



Plantentuin Meise

AGENTSCHAP PLANTENTUIN MEISE

Botanic Garden Meise

Gender Equality plan

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Main Version 2023, Report 2024 -2025 & Planning 2026

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1. Introduction

Meise Botanic Garden acknowledges the existing [Diversity Plan](#), yet in response to the expressed needs of our staff for more targeted and quantifiable actions to advance gender equality within our institution, we have developed this Gender Equality Plan (GEP). This plan serves as a complementary component to our Diversity Plan, catering specifically to gender related concerns. Furthermore, the adoption of a GEP aligns with the prerequisites for continued participation in projects funded by the European Commission.

At Meise Botanic Garden, we place significant emphasis on the significance of a comprehensive gender policy, and we wholeheartedly endorse the principles and objectives outlined in this Gender Equality Plan.

Jérôme Degreef

Steven Dessein

Koen Es

Frederik Leliaert

Filip Vandelook

2. Dedicated resources

The following resources are provided for the execution of the tasks below:

1. HR Business Partner (0.05 FTE or Full-Time Equivalent). Freek Van Looveren holds a pivotal role as the bridge connecting the Diversity Officer with the management team. His specific tasks and responsibilities encompass:

- ✓ Reviewing and overseeing the incorporation of gender equality into career advancement and business policies.
- ✓ Managing internal communications related to gender equality.
- ✓ Overseeing the organisation-wide distribution of the biannual staff survey.

2. Diversity Officer (0.2 FTE), Katrien Clarysse leads on the coordination of activities outlined in the GEP and serves as the primary point of contact for diversity, gender, and inclusion matters. She also collaborates closely with the Integrity Contact Person. Specific tasks and responsibilities:

- ✓ Compilation of gender balance statistics used for monitoring and reporting.
- ✓ Coordination of the self-assessment group.
- ✓ Providing and communicating training and awareness-raising opportunities, addressing unconscious bias, and inclusive leadership

and employment to the management team, selection panel members and all other staff members.

3. Contact Person for Integrity, Chris Kosolosky provides valuable advice and support for implementing necessary actions.

4. Trained confidential counsellors: A confidential counsellor is an approachable first point of contact for all employees to contact for problems of a psychosocial nature and unwanted cross-border behaviour. Employees can expect first-line care and advice from them. The confidential counsellors work independently of the organisation and are bound by professional secrecy. What an employee discusses with a counsellor remains between you and the confidant. Only after your explicit agreement can the counsellor talk to other people, such as your supervisor, HR, ... Meise Botanic Garden has two confidential counsellors, Anja Van Ossel and Natacha Beau.

5. All members of the management team at Meise Botanic Garden dedicate 0.05 FTE to actively support the initiatives outlined in the GEP. Managers overseeing gender imbalanced specific professional categories within the Garden have a particular responsibility to drive progress toward the specific objectives outlined in our Gender Equality Plan. The engagement entails the active involvement in workshops, training sessions, and the implementation of unbiased recruitment practices. The members of the management team are also responsible for reviewing visual and textual content for gender bias, as well as encouraging team members to participate in gender equality initiatives while promoting gender neutrality across all our organizational activities.

6. Members of the self-assessment group are expected to allocate 0.02 FTE to support the group's functions, including tasks such as preparing and assessing working group meetings, participating in 1-2 working group meetings annually, and attending the annual general consultation committee meeting (AOC) on gender equality. Specific tasks include:

- ✓ Defining KPIs to monitor gender equality actions.
- ✓ Evaluation of gender statistics.
- ✓ Review of the HR management plan.
- ✓ Review of the plan for external communication.
- ✓ Formulating additions and changes to the gender equality action plan.

7. Communication team in charge of external communication. Specific tasks include:

- ✓ Add a gender dimension to the external communication plan to reflect an inclusive organisational culture.
- ✓ Disseminate job opportunities at Meise Botanic Garden via a variety of channels.
- ✓ Improve gender neutrality in public communication.

3. Data collection, monitoring and reporting

In line with our commitment to gender equality, we annually compile gender balance statistics, encompassing both the overall workforce and specific professional categories, which are integrated into our annual report. Commencing in 2023, we are poised to systematically track the gender composition of applicants for every job vacancy at Meise Botanic Garden as part of our ongoing monitoring initiatives, enabling us to make informed decisions for future job openings and bolster gender diversity. Furthermore, our biannual staff survey, conducted under the purview of the Flemish Government, now incorporates targeted questions addressing gender-related issues and the cultivation of an inclusive organizational culture, thereby facilitating the collection of valuable insights and feedback from our dedicated staff.

In 2023, Meise Botanic Garden will establish an institutional diversity reflection group incorporating a wide range of perspectives and expertise, assigned the responsibility of establishing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), tracking and assessing progress in attaining the objectives, and proposing modifications and enhancements to the gender equality action plan. This group will be a carefully curated assembly comprising representatives from every major facet of our institution, spanning from senior management to staff members at various grades and roles. This diversity ensures a multifaceted perspective, capturing insights from various career stages. We uphold a commitment to gender balance within the self-assessment team, prioritizing representation from both men and women, and we also value the inclusion of individuals with experience in balancing career and family responsibilities. Furthermore, we contemplate the involvement of undergraduate and postgraduate students in this group.

