

Antwerp,

Gender Equality and Inclusion Action Plan 2025-2030

For agreement and approval

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Shortened version

Özge Tunçalp Mingard

Executive Director

Ann Peters

General Manager

Raffaella Ravinetto

Head of Department of Public Health

Kevin Ariën

Head of Department of Biomedical Sciences

Johan Van Griensven

Head of Department of Clinical Sciences

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1. Introduction

This 'Gender Equality and Inclusion Action plan' sets out the Institute of Tropical Medicine's (ITM) approach to gender equality, equity, diversity and inclusion over the 2025-2030 period. The Institute of Tropical Medicine aims to be a just and inclusive institute that encourages diversity.

This Gender Equality and Inclusion Action Plan¹ :

1. Acts as a public statement of our commitment to progressing gender equality, equity, diversity and inclusion and sets goals and detailed actions and measures to achieve them. The plan is a public document endorsed and signed by the management and disseminated within the institution.
2. Has dedicated resources allocated by the management.
3. Includes arrangements for data collection and monitoring as part of ITM's annual reporting. We aim to develop a data-driven policy and evidence-based work, adapting the action points where necessary.
4. Is supported by training and capacity-building actions that promote gender equality and inclusion, including raising awareness through workshops and communication activities
5. Is embedded in ITM's Institutional Policy Plan (2025-2030).

This Gender Equality and Inclusion Action Plan was initially developed by ITM's institutional working group on 'Gender & Inclusion'² and discussed within ITM, incorporating feedback and comments from the bodies below:

Academic Council (AC)	12/05/2025
AC Research Policy Commission	02/12/2024
AC Education Policy Commission	28/11/2024
AC Policy Commission International Cooperation	03/12/2024
Student Participation meeting	19/06/2025
Management Committee	08/07/2025

This plan is presented as a work in progress for a continued dialogue in the institution.

¹ European Commission, Gender equality in research and innovation – Mandatory requirements for a GEP. Available at: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en

² The working group 'Gender and Diversity' was first installed by the Management Committee in 2018. In 2021 an ITM wide call for new members was launched. In 2024 the ITM Management Committee requested the newly composed working group to prepare the Gender & Inclusion action plan 2025_2030. Acknowledgements to all past and current members.



2. Definitions

Gender: socio-cultural meanings associated with being male, female or another identity. These attributes are socially constructed and are learnt through socialization processes.

Diversity³ refers to the existence of different characteristics in a group of people, such as age, geographical origin, gender, gender identity, culture, socio-economic background, migratory, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability.

Inclusion: the practice or policy of including and integrating all people and groups in activities, organizations, political processes, etc., especially those who are disadvantaged, have suffered discriminations. Following, the antidiscrimination laws in Belgium, no form or expression of discrimination based on gender, color, sexual preference, ethnic or national origin, marital status, birth age, religious or philosophical beliefs, health status or disability can be allowed. This is also outlined in ITM's Code of Conduct, as well as in the internal Terms & Conditions for non-staff members.

Gender Equality⁴: when people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. It implies that the interests, needs and priorities of women, men and other gender identities are taken into consideration, thereby recognizing the diversity of different groups.

Gender Mainstreaming: Systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations, and needs of women, men and other gender identities in all policies and actions. It is an inclusive strategy to integrate the gender perspective systematically in the process of assessing the implications of any planned action, including policies or programs, in all areas, and at all levels.

Intersectionality⁵: refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations. It is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which inequality arises at the

³ European Institute for Gender Equality, terms and definitions. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/terms-and-definitions>

⁴ Adapted to the definition of European Institute for Gender Equality, terms and definitions. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/terms-and-definitions>

⁵ Bauer, G. R., Churchill, S. M., Mahendran, M., Walwyn, C., Lizotte, D., & Villa-Rueda, A. A. (2021). Intersectionality in quantitative research: A systematic review of its emergence and applications of theory and methods. *SSM-population health*, 100798.



intersection of different personal characteristics (sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, religion and more) and which are influenced by structural factors.

