



Plan for Gender Equality

2022 - 2025





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Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that gender equality is a fundamental human right, essential to prosperous and peaceful world development. Considering its importance, in 2015, all United Nations Member States named gender equality as one of the Sustainable Development Goals for the 2030 Agenda.

People have suffered from discrimination in all work domains, from industry to academia. Women have historically been very affected by discrimination due to the societal precedent of male-dominated positions of power and careers while leaving women in subservient roles. Globalization has given societies a different perception of the world and consequently, of women's rights. Social movements and unions have been fighting for changes and drawing attention to existing power imbalances in the workplace such as gender discrimination, difficulties in establishing a good work-life balance, and sexual harassment.

Reinforcing the vision of the Vasco da Gama Collaborative Laboratory (VG CoLAB) as an inclusive and open-minded institution, a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) has been developed to establish protocols for ensuring non-discrimination until 2024. During this time, the institution will enact the recommendations stated in this document as a means of strengthening an ethical and diverse workplace, where women and men are recruited without discrimination of any kind, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, language, physical ability, or other status, being free to express their individuality, originality, and beliefs without prejudice, and therefore enabling productive and economic growth.

Giving continuity to the policies proposed by the Plotina project funded by the Horizon 2020 Programme, and exploring anti-discrimination strategies, VG CoLAB proposes to perform an annual analysis considering the institutional context and alignments, when needed, to possible strategic rearrangements. As a starting point, the distribution between men and women at the institution has been monitored and the indicators are specified in **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.**. The monitoring intends to identify areas of intervention regarding gender equality:

- In the first 6 months of activity, the VG CoLAB workforce had a significantly higher fraction of men (71 %) compared to the contracted women (29 %). However, the institution has tried to minimize this difference and in the latest data collected (December 2021), the fraction of female workers increased to nearly half of the staff (42 %).

- The VG CoLAB has a high representation of women with a Ph.D. degree (80 %) when compared to men (20 %), showing its investment in highly specialized women. Due to differences in the areas of application from chemistry, engineering to power electronics, the same distribution is not observed for MSc positions, where the number of men contracted is 71 %.

Distribution of men and women (november 2020 - december 2021)

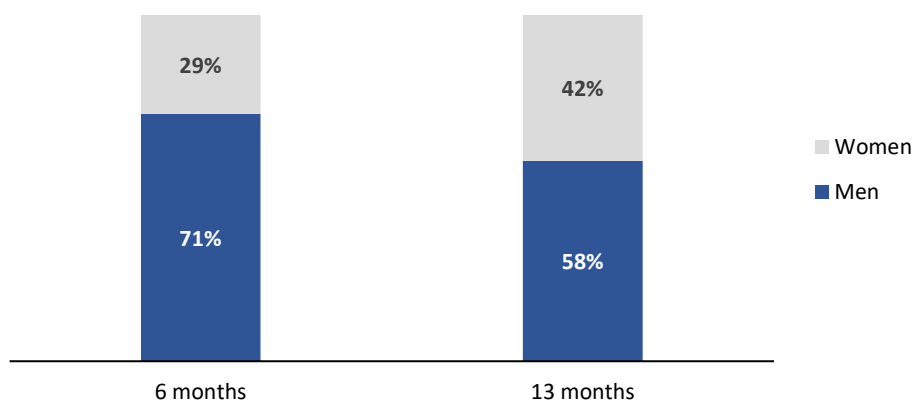


Figure 1. Distribution of employee genders at 6 and 13 months of activity for VG CoLab.

Distribution of men and women by position (2021)

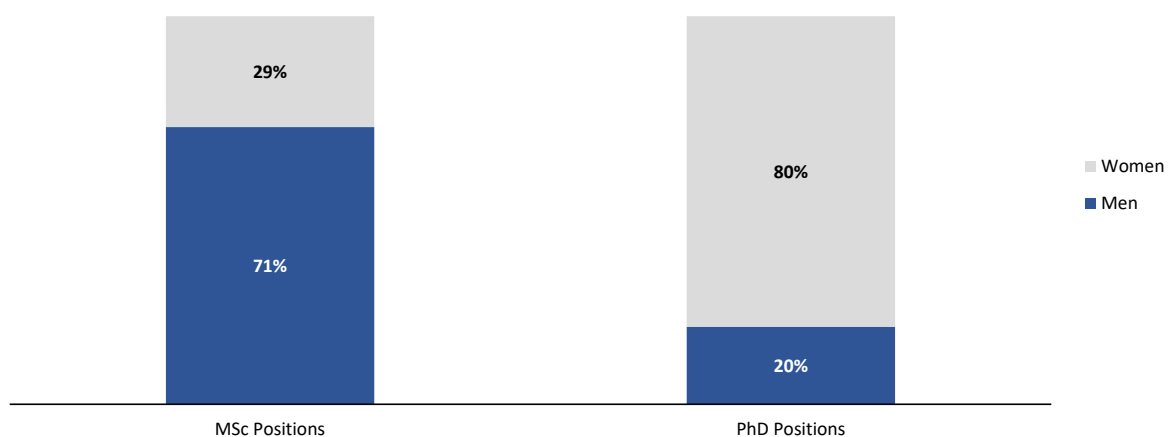


Figure 2. Current distribution of genders by position.