The collective composition of our diversity reflection group is marked by members possessing specific expertise in critical areas such as equality and diversity, human resources, and data analysis, contributing indispensable skills to our team. Together, the diversity team embodies the necessary knowledge, experience, and proficiency to analyze data and formulate apt actions to address issues identified. At the start, significant emphasis is laid on the definition of KPIs and measures of success, which serve as the foundational framework for assessing actions in subsequent phases. The output of the self-assessment group will be discussed once a year in our general consultation committee meetings (AOC) affording us the opportunity to present the effectiveness of past actions to the management committee and present an adapted gender equality action plan for the year ahead.

4. Training and capacity building

At Meise Botanic Garden, we prioritize training and capacity building as key pillars of our gender equality efforts. Our comprehensive approach includes targeted training programs to address unconscious gender biases among our staff and decision-makers, including training for selection panel members. Training can take

various forms, including instruction videos, guidelines and interactive workshops. Additionally, we conduct yearly awareness-raising activities focused on inclusive leadership and employment, ensuring our managers are well equipped to foster a gender-inclusive workplace.

To promote conscious and respectful communication, we actively encourage a culture of appreciative teamwork. We create safe spaces where employees can engage in open dialogues, connect, and share their experiences within the corporate culture. These spaces can include women's circles, LGBTQ+ meetings, or communities for junior or senior employees, single parents, and/or French-speaking colleagues, or any other group of individuals that relate with each other in one or more aspects.

Our commitment to gender equality awareness raising extends to our communication practices. We incorporate gender-neutral language and imagery into all internal communication devices, such as newsletters, social media platforms, and general information notes. We also inform our staff that any instances of inappropriate verbal behavior related to gender can be reported to our designated contact point for integrity. Furthermore, we ensure that our staff is aware of and can access Flemish government facilities related to transgender care. To address any transgressive behavior, we promote the use of our existing system of trained confidential counselors. We highlight the role of the contact person for integrity violations and emphasize the importance of adhering to our roadmap deontology.

5. Baseline Assessment and Analysis

5.1. Policies on Gender Equality

5.1.1. European level

The European Union's Key objectives for gender equality are:

- ✓ Combating gender-based violence and stereotypes.
- ✓ A thriving gender equal economy by addressing issues such as the gender pay gap.
- ✓ Equal leadership opportunities in decision-making and politics.
- ✓ Enhancing EU gender policy externally.

Our commitment to fairness and equity means that all applicants will be assessed fairly and appropriately. As a member of Euraxess, Meise Botanic Garden adheres to the European Charter for Researchers | EURAXESS and the Code of Conduct for recruitment, reinforcing our dedication to ethical recruitment practices.

5.1.2. Flemish level

The Flemish government is committed to an integrated and inclusive diversity policy. It aims to reflect the diversity in society and wants to create equal opportunities in every domain and at every level. Aligned with the Flemish

Government's objectives, Meise Botanic Garden strives to achieve a representation of at least 40% women in top and at least 40% of women in middle management.

5.1.3. Institutional level

There is strength in diversity because women and men have different perspectives and approaches to situations. In our current global civilisation there is a trend of complicit masculinity, which means that men flourish more and quietly support the culture. Therefore there is a need to equally encourage women to develop their talents into skills, which help them excel in the labor market. It is a universal trend that for most professions the higher the rank, the number of women decreases. Therefore women need to compete even more in a world that implicitly favors masculine qualities. Consequently, to gain real change in cultural norms and behavior, you also need to influence the unconscious mentality of both men and women in general. And on the level of organizations we need to investigate if the work culture is respectful towards feminine aspects of leadership.

Meise Botanic Garden is deeply committed to championing gender equality, considering it an essential component of our overarching management plan for equal opportunities and diversity. To actively promote gender balance and combat discrimination, we seamlessly integrate a gender perspective into every facet of our diversity policies, HR management plan, regulatory measures, and expenditure programs, ensuring that our commitment to equality is embedded in all our initiatives.

In synergy with the Garden's comprehensive [Diversity Plan](#), this Gender Equality Plan (GEP) stands as a dynamic instrument for effecting tangible and meaningful change, both from the grassroots and executive levels. We recognize that this document is far from static; rather, it remains adaptable and open to evolution through collaborative efforts with the very individuals it endeavors to empower and support: the dedicated staff of Meise Botanic Garden.

In addition, Meise Botanic Garden has a [Deontological Code](#) (Implemented since 2014) which declares that we unequivocally condemn all manifestations of discrimination, whether rooted in philosophical, political, or religious beliefs, appearance, sexual orientation, gender, perceived racial origin, language, nationality, linguistic community, age, marital status, disability, or health condition.

