

Gender Equality Plan

2026 - 2028



Introduction

Gender equality is a key component of TWINCORE's commitment to providing excellent research conditions and fostering equal opportunities across all career stages. In line with the requirements of Horizon Europe, TWINCORE has established annual monitoring of the gender distribution across organisational areas and hierarchical levels. In addition, reports were provided on measures implemented to promote gender equality.

The Gender Equality Plan serves as a strategic framework to address these developments in a systematic and long-term manner. It defines key areas and objectives to strengthen gender equality within the organisational context of TWINCORE, while taking into account structural conditions and the broader diversity perspective. As a signatory to the Diversity Charter, TWINCORE is committed to promoting an appreciative, non-discriminatory and inclusive working environment in which different realities and perspectives are recognised and respected regardless of gender. The Gender Equality Plan translates this commitment into a structured approach.

Organisation and Framework

TWINCORE is a subsidiary of two partners, the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) and the Hannover Medical School (MHH). TWINCORE does not employ its own staff, but operates based on employees from the two partners, who work together within the joint venture TWINCORE, which is located within a distinct research building. As a result, key elements of gender equality policies, including formal responsibilities and institutional measures, are primarily defined and implemented by the partner institutions.

However, as TWINCORE is an independent legal entity and has a local management at the Hannover site, there is a strong commitment for additionally promoting gender equality by implementation of certain site-specific measures within the TWINCORE sphere of influence. The present Gender Equality Plan builds on this dual structure by focusing on aspects that can be addressed at the TWINCORE level and by using site-specific data to identify relevant areas for action.

The responsibility for site-specific measures with respect to gender equality is with the TWINCORE head of administration. Two further team members of the administration support the data collection and monitoring, as well as the implementation of gender equality measures. Since 2023, the Sustainability Initiative of TWINCORE has also been addressing social sustainability aspects and submitted suggestions correspondingly. Public relations activities are implemented by the communication coordinator.

Starting Point

TWINCORE has an inclusive approach to gender. Currently, gender is reported in the available staff data as either female or male, as no other gender assignment has been submitted to date. If this changes in future, it will be reflected in the annual indication reports accordingly.

The gender equality starting point at TWINCORE is characterised by a comparatively high overall proportion of female employees. As of 1 December, 2025, women account for

approximately 60.3% of all staff members, with a nearly identical ratio among employees working directly in science (61%).

A differentiated view across career stages reveals notable variations in gender distribution. While women are strongly represented among PhD candidates (66.7%), the proportion of women decreases at subsequent career levels. At postdoctoral level, the gender ratio is becoming somewhat more balanced (47.1% female, 52.9% male). In scientific leadership positions, women account for 20% of group leaders. As the total number of group leader positions at TWINCORE is comparatively small, even minor changes in absolute numbers can have a strong effect on this ratio. Even so, the distribution across career stages suggests that the transition from postdoctoral positions to scientific leadership is a particularly relevant stage for gender equality at TWINCORE. This does not in itself explain the reasons for the current distribution, but it indicates where closer attention to structural conditions and career development is especially warranted.

A separate view by employment status shows a different pattern. Among fixed-term employees, the gender distribution broadly reflects the overall ratio. Among permanent employees, women account for a higher proportion, although this is likewise based on a comparatively small total number. These figures provide additional context for the overall picture, but do not in themselves suggest the same type of transition dynamic as the distribution across scientific career stages.

Due to the personnel model of TWINCORE, comprehensive analysis of pay grades and working time models are currently not available. These aspects will be included in future analyses as soon as the corresponding data become accessible.

Key Areas

The starting point leads to clear key areas for which the Gender Equality Plan defines objectives.

Key Area 1: Career Development and Transition to Scientific Leadership

The analysis of gender distribution across career stages at TWINCORE reveals a clear structural gap in the transition from postdoctoral positions to scientific leadership. This transition is shaped not only by local organisational conditions, but also by broader qualification requirements and career patterns in academic research. Within its sphere of influence, TWINCORE therefore aims to strengthen structural conditions that enable fair access to leadership perspectives.

Accordingly, the following objectives are defined:

- Strengthen transparency regarding scientific leadership positions and provide clear guidance on the requirements for these roles.
- Identify and address structural barriers that may affect the transition from postdoctoral positions to leadership roles.
- Establish a dedicated initiative to support gender-sensitive career development at the postdoctoral stage.

Key Area 2: Gender Equality in Recruitment Processes

The gender distribution in scientific leadership positions is shaped by multiple factors, including recruitment processes. Within the framework of shared responsibilities with the partner institutions, TWINCORE has limited formal influence on these processes, but plays a role in shaping local practices and decision-making contexts.

Accordingly, the following objectives are defined:

- Strengthen fairness and transparency in recruitment within the institutional framework.
- Reduce the impact of unconscious bias in recruitment and decision-making.
- Promote gender-balanced participation and gender-sensitive decision-making within relevant structures.

Key Area 3: Organisational Culture and Life-Domain Balance

A sustainable gender equality strategy requires an organisational environment that enables retention across all career stages. TWINCORE already benefits from a range of measures that support the reconciliation of professional and private responsibilities, but their visibility and integration at the local level remain relevant factors.

TWINCORE therefore aims to further strengthen inclusive working conditions and organisational culture by building on existing structures and increasing the visibility of existing support measures.

Accordingly, the following objectives are defined:

- Foster an inclusive and non-discriminatory organisational culture.
- Organize working conditions so that taking on professional responsibilities does not preclude taking on private responsibilities as well.
- Strengthen organisational conditions that ease transitions before and after parental leave or other longer absences.

Effect and Review

This Plan is valid for a period of three years (2026-2028). It is deliberately designed as a multi-year strategic framework and is separate from the annual indication report. The indication report accompanies the Gender Equality Plan by documenting the annual monitoring and publishing the quantitative results on the gender distribution of employees.

The Gender Equality Plan will be revised or adjusted in the event of changes in strategic, organisational or legal conditions, or if it becomes apparent that the objectives and measures are no longer appropriately tailored to the situation at TWINCORE.

Final Remark

With this Gender Equality Plan, TWINCORE commits itself to gender equality as a central component of an excellent, future-oriented and responsible research organisation. The plan

is intended as a strategic orientation framework that systematically integrates equality into organisational structures, decision-making processes and development perspectives.

Against the backdrop of the institutional framework and the supporting structure, the Gender Equality Plan focuses on realism, cooperation and long-term impact. It is an expression of the commitment to take responsibility for equal opportunities and to understand this as an integral part of organisational development.

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