3. Guiding Principles and Institutional Strategic Objectives

The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) is an independent academic institute for advanced training, research and service delivery in tropical medicine and public health with a focus on low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). ITM's mission is:

To conduct and promote scientific research, professional and academic education as well as scientific and community services in the field of tropical diseases and global healthcare, with special attention to low and middle-income countries. (ITM Statutes Art. 3)

Our vision is equal chances at a healthy life for all. We value:

Excellence & Relevance: we strive to stand at the international front line in key scientific domains. We pursue the highest quality research, education, and service delivery to find solutions to global health problems.

Integrity: we want to comply with international ethical standards and aim for critical sense, honesty and transparency in all our activities.

Fairness and inclusion: we commit to equity, diversity, and solidarity with an active, intentional, and ongoing global engagement.

Respect: we believe in an open, transparent, and respectful attitude contributing to the well-being of patients, students, employees, and collaborating partners.

Sustainability: we aim for long-term progress without compromising the ability of future generations.

In the Institutional Policy Plan 2025-2030, we included the following core principles based on ITM's values, with guiding principle 4 playing a key role in this Gender Equality & Inclusion plan:

- **Guiding principle 1:** We strive to enable societies to cope with the realities of the 'Anthropocene' and its impact on health. We recognise that the most significant impacts of climate change, reduction of biodiversity, food insecurity, demographic shifts, and urbanisation will be felt by people in vulnerable settings worldwide.
- 1. **Guiding principle 2:** We continuously reflect on the global impact and significance of our actions and strive towards the highest standard of codesign and ownership by our partners.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. Stanford law review, 43(6), 1241-1299.



2. **Guiding principle 3:** We embrace systems thinking, which is reflected in approaches such as One Health, Eco Health, and Planetary Health.⁶ We recognise that applying these in our academic triad of research, education and capacity sharing is essential to ensure sustainable health.
3. **Guiding principle 4:** We affirm the importance of inclusion and equitable representation in all our actions.

In the Institutional Policy Plan 2025-2029/30 we defined the following institutional strategic objectives (SO):

SO1 – To excel in **research**, pushing the boundaries of knowledge and innovation, leading to cutting-edge **innovations** that can be translated into products and outcomes that directly benefit the health and lives of those in need and contribute to resilient health systems. For this, the early involvement of stakeholders (e.g. communities, policymakers) is essential. Our research will have a profound impact on **health policies globally**.

SO2 - To thrive as an open global campus for students, teachers, alumni, professionals, and researchers and to serve as a **hub for advanced academic education**. Our academic programmes, online, in-person or hybrid, will be sought after by students from around the world, and our graduates will be at the forefront of a driving change in global public health.

SO3 - To establish our **medical services** and **reference laboratories** as an unequivocal global benchmark for tropical diseases and travel medicine. We will steadfastly pursue **excellence in patient care** and cutting-edge laboratory diagnostics in the specialised realm of tropical infectious diseases.

SO4 - To amplify the influence of our collective expertise and knowledge with partners, we will foster increased **scientific exchange and forge synergistic partnerships**. Our focus is on building a shared academic reputation within our global network. Central to our approach is the commitment to equitable partnerships, where collaborations with public and private institutions worldwide are marked by mutual respect, shared objectives, and a dedication to addressing health disparities.

SO5 - To strengthen the overall coherence, **efficiency and effectiveness** of ITM's policy by investing in research- and management platforms within the organisation or by strategic partnerships.

In view of these institutional strategic objectives of ITM policy plan 2025-2029/30, ITM sets the following long-term objectives for gender and inclusion:

SO1	<p>-We want to invest in attracting, fostering and circulating talent ensuring that staff and students are not hampered because of structural or implicit barriers related to gender, cultural or social background or other 'diversity' characteristics.</p> <p>-We strive to integrate gender and diversity into our research and teaching content, when deemed relevant.</p>
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⁶ We adopt the definition of the quadripartite UN organisations, following the One Health High-Level Panel (OHHLEP) (Adisasmito, W.K. et al 2022). ITM recognises that this definition reinforces the overall aims of the related concepts of Eco Health (highlighting the ecocentric versus anthropocentric scope) and Planetary Health (acknowledging the relevance of environmental/ecosystem health)