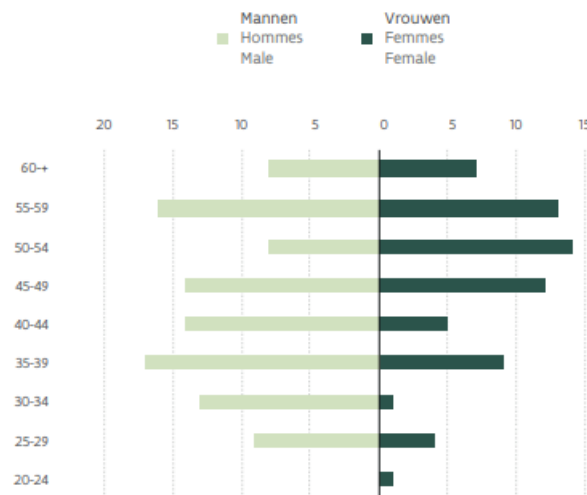
5.2. Baseline data¹ (2023)

5.2.1. Gender and Age

As of 2023, the gender distribution among employees of the Flemish government stands at 100 males (100M) to 69 females (69F), while within the French-speaking

¹ The gender statistics presented in this document are derived from the official gender registration of our employees, as indicated by the options "Male" and "Female" on their

community, it is 22 males (22M) to 6 females (6F). When examining the intersection of gender and age across our entire organization, a significant gender imbalance becomes apparent, particularly among individuals under the age of 45, where men are disproportionately represented. This underscores the importance of addressing gender disparities within our workforce.



SOURCE: ANNUAL REPORT MEISE BOTANIC GARDEN 2022

5.2.2. Gender and Job Level

Within the Flemish Government, job levels are primarily determined by the educational qualifications of employees, structured as follows:

Level A corresponds to positions requiring a Master's degree.

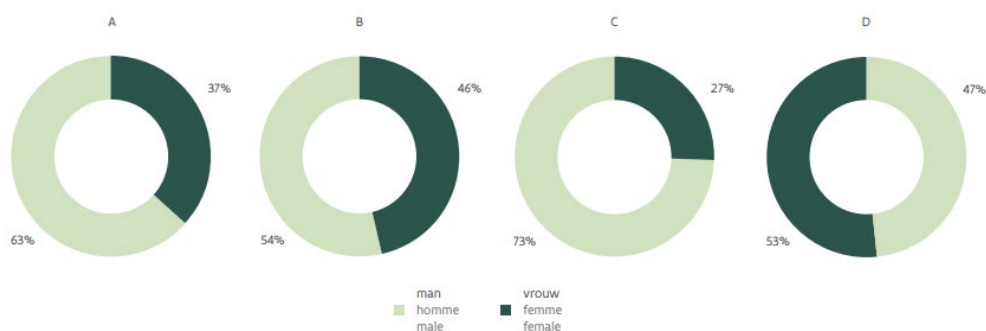
Level B is associated with roles requiring a Bachelor's degree.

Level C is aligned with positions necessitating a secondary education degree.

Level D encompasses recruitment without any specific degree requirements.

Belgian Identity cards. "The Belgian Transgender Law of 2017 permits transgender citizens to update their official gender registration but does not currently provide an option for an 'X' gender marker or the choice of no gender registration.

However, on June 19, 2019, the Constitutional Court ruled that certain aspects of this Transgender Act were unconstitutional, as they were deemed to discriminate against individuals identifying as gender non-binary and gender fluid."



SOURCE: ANNUAL REPORT MEISE BOTANIC GARDEN 2022

When examining the distribution of workers by both gender and job level, it becomes evident that there exists a distinct overrepresentation of men in the higher paid job levels, particularly at Levels A (compared to B) and C (compared to D). This disparity is especially pronounced at the upper echelons of top and middle management, represented by the Direction Committee, where the gender distribution stands at 1 woman compared to 5 men. This pattern underscores a vertical imbalance in job levels, where men tend to occupy higher positions compared to their female counterparts.

5.2.3. Gender and Profession

Gender imbalances are notably prominent within specific professions at Meise Botanic Garden:

- ✓ Within the academic staff category, only 39% comprises females. Academic staff includes employees evaluated by the scientific council of Meise Botanic Garden for the quality of their scientific work and output (Table 1).
- ✓ Among gardeners, only 1 out of 12 is female.
- ✓ Within the cleaning team, there is a reversed gender imbalance, with 8 out of the 10 cleaners being women

	DUTCH	FRENCH	TOTAL	TOTAL (%)
FEMALE	15	4	19	39%
MALE	22	8	30	61%
TOTAL	37	12	49	100%

TABLE 1: 2023 ACADEMIC STAFF DISTRIBUTION CLASSIFIED BY GENDER AND LANGUAGE.

