff	First quarter of 2026	HR and Payroll Team	Number of trained persons
<p><b>1.3.</b> Delivery of an online training session for all employees on preventing discrimination and mobbing, including recognising such phenomena and the basic legal and psychosocial aspects of responding to them</p>	All persons working at NCN	First quarter of 2026	HR and Payroll Team	Number of trained persons

<b>1.4.</b> Conducting an evaluation survey after each training session to assess its quality and effectiveness and to identify areas for improvement	All training participants	After each completed training session	HR and Payroll Team, Gender Equality Plan Team	Number of collected surveys, number of recommendations for process improvement, average satisfaction score
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*Objective 2. Increasing knowledge and competences in equality, diversity and inclusion across NCN\*\**

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<b>2.1.</b> Delivery of equality trainings for all employees covering gender equality, diversity and inclusion in a broad sense, including for example awareness of disability and neurodiversity	All persons working at NCN	Twice during the implementation period (in 2027 and 2029)	HR and Payroll Team	Number of trained persons
<b>2.2.</b> Delivery of training for recruiting staff and management at NCN on avoiding discrimination in recruitment processes	Recruiting staff and management at NCN	One training during the implementation period (by the end of 2029)	HR and Payroll Team	Number of trained persons
<b>2.3.</b> Conducting an evaluation survey after each training session to assess its quality, usefulness and effectiveness and to identify areas for improvement	All training participants	After each completed training session	HR and Payroll Team, Gender Equality Plan Team	Number of collected surveys, number of recommendations for process improvement, average satisfaction score

*Objective 3. Improving the onboarding and reintegration process for new staff and for persons returning to work after long-term absence*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<b>3.1.</b> Monitoring and developing recommendations regarding the	All persons starting work or returning after a break (e.g. long-term sick	Continuous monitoring (2026), preparation of recommendations	HR and Payroll Team, Gender Equality Plan Team	Number of recommendations developed, number



onboarding and reintegration process for new staff and persons returning after a break in employment, through collecting experiences and opinions of persons involved in the process and incorporating recommendations from the HR and Payroll Team in order to improve the process	leave, parental leave)	at the end of the period		of improvements implemented
<b>3.2.</b> Providing a welcome package for persons returning to work after a long-term absence	Persons returning after a break (e.g. long-term sick leave, parental leave)	Continuous process upon each return	HR and Payroll Team	Number of persons covered by the programme, number of welcome packages delivered
<b>3.3.</b> Providing e-learning covering anti-mobbing procedures and equal treatment principles in order to support onboarding and reintegration	All persons starting work or returning after a break (e.g. long-term sick leave, parental leave)	Continuous process upon each recruitment or return	HR and Payroll Team	Number of persons granted access to the e-learning

*Objective 4. Reinforcing awareness of procedures for reporting undesirable behaviours through regular communication and information activities*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<b>4.1.</b> Reinforcing communication regarding the Committee for Equal Treatment, Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Mobbing by regularly providing information on its composition, contact methods and available forms of support	All persons working at NCN	Once a year during the validity of the Plan and after each change in the Committee's composition	HR and Payroll Team; Committee for Equal Treatment, Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Mobbing	Number of communications issued, number of information updates

## 2. Gender equality and inclusiveness in the funding of basic research in NCN's activities

*Objective 1: Strengthening the competences of the NCN Council and Discipline Coordinators in gender equality, diversity and unconscious bias in research funding processes*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<b>1.1.</b> Delivery of an in-person training session on gender equality, diversity and unconscious bias in research funding processes	NCN Council; Discipline Coordinators Division	Twice during the implementation period (in 2027 and 2029)	HR and Payroll Team, Gender Equality Plan Team	Number of trained persons
<b>1.2.</b> Evaluation of training outcomes and improvement of the programme	NCN Council; Discipline Coordinators Division	After each completed training session	HR and Payroll Team, Gender Equality Plan Team	Number of collected surveys, number of recommendations for process improvement, average satisfaction score

*Objective 2: Raising awareness of the importance of equality-related issues in NCN information and promotional activities*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<b>2.1.</b> Visibility of diverse faces of science in NCN publications – on the NCN website and in brochures, profiles of researchers from different disciplines, environments and career stages will be consistently presented	Academic community and audiences interested in the significance and outcomes of scientific research	Continuous activities throughout the duration of the Plan	Information and Promotion Team	Number of promotional materials or publications presenting researcher profiles; balanced gender representation in materials (yes/no)
<b>2.2.</b> Interviews with researchers conducting projects funded by NCN	Academic community and audiences interested in the significance and outcomes of scientific research	Continuous activities throughout the duration of the Plan	Information and Promotion Team	Number of interviews (at least six per year); selection of interviewees ensuring balanced gender representation as

well as diversity of scientific disciplines and career stages

**2.3. Ensuring diversity in NCN communication activities and events – in all activities, from podcasts and discussion panels to campaigns and publications, NCN will ensure the representation of different environments, experiences and perspectives**

