Gender Equality Plan

October 2026

Goals

ZOE Institute is proud of our commitment to gender equality and non-discrimination. We pride ourselves on our flexible, family-friendly working conditions and benefits which respond to the preferences and requests of our employees, in line with our values.

ZOE Institute strives to ensure transparency, fairness, inclusiveness and equality where all employees have a chance to co-create the future of the organisation. We are aware that the responsibility and imperative to act in a gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory way within our structures and in our research is an ongoing task that requires self-reflection, monitoring and action. Our Gender Equality Plan sets out the efforts we are making, as well as our goals on this front.

Our Gender Equality Plan was developed through a participatory process involving colleagues from various functions and levels within ZOE Institute. This approach is based on the directives of the European Commission and therefore included the following process-related requirements and recommended areas.[1]

1. Work-life balance and organisational structure

ZOE Institute works hard to ensure our employees maintain a good work-life balance. We also place great value on providing opportunities for further personal development and for finding inspiration outside of the work context.

ZOE defines 38hours/week as the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), spread across a 5-day working week. A daily schedule of available hours will confirm an employee's standard work week. However, ZOE offers great flexibility on how to organise this. Options include, but are not limited to: working 8 hours for 4 days and 6 hours for 1 day per week every week, OR every other week taking 1 half day, or other options.

ZOE provides flex-work office spaces in Berlin, Brussels and Cologne. However, structural telework (a form of organisation and of performance of work whereby activities that could also be performed at the company premises, are performed outside of those company premises through the use of information technologies) is an option to all employees.

ZOE has a transparent salary framework and provides more than the minimum paid annual leave, up to 30 days per year (FTE), and a flexible annual leave plan that each employee can decide on her/his own (coordinated within the team).

In order to encourage engagement in the communities our employees inhabit, ZOE team members are allowed to take two workdays per calendar year to use for volunteering with an organisation, community or initiative of their choice. Team members are also welcome to coordinate and do this together.

We support continuous learning and development of all our team members, including providing budget for individual trainings for personal development, and arranging joint trainings on changing topics subject to annual budget availability.

After 3 years of employment with ZOE, employees may take one month unpaid Sabbatical; after 5 years, six months unpaid Sabbatical. This can be aligned with paid leave to create a total period of leave longer than one month/six months.

[1] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d9468388-df75-11f0-8439-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

POSSIBLE DATA & TARGETS:

- **Reconciling private life and work**: Flexible management of working time (proportion of employees working part-time).
- **Facilitating location-flexible working**: Telework take-up.
- **Community engagement**: Days taken for volunteering activity.
- **Team gatherings and activities**: participation of employees by gender.
- **Leave days taken by gender**: leave type, and number of days.

2. Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

ZOE Institute is led by two Directors, one woman and one man. There is a 50:50 gender balance among our Programme Leads as well. In the projects and thematic areas, employees take on leadership roles, with both men and women having a formative influence on the outcome of the work.

POSSIBLE DATA & TARGETS:

- **Maintaining gender equity** in the workforce and when filling managerial positions: Monitoring on 1 January annually.
- **Gender representation** among Programme and horizontal area leads.

3. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

Instead of rigid and often inefficient organisational structures, we rely on self-organised agile teams with clearly defined competence-based responsibilities. Our impact thus arises organically from the creativity and motivation of our employees.

At the core of ZOE are the internal governance team and the employees. The governance team is responsible for defining the schedule for the coming years and for the central organisational and coordination tasks. One-on-one development conversations focused on professional development take place annually using our competency framework as a basis.

All employees at ZOE can lead projects and initiate new processes in a self-organised manner to support their career development. More experienced colleagues also offer training sessions on relevant topics, such as writing with impact or engaging with policymakers.

POSSIBLE DATA & TARGETS:

- **Maintaining gender equity in the workforce:** Gender disaggregated and anonymised data (including data of non-binary individuals) will be assessed on 1 January annually.
- **Recruitment data:** The number of female and male applicants for different functions during different interview stages, the outcome.
- **Skill enhancement:** Monitoring in alignment with competency framework; skill enhancement opportunities such as trainings.

4. Integration of the gender dimension into research

Gender issues can affect economic and environmental policy and research, thereby also affecting ZOE's research practice. Demonstrating an understanding of the attitudes, behaviours and needs of different genders strengthens our research and increases the accuracy of our findings.

POSSIBLE DATA & TARGETS:

- Monitor gender diversity of appointments to advisory boards, panels, discussion groups, etc where ZOE Institute is involved.
- Gender representation in publications.
- Programme Leads are made aware and ensure editorial quality control to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and to use gender-neutral language in publications, surveys, interviews, etc. and identify issues that should be addressed in projects, e.g. Are women and men affected differently?
- Gender representation at ZOE-organised events and panels.

5. Non-discrimination

Inequality and unequal treatment go beyond gender justice, manifesting in various social and economic dimensions, such as income, ethnicity, age, disability, and religion. Both environmental degradation and conservation efforts impact different social groups in distinct ways, leading to significant social challenges. As a leader in transdisciplinary research, ZOE Institute addresses the social aspects of environmental policy in its initiatives, aiming to positively influence this area within its capacity.

POSSIBLE DATA & TARGETS:

- Trainings and exchange to increase awareness of discriminatory social structures within our own work. ZOE will organise regular, at least once per year, internal peer learning sessions on gender equality and unconscious gender bias. These sessions will be open to all staff and will include specific reflection for colleagues involved in recruitment, management and decision-making.
- Discussion and identification of best practices for our research to counteract possible discrimination.
- Involvement of diverse stakeholder groups in transdisciplinary research projects.
- Cooperation with partners in the Global South where possible and relevant.
- Ensure non-discriminatory HR work through sensitivity in recruiting and management e.g. appropriate design of recruitment processes.

6. Institutionalising measures against sexual harassment

To foster an inclusive, respectful, and psychologically safe work environment, ZOE has an anonymous contact channel dedicated exclusively to gender-related concerns (e.g. discrimination, bias, harassment, or questions around gender inclusion).

Employees can share gender-related concern or experience by either:

- Writing to the dedicated email address (note: email is not anonymous, your address will be visible): gender.awareness@zoe-institut.de

- Filling out the anonymous online form (no login or personal information required): https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=9gSOwgpZwU-XJ4rU1AaAzHSKAetgCJCmoStRzfye3JUMlVQTFdKTVdDUUlYWUMwNzhSSDhFUDNRVC4u
- ZOE designates two Gender Awareness Contacts, who dedicate staff time to monitoring the gender-awareness channel, supporting colleagues who raise concerns, coordinating annual monitoring of the Gender Equality Plan, and supporting awareness-raising and peer-learning activities.

The channel is open to everyone on the team, regardless of role or location. It may be used for gender-related issues such as:

- Experiencing or witnessing a situation that felt discriminatory or exclusionary on the basis of gender;
- Needing advice on how to raise a gender inclusion issue in your team;
- Wanting someone to listen or help you think through a gender-specific situation;
- Wishing to flag a gender concern to leadership without doing so publicly.

Everything shared will be treated with strict confidentiality and will not be passed on without consent - unless there's a serious risk or legal obligation to act.

POSSIBLE DATA & TARGETS:

- Number of reported and solved incidents of discrimination, sexism, and sexual harassment.

Brussels, 27.10.2026