5.2.4. Gender in management

At Meise Botanic Garden, leadership and management positions play a pivotal role shaping the organization's direction. The governing bodies include a board of directors and a scientific council, both governed by executive decrees that emphasize balanced gender composition.

- ✓ The scientific council comprises 16 voting members and a secretary, achieving gender balance with 8 females and 8 males.
- ✓ The board of directors is composed of 9 voting members, 2 government commissioners, and a secretary, with a gender distribution of 5 females and 4 males.

In operational top and middle management roles, represented by the Direction Committee, gender balance is not yet achieved, with 1 female and 5 male members. Lower management positions, encompassing team leaders across various garden teams, total 10 in number, has a 60% women vs 40% men balance.

	TOP & MIDDLE MGMT	LOWER MGMT	TOTAL OPERATIONAL MGMT
FEMALE	1	6	7
MALE	5	4	9
TOTAL	6	10	16

TABLE 2: 2023 MANAGEMENT ROLES, CLASSIFIED BY LEVEL AND GENDER.

5.2.5. Gender and pay

The distribution of professional status within our organization significantly influences pay disparities. There are two main categories: statutory employees and contractual employees. Statutory employees enjoy advantages such as better health insurance, enhanced career opportunities, and improved pension packages compared to their contractual counterparts. The gender pay gap in our organization primarily results from the distinction in professional contracting among collaborators, as statutory employees receive a more comprehensive salary package.

As of the current data, 51% of our male employees hold statutory positions, while 47.8% of female employees fall into this category. In contrast, 49% of our male employees are contractual, compared to 52.2% of female employees (Table 2).

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE (%)	FEMALE (%)	TOTAL (%)
STATUTORY	51	33	84	51%	48%	50%
CONTRACTUAL	49	36	85	49%	52%	50%
TOTAL	100	69	169	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 3: 2023 STATUTORY AND CONTRACTUAL STAFF DISTRIBUTION CLASSIFIED BY GENDER.

It is important to note that a recent legislative change will impact these statistics. This law stipulates that all future contracts will be contractual rather than statutory. This change will narrow the gap between employment categories.

6. Objectives for gender equality

Objective 1: To attain gender balance within the scientific staff over a defined period, starting with a 60/40 balance within 5 years and progressing to a 50/50² balance within 10 years. This objective is relevant because it aligns with our commitment to promoting gender diversity within our scientific workforce, which, in turn, fosters innovation and brings a variety of perspectives to our research and projects.

Objective 2: To maintain the gender balance within lower management positions. This is relevant as it fosters gender diversity within leadership, contributing to a more inclusive work environment and providing equitable career advancement opportunities.

Objective 3: To achieve a 60/40 gender balance within top and middle management within 10 years. This is relevant as it promotes diversity and inclusivity at the highest decision-making levels, contributing to more well-rounded organizational perspectives and decision-making processes.

Objective 4: To maintain gender balance within the scientific council and the board of directors. This is relevant as it fosters inclusive decision-making, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in the governance and strategic direction of the organization.

Objective 5: To achieve a 70/30 gender difference in the teams of gardeners and the cleaning team and the technical service operatives, within 5 years. This is relevant as it promotes inclusivity by breaking down traditional gender imbalances in specific roles, contributing to a more diverse and equitable workplace.

The rationale behind our decision to extend the timeframes for objectives 1 (in part), 3, and 5 is rooted in the inherent challenges of achieving these targets within a shorter 5-year period. Objectives 1, 3, and 5 present greater complexities and, in some cases, may even appear unattainable within this shorter timeframe.

For instance, our top and middle management currently consists of a stable team of 6 individuals, with limited retirements or vacancies anticipated over the next 10 years. Even a single personnel change can have a substantial impact on our gender balance, making this goal more difficult to achieve.

² In light of the contemporary recognition of individuals' autonomy in identifying with gender fluidity, establishing goals for, say, a 50/50 gender balance can pose challenges. Given that our current Flemish Government statistics do not encompass non-binary registration, we opt for whole numbers in our approach. However, it's essential to note that when we refer to a 50/50 gender balance (F/M), we essentially encompass a breakdown of approximately 45% female (45F), 45% male (45M), and reserve 10% as an open category (10X). This open category, denoted as 'X,' effectively represents an indeterminate variable, accommodating non-binary individuals and those who choose not to disclose their gender identity.

Similarly, the aim of reaching a 30% representation of female gardeners is undeniably ambitious. We presently stand at a 10% representation, and considering the relatively low number of female students pursuing this field, this objective is particularly challenging. However, it's important to emphasize that our choice of a longer time frame does not indicate complacency. Meise Botanic Garden remains resolute in its commitment to seizing every opportunity to promote gender equality and will continue to implement measures aimed at improving and sustaining gender balance.

7. Gender Equality Action plan

7.1. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

In our steadfast commitment to advancing gender equality in recruitment and career progression, we have devised a comprehensive strategy to actively engage with prospective female employees (and male candidates for cleaning staff) at every stage of the recruitment process. Our approach encompasses multiple facets designed to promote inclusivity and diversity within our workforce.