Considering the current analysis and following the guidelines for a more sustainable world, VG CoLAB will maintain policies for the five following priority areas:

- Integration of professional and personal life, organizational culture, and support for our difference
- Egalitarian leadership and diversified and inclusive decision-making bodies
- Gender equality in recruitment, training, and career progression
- Prevention and combatting of gender-based violence including sexual harassment
- Monitoring indicators and targets, adopting strategies to encourage gender awareness

Area 1 - Professional and personal life integration, organizational culture, and supporting differences

Work-life balance is a key component of an organization's culture for gender equality. This topic is important for all genders because it ensures that everyone is properly supported in developing their career while ensuring that they can manage their responsibilities both in and out of the workplace, including caretaking roles. To this end, Vasco da Gama CoLAB has developed the following policies:

Maternity and paternity protection: VG CoLAB promotes knowledge of the rights of pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth, and workers who are mothers and fathers by following all Portuguese legislation regarding mandatory (90 days for mothers, 20 days for fathers) and optional parental leave, as well as legislation regarding other parental rights [1]. This information is posted in the workplace and disseminated in work e-mails. VG CoLAB also ensures that an employee who is granted parental leave is accompanied when he or she returns to work so that he or she does not lose track of the projects.

Flexible working time arrangements: All workers can ask, for personal reasons, to be absent from the workplace for short periods of time, as well as work from home, if their specific job permits it. VG CoLAB also abides by all Portuguese legislation regarding parental rights in the absence of work [2].

Workload management: The different work tasks, both scientific and non-scientific, are allocated to employees of the Vasco da Gama CoLAB in a distributed manner in order not to overload any individual.

Reintegration of staff after career breaks: As CoLAB is an association that has hired many early-career workers (often as their first job), it has a policy of mentoring and coaching. The same applies to workers who have taken a career break.

Culture: The Vasco da Gama CoLAB has employees of many diverse backgrounds and cultures. The staff engages in regular teambuilding and social activities to promote the integration and inclusion of all employees.

Area 2 - Egalitarian leadership and diversified and inclusive decision-making bodies

Within the Vasco da Gama CoLAB staff positions, there are four leadership and decision-making positions: Two out of three group leader positions are currently held by women, and the VG CoLAB Research Coordinator is also a woman. All the positions were filled based on a public objective numerical ranking system, which aids in eliminating bias in the selection of candidates. Calls for positions at VG CoLAB are open to all, and the numerical ranking system for the selection of candidates is solely based on the professional experience and profile of the candidate, namely regarding previously held positions, academic degree and mark, relevant experience, number and quality of publications, and the outcome of interviews held during the selection process [3]. VG CoLAB is committed to continuously improve leadership and management gender equality, by providing employees with safe and dignified working conditions, ensuring that all employees are given an equal opportunity to maintain and succeed in their career.

Vasco da Gama CoLAB follows Portuguese and European legislations regarding employee gender equality to ensure fair and equal working conditions for all genders during employment, including legislation to ensure parental and family leave, non-discrimination in the workplace, assurance of safe and respectful working conditions for pregnant and lactating women, and assurance of sexual harassment-free and fair conditions for employees. These directives are implemented regardless of the employee's position in VG CoLAB. VG CoLAB follows and enforces the Portuguese labor law (e.g., regarding parental rights, reintegration after parental leave, the right to non-discrimination in the workplace, etc.), thereby ensuring that all employees are given a fair and equal opportunity to advance into and maintain leadership positions, as well as providing optimal conditions to prevent attrition at higher levels of leadership and management.

Area 3 - Gender equality in recruitment, training, and career progression

Women and gender minorities face systematic discrimination and structural barriers along their career paths in research and innovation. To avoid biased gender selection during recruitment, training, and career progression, it is necessary to ensure that people get equal chances to develop and advance their careers.

The selection process for positions within VG CoLAB takes two stages. The first stage consists of a pre-selection based on the candidate's CV. The second stage consists of a two-round interview.