Academic community and audiences interested in the significance and outcomes of scientific research

Continuous activities throughout the duration of the Plan

Information and Promotion Team

Inclusion of diversity principles when planning communication activities and events (yes/no)

*Objective 3: Reinforcing the quality of integrating the gender dimension in the proposals and evaluation of proposals*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<b>3.1. Supplementing call documents with references to the gender dimension (application form template, guidelines for applicants completing the proposal in the OSF system)</b>	Applicants to NCN; Expert Teams	2026	Scientific Coordinators Division	Updated call documentation (yes/no)
<b>3.2. Emphasising the gender dimension in training sessions for applicants and Expert Teams</b>	Applicants to NCN; Expert Teams	2026–2027	Scientific Coordinators Division	Updated training materials emphasising the gender-dimension criterion (yes/no)
<b>3.3. Expanding the ethical section of the application form to include reference to the gender dimension</b>	Applicants to NCN; Expert Teams	2026–2027	NCN Council Committee for Regulations and Procedures	Updated ethical form (yes/no)
<b>3.4. Conducting an evaluation study on the integration of the</b>	Applicants to NCN; Expert Teams; NCN Council	2028–2029	Analysis and Evaluation Team	Evaluation study conducted and report produced (yes/no)

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
gender dimension in projects and their assessment				

*Objective 4: Efforts to explore the causes of gender-related differences in call results and to identify factors influencing them*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<b>4.1.</b> Systematic analysis of collected data on call results (including gender as a variable)	NCN Council; NCN-funded principal investigators; potential applicants; academic community	By the end of 2029	NCN Council thematic committee; Analysis and Evaluation Team	Report summarising the analysis (yes/no)
<b>4.2.</b> Deepening the analysis with additional factors potentially influencing differences	NCN Council; NCN-funded principal investigators; potential applicants; academic community	By the end of 2029	NCN Council thematic committee; Analysis and Evaluation Team	Report summarising the analysis (yes/no)
<b>4.3.</b> Developing recommendations based on the analysis results	NCN Council; NCN-funded principal investigators; potential applicants; academic community	By the end of 2029	NCN Council thematic committee; Analysis and Evaluation Team	Recommendation document (yes/no)

*Objective 5: Embedding good gender and inclusiveness practices of Expert Teams into the proposal evaluation process*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
<b>5.1.</b> Reinforcing the component on equality and impartiality principles in briefings for Expert Teams	Expert Teams	2026, with continuation planned in subsequent years	Scientific Coordinators Division	Permanent equality and diversity component in expert briefings (yes/no)
<b>5.2.</b> Adding a question on adherence to equal	Expert Teams; Scientific	2026	Analysis and Evaluation Team	Inclusion of equality and equal treatment

treatment principles in the evaluation process to the survey for Expert Teams, and identifying potential areas for improvement

issues in the evaluation survey (yes/no)

*Objective 6: Diagnosing effective measures to support those experiencing specific life challenges*

Activity	Target group	Schedule	Responsible entities	Indicators
6.1. Monitoring and recording cases where a flexible approach to project implementation is applied by principal investigators in specific life situations.	NCN-funded principal investigators; potential applicants; academic community	First half of 2026	Research Projects and Researcher Development Division	Creation and ongoing maintenance of a register of cases from 2026 (yes/no)
6.2. Developing a diagnosis and recommendations on improving support mechanisms for persons implementing projects (e.g. indicating the need for regulatory changes or supplementing information on the NCN website)	NCN-funded principal investigators; potential applicants; academic community	Second half of 2026	Research Projects and Researcher Development Division; Information and Promotion Team; Gender Equality Plan Team	Diagnosis developed on support mechanisms (yes/no); implementation of actions resulting from the diagnosis, e.g. publication of a communication or website information (yes/no)

## IV. CONCLUSION

### 1. Publication, implementation and monitoring of the Plan and combining objectives with the thematic areas of gender equality plans

The NCN Gender Equality Plan (2026–2029) will be published on the NCN website, in the [Gender Equality Support](#) section, in order to ensure full accessibility for persons working at NCN, applicants and stakeholders. Its implementation, coordination of activities and response to emerging needs will be the responsibility of the Gender Equality Plan Team, supported by the persons and teams involved in the implementation of the individual tasks specified in the Plan.