First and foremost, we are dedicated to shaping our organizational image to resonate with and attract a more diverse pool of applicants. We will meticulously craft and present job offers that champion gender equality, ensuring that our messaging is inclusive and inviting to all. Moreover, we will leverage a variety of channels to disseminate our job opportunities, expanding our reach to encompass a broader audience and welcome talent from various backgrounds.

To eliminate unconscious bias from our selection process, we are resolute in our commitment to promoting awareness. This includes addressing bias at every juncture, from the initial assessment of CVs to the scheduling of job interviews and the composition of selection panels. We are also poised to provide training to our selection panel members, fostering a culture of respect and gender sensitivity;

Furthermore, we are proactively incorporating gender equality into our career advancement policies. Our guidelines promote explicit gender equality, focusing on merit-based evaluations and equal opportunities for career progression, irrespective of gender. We conduct regular policy reviews and updates to eliminate gender-based disparities, reinforcing our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The actions below collectively underpin our mission to foster an inclusive and equitable work environment, where individuals of all genders are empowered to thrive and contribute to our shared success.

7.1.1. Actions

- ✓ Enhance selection procedures and visual representation:

Conduct a comprehensive review of job offers and selection procedures to ensure gender neutrality. Collaborate with qualified selection officers experienced in fair and inclusive practices. Promote diversity by incorporating visuals and chat videos showcasing female role models and diverse teams in job vacancies. Work closely with design and multimedia teams to create inclusive visuals that attract a diverse pool of applicants.

- ✓ Mitigate bias through mandatory training:

Investigate effective strategies to mitigate implicit bias in the selection process. Develop and implement mandatory training programs for selection panel members to educate them on recognizing and addressing unconscious bias. Customize training materials for practical relevance and to raise awareness among all involved stakeholders.

- ✓ Engage staff for wider outreach:

Actively encourage employees, especially those from the target gender, to promote job vacancies within their professional and personal networks. Incentivize and motivate staff to share job opportunities, expanding the reach of recruitment efforts.

- ✓ Foster gender balance in selection panels:

Strive for gender balance within selection panels, with a specific focus on involving managers. Uni-gender selection panels should be avoided. Align these efforts with organizational goals for gender diversity to ensure a more inclusive selection process.

- ✓ Communicate gender neutrality:

Review and adapt public communication tools for gender neutrality, ensuring language and visuals are inclusive and free from gender bias. Collaborate closely with communication teams to implement gender bias-free changes.

- ✓ Integrate gender equality in career advancement policies:

Develop and implement policies and guidelines for career advancement that explicitly promote gender equality. Ensure that these policies emphasize merit-based evaluations and equal opportunities for career progression, irrespective of gender. Regularly review and update these policies to eliminate any gender-based disparities and align them with our organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

7.2. Work-life balance and an inclusive organisational culture

Work-life balance and an inclusive organisational culture hold paramount importance in fostering a truly inclusive and equitable workplace. Striking a harmonious equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal well-being is not only an essential element of employee satisfaction but also a

fundamental human need. This section of the Gender Equality Plan delineates a comprehensive strategy aimed at redefining and nurturing our organisational culture. By championing policies that facilitate flexible work arrangements, supporting caregivers, and fostering an environment of mutual respect, we aspire to cultivate a workplace where all individuals can thrive. Through targeted measures, this action plan seeks to dismantle any barriers that impede work-life balance, enabling our workforce to flourish both personally and professionally.

7.2.1. Actions

- ✓ Inclusive leadership training:

Conduct annual awareness-raising activities to empower managers with inclusive leadership skills, promoting an environment of respect and equity.

- ✓ Addressing unconscious bias:

Organize sessions to identify and combat unconscious bias, creating a conscious awareness of potential stereotypes and biases that may impact decision-making processes.

- ✓ Organization-wide support for gender equality:

Facilitate a session involving the entire organization to collectively address unconscious gender bias and garner widespread endorsement for the Gender Equality objectives.

- ✓ Cultivating appreciative teamwork:

Foster a culture of appreciation, valuing colleagues for their unique strengths, contributions, and efforts, rather than solely focusing on outcomes.

- ✓ Establishing safe spaces

Create safe and inclusive spaces for open dialogue, enabling individuals to connect, share experiences, and support one another. These spaces can include women's circles, LGBTQ+ meetings, or communities for junior or senior employees, single parents, and/or French-speaking colleagues, or any other group of individuals that relate with each other in one or more aspects..

- ✓ Flexible work arrangements

Implement measures to improve work-life balance, offering flexibility in part-time work and independent, flexible working hours and when possible irrespective of location.

- ✓ Gender inclusive communication

Introduce a section in the internal communication plan to scrutinize all internal communications for any language or visual content that may exhibit gender bias.

- ✓ Reporting inappropriate verbal behavior:

Communicate to staff that instances of gender-related inappropriate verbal behavior, such as sexist remarks, can be reported to the designated integrity contact point.