The interview panel of the first round is composed of two interviewers (usually of both genders). One of the interviewers is the group leader of the respective VG CoLAB pillar, the other is either the project manager, the research coordinator, or the group leader of another pillar. Since the interviewing process results in a qualitative assessment of the candidate, it is important to include people of both genders in the evaluation process and consequently reduce the chance of obtaining a biased selection. The second-round interview is applied to the candidates selected at the end of the first round, integrating into the interviewer's panel the respective pillar director. Similarly, another interviewer is also included; this could be the project manager, the research coordinator, or another group leader, resulting in an even interviewer's panel gender distribution. To increase collaborator awareness of gender biases, implicit bias training should be completed by all the VG CoLAB collaborators. The investment of VG CoLAB in technical and other human resource training should also follow an equalized gender distribution to ensure the same opportunities to different collaborators, independent of their gender. Such distribution serves as an indicator of the applied effort of the VG CoLAB to increase the different collaborators' self-awareness.

The VG CoLAB career progression is based on well-defined goals and monitored based on results independently of gender.

Area 4 - Prevent and combat gender-based violence including sexual harassment

According to the World Health Organization's "World bank" data, 35 % of women worldwide have experienced some form of gender-based violence [4]. There is a need for gender-based violence to be a publicly exposed topic because only then these problems will be uncovered and combated. Its importance is even clearer when noting that gender-based violence is not only a clear violation of human rights (which would already be an irrefutable argument to assess its importance) but is also a point of contact in fighting poverty and economic development, decreasing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and fighting the insecurity that is prerequisite for child and youth welfare. The following is understood as gender-based violence according to the Council of Europe, with legal consequences under Portuguese law [5]:

- Psychological violence
- Stalking
- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Rape
- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation
- Forced abortion
- Forced sterilization
- Domestic violence
- Sexual harassment

The diversity of genders in the workplace environment brings challenges that require other approaches as this inequality still exists in research institutions. In the workplace, sexual harassment is the most common form of gender-based violence. Sexual harassment, as defined by Portuguese law, is:

"Any kind of unwanted behavior occurring in the context of an application for a job or in the context of actual employment, occupation, or professional training, which has the purpose or the effect of effecting a person's dignity, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Any unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical behavior of sexual nature, with the purpose or the effect described in the previous section. Who troubles another by acting before them in an exhibitionist way or coercing them to sexual contact." (Labor Code, Article 29; Criminal Code; Law 19/2013 of 20 February, Article 170) [6]

The Vasco da Gama CoLAB, as an institution focused on the integration and well-being of its employees, has developed a set of measures to offer attention and support to those who are harmed, and to commit themselves to eradicating such behavior. Therefore, the VG CoLAB also proposes a set of measures to combat gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, which are divided into two segments - prevention and disciplinary actions. As prevention, all employees will attend a seminar on sexual harassment in the workplace.

In the event of a sexual harassment case, VG CoLab follows the Portuguese legislation as described in Article 170 of the Penal Code of the Portuguese Republic.

Area 5 - Monitoring of indicators and targets, adopting strategies to encourage gender awareness

The indicators provided in the Gender Equality Plan are monitored by a team created exclusively for this task. Once per year, a meeting will be held to discuss all points and results. This helps to identify opportunities for improvement of all strategies and methods, to seek a more robust way to create better equality and a better workplace environment.

The main indicators that are analyzed can be summarized as follows:

- The number of candidates after the first phase of a hiring process
- The number of employees and their gender
- Satisfaction of the human resources acquired through a yearly questionnaire
- The base salary for each gender according to their training and active role in the organization

Opportunities for growth within the VG CoLab for each gender, and statistics on the number of each gender that received a promotion within the year

As strategies, VG CoLab gives priority to prevention and awareness. To this end, the following strategies will be created:

- Internal documentation will be provided for the awareness of all aspects of gender equality within VG CoLab
- A presentation will be given to all employees for the explanation of this document. Upon hiring, each new employee will also be given a presentation on this document
- Periodic training programs will be provided, aimed at improving the self-knowledge and self-development of all the employees. This aims to solidify the inclusive culture of VG CoLab and provide a safe and welcoming working environment
- A questionnaire will be distributed to learn employees' opinions in relation to gender equality and employee satisfaction with the related VG CoLab policies.

VG CoLab has a team responsible for this topic, that will implement all the stated strategies. The team is composed by the Project Manager, Ana Cunha, and the Group Leader of Power Electronics and Energy Management, Jorge Pinto.

The adoption and continuation of the indicators and strategies mentioned will maintain and increase good practices between VG CoLab employees and all the other entities that maintain a relationship with VG CoLab. This will contribute for promoting equality of opportunities between genders, making the workspace environment better, and will decrease the probability of discrimination between VG CoLab employees at all levels of employment.

A committee will meet bi-annually to evaluate the benchmarks of this plan and make new recommendations.

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