

# Gender Equality Plan

*Duration: 2026 – annual review*

## 1. Introduction and guiding principles

VSL's Executive Board recognises the importance the European Union attaches to gender equality in research, development and innovation. VSL is committed to a workforce and working environment where everyone has equal opportunities, and where differences in background and perspective strengthen quality and innovation.

This plan sets out the measures already in place and those planned to advance gender equality within VSL, and explains how these measures are embedded, monitored and reviewed. The guiding principles (equal opportunities, respectful behaviour and non-discrimination) are laid down in this plan and are supported in practice by existing agreements and frameworks within VSL, such as the VSL Code of Conduct.

This plan is VSL's formally adopted framework for gender equality. Where VSL has not adopted a separate Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) policy document, this plan serves as the reference document for agreements and ways of working on this topic. It applies to all employees and interns covered by the VSL Code of Conduct and is reviewed every 12 months by the D&I working group, with a high-level update reported to the Board. Where relevant, actions are aligned with HR and people managers. The D&I working group consists of 4–6 VSL employees who are enthusiastic about this subject.

Publication: this plan will be made publicly available via the VSL website. Internal progress updates and baseline reports will not be published. Progress will be shown through an annual baseline report and a short internal action list covering completed and ongoing activities.

## 2. Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

VSL aims for balanced representation in leadership and decision-making. The Board and the Management Team safeguard this in appointments, succession planning and team composition, within the constraints of available talent and role requirements.

- From salary scale 13 upwards, representation is balanced.
- There is also a substantial proportion of women within management.
- Across the organisation as a whole, the proportion of women is lower than the proportion of men, though the trend is upwards.

### 3. Governance and resources

VSL's Executive Board holds ultimate responsibility for implementing this plan. VSL has a D&I working group that meets periodically (typically monthly). The working group collaborates with HR and people management where measures affect HR processes or team agreements. The working group issues a brief progress update at least once a year.

The D&I working group has an annual budget of €7,500 for small-scale activities. For activities requiring additional effort (e.g. external support), prior alignment with management is required.

- Meets monthly to discuss signals, questions and improvement ideas around D&I and to set in motion (small) actions.
- Organises 1–2 low-threshold D&I events per year focused on raising awareness and encouraging conversation (without a preachy tone).
- Acts as an approachable point of contact: employees can raise topics and signals relating to D&I with the working group; where needed, matters are referred to HR, the people manager, a confidential adviser, or the integrity reporting channel.
- Provides input for an annual short update and publishes this internally.

The working group uses signals from across the organisation (e.g. from conversations, events and employee questions) to identify areas for improvement. Where appropriate, HR can, at its request or based on those signals, carry out a targeted analysis (for example on recruitment and progression or pay differences), provided the available data and privacy rules allow. Agreed follow-up steps are recorded and tracked.

The D&I working group organises 1–2 accessible events each year to build awareness and keep the conversation about D&I going. After each event, the key signals and any follow-up actions are briefly recorded and shared with employees.

### 4. Training and capacity building

VSL mainly builds awareness and knowledge about D&I through communication and the annual D&I events. Where appropriate, VSL signposts employees to available learning and development opportunities via the VSL Academy. If training is attended or organised, key learnings are, where possible, fed back to the D&I working group.

### 5. Data collection and monitoring

VSL monitors progress on gender equality and D&I in a pragmatic way, proportionate to the size of the organisation and the agreements in this plan. HR and the D&I working

group align annually on which key figures and signals are shared and which improvement actions follow from them. External benchmarking or additional studies are only used where there is a clear reason or need.

## 6. Gender equality in recruitment and career development

VSL aims to provide equal opportunities in recruitment and career development. In practice, this means HR and people managers strive for transparent procedures and a careful, consistent assessment of candidates and employees.

- Recruitment & selection: vacancies and selection criteria are communicated clearly; where appropriate, inclusive wording is used and reach is kept as broad as possible.
- Selection: interviews and assessments are carried out as consistently as possible.
- Development: employees can discuss development aspirations with their people manager; where appropriate, VSL signposts available development opportunities.

## 7. Work–life balance and organisational culture

VSL encourages a healthy work–life balance and an inclusive organisational culture. In doing so, VSL builds on existing initiatives and agreements around health and wellbeing (including within the occupational health & safety approach) and on signals from across the organisation.

VSL supports mental health, among other things, by giving employees access to Binqy (an online platform for wellbeing monitoring and personal feedback). In addition, where appropriate, VSL can signpost available learning and development opportunities (e.g. via the VSL Academy) on topics such as workload, prioritisation and work–life balance.

## 8. Measures against gender-based violence

VSL is committed to a socially safe working environment. Employees can discuss signals or concerns with their people manager, HR or the D&I working group. For formal reports and confidential support, employees can contact the integrity reporting channel and (internal and/or external) confidential advisers. VSL communicates periodically where employees can go for support.

## 9. Integrating the gender dimension in research and education

VSL encourages the integration of the gender dimension in research and external representation where this is relevant to the content, application or user context. When developing proposals, project teams are reminded to consider whether the gender dimension is relevant to the research question, method or impact, and to pay attention to team diversity where this fits with the expertise available.

VSL regards this plan as a living document. Each year, results and lessons learned from monitoring, recruitment, the D&I events, and signals/reports are summarised and, where necessary, translated into updated actions. In this way, the commitments in this plan are strengthened and embedded step by step.

### **Adopted by**

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