- ✓ Support for transgender care:

Disseminate information about existing Flemish government resources and facilities that cater to transgender care.

- ✓ Confidential counselor system:

Encourage and promote the utilization of a pre-existing system of trained confidential counsellors for the reporting of any transgressive behavior or misconduct.

- ✓ Highlighting integrity violations and deontology guidelines:

Emphasize the role of the contact person for integrity violations and the deontology roadmap, underscoring their significance in upholding ethical standards within the organization.

7.3. Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

In our commitment to fostering a safe and respectful workplace, this section of our action plan addresses the critical issue of gender-based violence, particularly focusing on measures to combat transgressive behavior and sexual harassment. Our comprehensive approach encompasses various strategies to promote a culture of respect and accountability within our organization.

7.3.1. Actions

- ✓ Implement Comprehensive Measures to Address Transgressive Behaviour:

Develop and implement a clear and comprehensive framework to address transgressive behaviour within the organization.

- ✓ Establish a Reporting Mechanism for Inappropriate Verbal Behaviour:

Create and communicate a reporting mechanism for instances of inappropriate verbal behavior related to gender, including sexist talk.

- ✓ Enhance Visibility of Integrity Contact Person and Deontology Roadmap:

Promote the role of the integrity contact person and the deontology roadmap to ensure a clear and accessible point of contact for integrity violations.

The Directors committee of Meise Botanic Garden thanks all who cooperated on this document, in particular Katrien Clarysse and Sofie Meeus. We commit ourselves to supporting the execution of the plan under supervision of the HR team and support the DISA working group.

Signed by all members of the Directors Committee

Steven Dessein

Steven Dessein, CEO

Filip Vandeloock

Filip Vandeloock (Mar 11, 2026 13:18:37 GMT+1)

Filip Vandeloock, director research department

Es

Koen Es, director

Frelia

Frederik Leliaert, director herbarium and library

Jérôme Degreef

Jérôme Degreef (Mar 12, 2026 11:07:25 GMT+1)

Jérôme Degreef, director Communauté française

Freek Van Looveren

On behalf of the HR team,

Freek Van Looveren, HRBP

8. Report: Gender Equality Plan Implementation - Meise Botanic Garden (2023-2024)

8.1. Introduction:

This section details the activities undertaken in the development and implementation of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) at Meise Botanic Garden from late 2023 to early 2025. This period focused on establishing clear objectives, defining measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and initiating data collection to track progress towards gender equality.

8.2. 2023 Activities:

8.2.1. October 10, 2023: Board of Directors Approval

The Gender Equality Plan (GEP) was presented to the Board of Directors.

The Director-General (DC) valorized and signed the plan, signifying social approval and commitment from the highest level of the organization.

8.2.2. November 30, 2023: Organization-Wide "Botanic Garden Café"

An organization-wide event, the "Botanic Garden Café," was held to raise awareness about the GEP.

The event included:

- ✓ An unconscious bias exercise, illustrated by a short movie.
- ✓ A presentation of the main statistics related to gender equality within the Botanic Garden.
- ✓ A call for staff members to join the GEP working group.

8.3. 2024 Activities:

8.3.1. January 18, 2024: 1st GEP Working Group Meeting

The first meeting of the GEP working group took place.

Key activities included:

- ✓ Introductions among working group members.
- ✓ Initial discussions on KPIs, which revealed a general confusion between measures, awareness campaigns, objectives and indicators to measure the performance of gender balance objectives (KPIs).
- ✓ The meeting aimed to clarify the nature of KPIs, emphasizing their role in making progress measurable and concrete.

This meeting served as preparation for the upcoming discussion on KPIs with all managerial employees (AOC).

8.3.2. March 22, 2024: 2nd GEP Working Group Meeting

The second meeting of the GEP working group was held.

Key activities included:

- ✓ Discussion of gender data related to all new staff selections in 2023, specifically focusing on data concerning the number of candidates, persons selected for an interview, and those ultimately hired.
- ✓ Further preparation for the AOC meeting.
- ✓ Refining the proposed KPIs.
- ✓ Proposing gender contact points within the organization.
- ✓ Gathering input from managerial employees using a KAHOOT app to identify the measures they considered most important to implement.

One member of the working group reported on a training she attended about "taking your claim," an assertiveness training program for female scientists.

8.3.3. September 3, 2024: AOC Meeting on Gender (Im)balance KPIs

A meeting was held with all managerial employees (AOC) to discuss KPIs related to gender (im)balance.

Discussions focused on KPIs within three key areas:

- ✓ Measures against gender-based violence and sexual harassment.
- ✓ Gender equality in selections and career progression.
- ✓ Work-life balance and inclusive organizational culture.

During this meeting, a new target group for promoting gender balance was validated: the technical service operative staff, it was agreed to add this team to the following objective from the Gender Equality Plan: *Objective 5: To achieve a 70/30 gender balance in the teams of gardeners, the cleaning team, and the technical service operatives within 5 years.*

8.3.4. October 24, 2024: 3rd GEP Working Group Meeting

The third meeting of the GEP working group was held.

