



Gender Equality Plan

The aim of the Gender Equality Plan of the Atrial Fibrillation Network („Kompetenznetz Vorhofflimmern e.V.“, hereinafter also *AFNET*) is to ensure equal opportunities for everyone in the organisation, regardless of their gender. We will build our work on the principles of equality which strengthens our competence and will improve its quality. We will support all team members and researchers in the fields of cardiovascular research, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, age, and other individual characteristics, and believe that research will benefit the society the most if the background of the persons involved in conducting research is as diverse as possible, and if the genders are equally represented at every stage/level of our organisation.

The current state of gender equality in cardiovascular research is less than ideal, with disparities in leadership opportunities and resource allocation across genders. There exists a great gender imbalance across academic positions and scientific visibility, especially in leadership posts. AFNET aims to identify and address this imbalance within our organisation, thereby contributing to more equitable conditions in the cardiovascular research landscape.

The responsibility of promoting gender equality is shared by all of the decision makers within AFNET. The Gender Equality Plan was initiated by the Board of Directors and the Managing Director of AFNET and developed with contributions from the steering committee and AFNET staff. Specific activities for achieving the set objectives shall be stipulated in an annual action plan of the AFNET. Review of the set objectives will be communicated in the annual meeting of all members of the AFNET association. The Plan has been approved by the Board of Directors and the Managing Director of AFNET on 28th of August 2024 and it will be revised at least once a year.

Subsequently, the objectives and underlying principles of the Gender Equality Plan, as well as the measures proposed and adopted by AFNET in order to meet the set objectives, have been listed. Building on AFNET's efforts to improve gender equality, the five main objectives for the time period 2024-2028 are as follows:

1. Raising gender awareness among the employees and among the members of the board, the steering committee and the advisory board of the academic network

In order to make fair and inclusive decisions, gender awareness - incl. awareness of possible problems caused by unconscious bias - is of utmost importance for the members of the committees, the management and other employees of the AFNET. Increased awareness helps to prevent discrimination and ensures making fairer decisions. Gender awareness also contributes to achieving all of the other objectives of the AFNET's Gender Equality Plan.

To ensure gender equality among the employees as well as among the members of the panels and committees of the AFNET, we will:

- Improve our knowledge and competencies regarding gender equality
- Present an annual overview of the gender representation of AFNET personnel at all levels. This data will be included in our meetings and reports, enabling us to actively make data-driven efforts to promote gender equality. Integrate aspects of gender into scientific projects, if applicable, and proactively design studies to be inclusive.
- Share our experiences, good practices, and developments regarding gender equality within our organisation, incl. communication in meetings, via social media and on our homepage, etc.

2. Adhering to the principles of equal treatment

AFNET supports equal treatment of all people, refraining from any form of discrimination based on gender. Among other things, we pay particular attention that work within the AFNET office team is organised in a way which enables a good work-life balance.

In order to ensure equal treatment, we will:

- Examine our working rules and organisation that they ensure equal opportunities for everyone.
- Take into consideration that employees with children or other family and caring obligations have individual needs to ensure a proper work-life balance.
- Collect feedback on the adherence to the principles of equal treatment in the decision-making processes of the committees and within the office organisation.

3. Improving gender balance among the members of the AFNET committees

AFNET aims to reach an ideal gender balance among its committee members taking the current male dominance in cardiovascular research leadership roles into consideration. We will work to address this issue in the following ways and we will:

- Consciously consider gender when searching for new candidates for one of the committees.
- Actively choose candidates from underrepresented genders when candidates are of equal standing.
- Consider gender balance in the leaders of scientific projects and in the organisational structure of AFNET as well as in decision making and representation of the network.

4. Implementing a gender-sensitive communication strategy

One of the key roles of AFNET is communicating with the society, incl. sharing information with researchers, scientific institutions and the public. Gender equality will also be promoted through communication activities. We will remain gender-aware in all our channels of communication and will:

- Monitor our use of language and refrain from reproducing gender stereotypes.
- Monitor the representation of our members and how we report our activities in illustrative materials, written press, profile articles, and other communications to ensure that gender bias does not affect their representation. Try to ensure gender balance among the speakers at conferences and other scientific events. As is the case with decision-making bodies, we consider the balanced representation of the underrepresented gender to be an achievable target.

5. Considering gender aspects in the design and performance of clinical studies

In order to integrate the gender dimension into clinical studies, we will consider gender aspects in the conceptual design of study protocol and planning. We will:

- Ensure that scientific results of our studies and scientific projects will provide valuable results for all genders.
- Emphasise the need to underline the aspects of gender in various materials and statistics: the data, wherever possible, will be disaggregated by gender.
- Design inclusive studies that account for inherent societal gender biases that may affect participation. We will ensure that our studies are accessible to all individuals, regardless of gender, to enroll in and follow the study requirements.