

Gender Equality Policy

1. Background

While the fraction of female and male students in natural and engineering sciences all across Europe is generally balanced, a significant female drop-out and increasing gap between male and female researchers is observed after the PhD level and beyond. This gender issue is complex, has deep roots in our society and must be addressed with a multi-pronged approach. The NCCR Bio-Inspired Materials strives to be part of the change towards a gender-balanced scientific community with an ambitious Equal Opportunities Program. This Gender Equality Policy reflects the commitment of our Center to offer equal opportunities to women and men, and it serves as guideline for our efforts to promote the integration of women at all educational levels in natural and life science disciplines to advance towards a more gender-balanced academic system.

2. Purpose

This policy serves to define:

- The gender equality guiding principles
- The general goals of the gender equality program
- The implemented framework to promote and protect gender equality
- The gender equality monitoring mechanisms
- The responsibilities of the NCCR members

3. Guiding principles

The NCCR Bio-Inspired Materials promotes and protects gender equality, which refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men. The gender equality commitments of the NCCR Bio-Inspired Materials are inspired by the international human rights framework and the principle of Equity and Non-Discrimination.¹ The United Nations have established that Gender Integration² – i.e. the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels – is essential for promoting gender equality. This Gender Equality Policy is the product of an integrative discussion involving both women and men.

4. General goals

The general goals of the NCCR Bio-Inspired Materials concerning gender equality are the following:

- Promote female role models and spark the interest of female students in natural sciences from elementary school and beyond.
- Create a culture and boundary conditions to ensure equal career opportunities for parents.
- Encourage young female researchers to pursue an academic career and actively help them to overcome existing hurdles.
- Support the career development of (female) PhD students and postdocs and promote the careers of pre-tenured academic researchers.
- Actively support the employment of women at all levels within the NCCR.
- Disseminate successful measures and transfer them to the affiliated departments of the Home (UniFr) and partner (EPFL, ETHZ) institutions.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/Enhancingequalityandcounteringdiscrimination.aspx>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/Pages/GenderIntegration.aspx>

5. Implementation

To reach its gender equality goals, the NCCR Bio-Inspired Materials puts in place the following measures:

- Outreach programs for children and educational activities for high school students are organized to awake their interest in natural and life sciences well before they choose their studies. The female researchers and PIs of the Center are heavily involved as supervisors of these activities acting as role models for the students.
- All meetings and seminars are scheduled during normal working hours to accommodate the participation of researchers with children and families and flexible working policies are applied whenever possible. The Center subsidizes two slots at the University of Fribourg's Daycare, covers the fraction of the maternity leave non-reimbursed by the insurance to avoid discrimination based on maternity, and reimburses additional childcare expenses during travel for a professional event.
- Career mentoring, grant writing support, and round tables/workshops on topics such as negotiation skills, gender bias identification or family-work balance among others are offered to ensure women and men have equal opportunities when making their next career step. The Center also sponsors symposia at conferences that highlight female researchers as women are still underrepresented, and thus less visible, at that level.
- The Woman in Science (WINS) Fellowship is awarded yearly to female researchers to reduce the gender gap at the postdoc level. The employment of women is also indirectly supported through the coverage of the non-reimbursed fraction of the maternity leave.
- Some of the most successful EO actions are translated to the departments that host the NCCR groups at the partner universities through the NCCR's Equal Opportunities Envoys program.
- The NCCR's management regularly monitors gender equality in the Center and has a permanent dialogue with the research groups in order to identify and address gender equality issues.

6. Monitoring and compliance

The gender equality status and the impact of the implemented measures is monitored by the NCCR management through several mechanisms. The women-to-men ratio at the different hierarchy levels is constantly monitored and put into context against reference groups. The number of female and male participants is monitored where possible for the majority of programs and activities organized by the Center, from the activities for elementary school students up to the round tables and workshops organized for the NCCR researchers. Feedback forms are collected after these activities to assess their impact and for continuous improvement. A large general survey involving all NCCR members is made once per funding phase. This survey allows to assess the gender equality situation in the NCCR and to obtain feedback from the NCCR members on the actions undertaken by the Center to foster the advancement of gender equality. Additionally, information on the next employer/next position of the female and male NCCR alumni is systematically collected to assess the impact of the gender equality measures. The translation status of gender equality actions to the departments that host the NCCR groups at the partner universities is also monitored. The members of the NCCR Bio-Inspired Materials further commit to respond to and take action with regard to any evidence or complaints of inappropriate or gender-biased behavior promptly and confidentially through established mechanisms at the respective institution.

7. Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the members of the NCCR Bio-Inspired Materials are as follows:

- All NCCR members: Uphold the Guiding Principles of this policy
- Principal Investigators: Ensure that the members of their research groups understand and comply with this policy
- Equal Opportunities Delegate and Coordinator: Monitor gender equality status and activities and inform the Executive Board
- Executive Board: Elaborate and review this policy regularly to ensure its effectiveness is maintained