The meeting focused on the valorization of KPIs and their differentiation into two categories:

- ✓ Data to be counted as KPIs:
 - Employees in gender-imbalanced teams.
 - Gender of employees in management positions.
 - Gender of job applicants.
 - Gender distribution in governing bodies.
 - Gender distribution among Academic and Professional Staff (APM).
 - Perception of equal opportunities and discrimination by men and women.

- Perception of work-life balance by men and women.
- ✓ Data to be collected for gender-related investigation:
 - Number of employees absent due to illness (M/F).
 - Percentage of employees working part-time (M/F).
- ✓ Annual Checklist Items:
 - Communication about measures against unwanted sexual behavior or harassment.
 - Communication plan revision.
 - Staffing plan revision.
 - Offer trainings regarding inclusivity and gender bias.

8.3.5. December 16, 2024:

A discussion on the 2024 KPIs took place with the HR Business Partner (HRBP).

8.4. 2025 Activities:

In 2025, the focus of our Gender equality team shifted from structural planning to active intervention, data validation, and cultural integration. A major highlight of the year was the decision to broaden the scope of our objectives: moving beyond gender balance and a women-friendly working culture to embrace all aspects of diversity, including foreign origin, education, age, disability or chronic illness, sexual diversity, non-discrimination and accessibility. Reflecting this evolution we officially renamed the Gep working group into **DiSa-working group** (meaning 'Diversiteit samen' in Dutch, which also references the Latin name of an orchid).

8.4.1. January 9, 2025: 1st GEP Working Group Meeting 2025

The first GEP working group meeting of 2025 was held.

Key activities included:

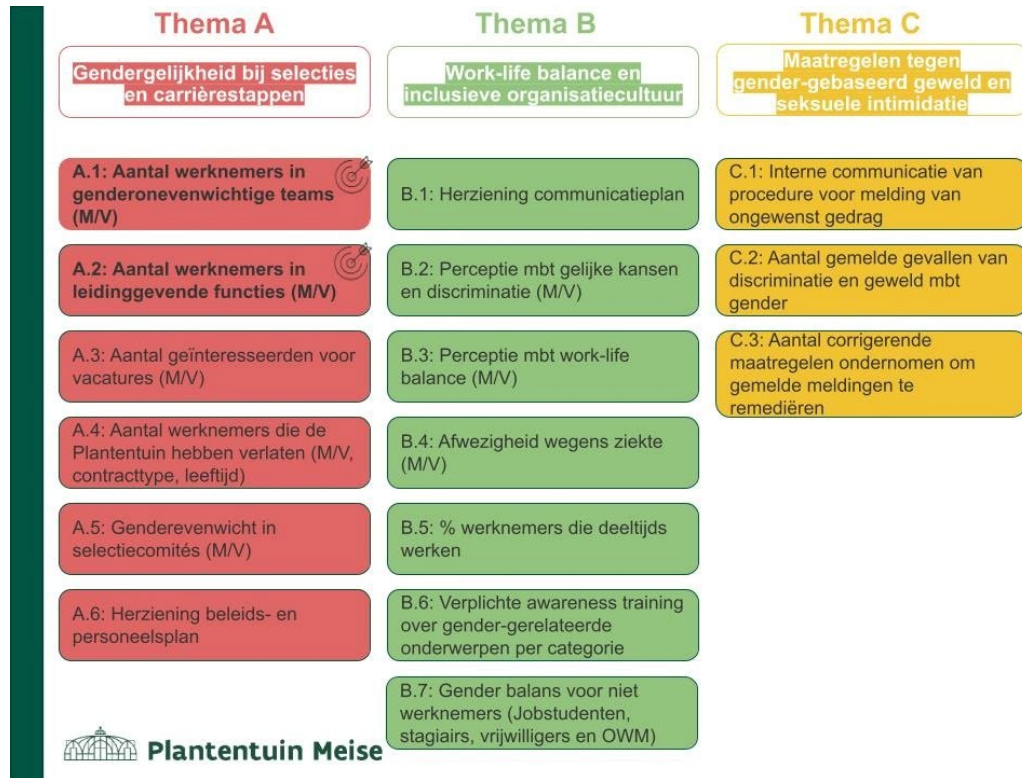
- ✓ Planning for 2025.
- ✓ Validation of the 2024 KPIs.

8.4.2. Summary of Meetings and Consultations

The DiSa-working group held numerous meetings throughout the year (January 9, April 3, May 12, June 18, August 21, September 2, September 3, and December 10). During these sessions, the team consolidated KPIs for the HR-team to track annually, welcomed new members, and shared insights from diversity workshops organized by the Flemish government. Crucially, the group actively consulted and increased collaboration with other key actors, such as the integrity officer, confidential counselors and the prevention advisor, to ensure seamless communication and better support for staff.