Progress monitoring will be conducted on an annual basis. It will include updating data, preparing and publishing an updated statistics file (Information on the participation of women and men among NCN

applicants and awardees, NCN Experts, and the composition of the NCN Council and Office) as well as assessing the implementation of individual activities. The conclusions from the monitoring will be used for the further improvement of policies and practices supporting gender equality in light of NCN acting as an employer and basic research-funding agency. The scope of analysed data may be expanded if necessary. An important element supporting the achievement of the Plan's objectives is also training, which will contribute to increasing awareness, competencies and the sustainability of gender equality activities at NCN. Training covers a broad scope of subjects, from training for persons conducting recruitment processes and managing teams, through training increasing awareness of anti-mobbing and anti-discrimination issues and addressing broadly understood equality issues, to training directed at the NCN Council and Discipline Coordinators in the field of gender equality, diversity and unconscious bias in the research funding procedure.

Thus, the Plan includes the four required areas of gender equality plans defined by the European Commission:

- publication of the document – the Plan will be published on the website and widely disseminated within NCN,
- resources – the implementation, coordination of activities and ongoing response to changing needs will be the responsibility of the Gender Equality Plan Team; individual activities and the achievement of objectives will be implemented and supported by selected teams or thematic committees,
- data – data on the participation of women and men among NCN applicants and awardees, NCN Experts and the composition of the NCN Council and Office will be updated and published annually; the Plan also includes specific objectives and activities which, based on data monitoring and maintaining ongoing registers of specific cases, will help develop recommendations for concrete actions supporting equality,
- training – the Plan includes a broad range of training related to equality issues and associated topics.

In addition to the four mandatory areas, the Plan also includes action areas recommended by the European Commission, which make it possible to strengthen the gender equality policy within the institution and ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the initiatives undertaken.

The table below presents the connection of the planned objectives of the Plan with the recommended action areas. It shows how individual activities support various aspects of gender equality at NCN, including organisational culture, gender balance in decision-making structures, recruitment processes and career development, integration of the gender dimension in research, and prevention of undesirable behaviours.

Recommended thematic area	Recommended thematic areas				
	Organisational structure and work-life balance	Gender equality at management and decision-making level	Gender equality in the process of recruitment and career development	Gender in research and teaching	Measures to prevent gender-based violence, including sexual harassment
<b>NCN as an employer – objectives</b>					
Objective 1. Increasing anti-mobbing and anti-discrimination awareness at NCN	X				X

Objective 2. Increasing knowledge and competences in equality, diversity and inclusion across NCN	X		X		X
Objective 3. Improving the onboarding and reintegration process for new staff and for persons returning to work after long-term absence	X		X		
Objective 4. Reinforcing awareness of procedures for reporting undesirable behaviours through regular communication and information activities	X				X
<b>Gender equality and inclusiveness in basic research funding across NCN – objectives</b>					
Objective 1. Strengthening the competences of the NCN Council and Discipline Coordinators in gender equality, diversity and unconscious bias in research funding processes	X	X	X	X	
Objective 2. Raising awareness of the importance of equality-related issues in NCN information and promotional activities	X	X			
Objective 3. Reinforcing the quality of integrating the gender dimension in the proposals and evaluation of proposals				X	
Objective 4. Efforts to explore the causes of gender-related differences in call results and to identify factors influencing them	X	X	X		
Objective 5. Embedding good gender and inclusiveness practices of Expert Teams into the proposal evaluation process		X	X	X	
Objective 6. Diagnosing effective measures to support those experiencing specific life challenges	X	X	X		

## 2. Summary

The 2026–2029 Gender Equality Plan for the National Science Centre has been drafted based on the analysis of existing activities and mechanisms supporting equality and inclusiveness, both with regard to NCN as an employer and basic research funding agency. Its purpose is to reinforce the potential of science and NCN by creating a working environment that supports the inclusion of all persons and by shaping a grant policy that ensures equal opportunities and supports the participation of different groups in scientific research.

This Plan constitutes a logical continuation of the previous document and defines long-term activities. If necessary, it may be updated in order to respond to the changing needs of working persons and to organisational and grant-related requirements, as well as to new legal provisions, while ensuring the consistency and durability of the gender equality policy. The document has been approved by the NCN Council and NCN Director.



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## Annexes

Annex 1. Information on the gender distribution among NCN applicants and awardees, NCN Experts, and the composition of the NCN Council and Office (2011–2025)