8.4.3. Detailed Report of the AOC Meeting (September 16, 2025)

A comprehensive AOC-meeting was held with management, confidential counselors, the integrity officer, and the prevention advisor to review progress on 16 KPI indicators.



Key findings included:

- **Targeted Teams:** Gradual progress toward parity was noted among researchers (37% female), gardeners (14% female), and cleaners (27% male). However, the Technical Service (TD) remains a significant challenge at 13% female, hindered by low turnover and a complete lack of female applicants. The lack of progress at the TD suggests that standard internal GEP measures (like bias training) may be insufficient. Future efforts must focus on external talent pipelining and targeted outreach to encourage women to apply for technical trades (see also 'Actions for 2026').
- **Management Balance:** While operational management maintained a stable gender balance, Top Management experienced a structural setback, dropping to 100% male following the departure of its sole female member. While the 10-year horizon (2033) allows for long-term correction, this vacancy serves as a "moment of truth" for the GEP. The next recruitment cycle for the Direction Committee will be the primary lever for realigning with the 60/40 target.

- **Recruitment & Culture:** Mixed-gender juries were successfully utilized in 23 out of 24 recruitment procedures. Despite this, a perception gap remains: 10% of women report feeling discriminated against (compared to 4% of men), women report having significantly less energy for private activities after work, 11% more women than men report needing better information or more time to complete tasks effectively.
- **Strategic Evolution:** The AOC concluded that the Botanic Garden must move beyond gender to intersectionality, specifically highlighting a severe underrepresentation and lack of data regarding staff of foreign origin. While operational management is balanced, the 100% male Direction Committee and the 10% discrimination rate among women indicate that our culture remains masculine-coded. We must move beyond recruitment numbers to address the "energy gap" and the systemic friction that causes women to feel less comfortable or more exhausted than their male peers.

8.4.4. Bystander Intervention Training

On November 6, 2025, staff attended an interactive session led by external expert Ann Labeeuw from the Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering. The training addressed the "bystander effect" and equipped participants with the '**5 Ds**' framework (**Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, Direct**) to safely and effectively intervene when witnessing transgressive behavior. The session successfully increased staff awareness, knowledge, and confidence in addressing identity-related harassment.

8.4.5. Inclusivity Audit

The working group conducted a collaborative "inclusion walk" through the Greenhouses to audit visitor information panels for unconscious bias. The audit resulted in actionable proposals for more inclusive scientific storytelling, such as addressing gendered grammar (e.g., gastheer vs. gastplant) and rethinking the vernacular names of plants.

8.4.6. Victim Support

To enhance victim support and resource accessibility, a flyer was created and distributed among the staff to increase the visibility of the confidential counselors (vertrouwenspersonen) where employees can report unwanted behavior.

8.5. Challenges and Lessons Learned:

- ✓ Clarifying the distinction between measures, objectives, and KPIs was essential for effective planning.
- ✓ Engaging a diverse group of stakeholders, including management, HR, and staff representatives, was crucial for developing relevant and practical KPI's.
- ✓ Regular communication and reporting were necessary to maintain momentum and ensure transparency.

- ✓ Efficiency in Organization: Having many meetings with the entire large group proved less efficient; creating smaller subgroups with appointed leaders is a better approach.
- ✓ Data Timeliness: KPI data needs to be requested earlier to allow for quicker action on the conclusions.
- ✓ Tangible Impact: Auditing the physical environment (like the greenhouse panels) is crucial because it makes diversity efforts tangible for both staff and visitors.
- ✓ Communication Skills: While staff are eager to support each other, they often lack the right vocabulary; future trainings must focus heavily on communication skills.
- ✓ Intersectional Engagement: Linking gender equality to broader intersectional themes, such as decolonization, significantly increased the efficiency in working towards an inclusive organisation with equal opportunities for all.

9. Actions for 2026

- ✓ Data & Policy: Rewrite the diversity plan using the new Flemish government template and transition to a comprehensive Diversity KPI Dashboard that tracks broader metrics, including ethnic background.
- ✓ Workplace Culture: organize a 'Plantentuincafé' session focused on non-dutch speaking employees to lower language barriers.
- ✓ Training & Leadership: Roll out mandatory Inclusive Leadership & Selection Training for management to mitigate bias in hiring.
- ✓ Visibility & Outreach: Shift to proactive, external talent pipelining to attract women to the Technical Service and direction committee.
- ✓ Produce a flyer to promote the DiSA-working group members as accessible contact points.
- ✓ Events & Infrastructure: Organize specific actions on international diversity days (Feb 11, March 24, Dec 3) and campaign to name the new meeting rooms in the renovated Research Campus after famous female researchers. Ensure digital inclusivity by utilizing alt-text on social media and colorblind-friendly palettes.

The 2026 actions will focus on ensuring that "diversity" is not just a set of monitored numbers, but a lived experience for every employee, regardless of gender or origin.












2026_GEP


Final Audit Report


2026-04-09


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