SO2	We aim to provide an inclusive research, education and working environment reflected through a community that students, staff, visiting partners and guests feel part of, which is safe, respectful, supportive and enables all to reach their full potential.
SO3	We want to establish our medical services as a model of excellence in gender equality and diversity, ensuring that all patients receive equitable, respectful, and inclusive care. We will integrate gender and diversity considerations into all aspects of our clinical practice, research, and community engagement, fostering a safe and supportive environment for both patients and staff.
SO4	We are committed to equitable partnerships, recognizing the global and diverse cultural contexts in which we work. We aim to foster gender mainstreaming in our partnerships.
SO5	We embed gender mainstreaming, inclusion and equity in our management, policy, support, monitoring and decision-making processes.

This gender equality and inclusion action plan concerns the ITM organization as a whole. We aim to work in dialogue and in co-creation with ITM's leadership, departments, units, partner institutions and individuals to ensure commitment enabling sustainable change. Next, we spell out the roles and responsibilities of the different layers of the organisation.



4. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
General Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that the policy, administration and management of the Institute are in accordance with its purpose, identity and integrity (hence, the Gender Equality and Inclusion Policy) • Electing members of the Board of Governors and evaluating their performance (oversee balanced composition in terms of gender and inclusion)
Board of Governors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring management performance of the Institute (including performance in terms of Gender Equality and Inclusion)
Management Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible Leadership and Accountability • Being exemplars and proactively advancing the Gender Equality and Inclusion action plan
Heads of scientific and supporting units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being exemplars and proactively advancing the Gender Equality and Inclusion action plan • Embedding gender mainstreaming and inclusion into unit planning and action
Gender & Diversity Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking progress on gender and diversity commitments, defining action points, and ensuring accountability within ITM • Promoting gender equality, inclusivity, and diversity across the institute
Gender focal points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as a reference point for addressing gender-related concerns • Work closely with the Gender & Diversity Working Group and other internal stakeholders <p><i>(Please note that the implementation of gender focal points is included as an action item in the new plan)</i></p>
Individual action – staff, students, guests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on collegiality and respect, developing own ‘gender & inclusion’ knowledge, embedding within own work and being an active bystander



5. Actions, targets, and timing

Up until 2022 ITM did not have a dedicated 'Gender Equality and Inclusion Action plan', but equity and diversity were part of ITM's core values, and gender and inclusion were considered important in our policies, guidelines and actions. In 2022, the Management Committee approved and published the first dedicated 'Gender Equality and Diversity Policy and Action Plan, 2022-2024'.

Following an evaluation of the 2022-2024 plan, we observed that not all proposed actions were carried out. To enhance feasibility and ensure meaningful progress, the new plan includes a more focused set of actions. Each action will be assigned a responsible lead to oversee its implementation, while the Gender & Diversity Working Group will provide ongoing monitoring and support. Below, we present the identified actions for the 2025–2030 policy period, prioritizing key actions.

		2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
SO1	- We want to invest in attracting, fostering and circulating talent, ensuring that staff and students are not hampered because of structural or implicit barriers related to gender, cultural or social background or other 'diversity' characteristics. - We strive to integrate gender and diversity into our research and teaching content, when deemed relevant						
SO1.1	We want to invest in attracting, fostering, and circulating of talent ensuring that staff and students are not hampered because of structural or implicit barriers related to gender, cultural or social background or other 'diversity' characteristics						
	Vacancy text: HR will include the following sentence by default in the vacancy text "ITM is committed to building a diverse, equitable and inclusive institute. We strive for excellence and relevance, integrity, sustainability and persistence and fairness. Your assignment contributes to the socially relevant mission of the ITM. We value human dignity and diversity, academic creativity and a critical spirit, solidarity and cooperation, and the well-being of employees, students, patients and clients. Lead for action: Human Resources (HR)	x	x	x	x	x	x
	All unit heads and department heads will receive training on gender and inclusion as part of the leadership course, to be delivered as part of group 5 and 6 on day 4 of the 'Ethical Leadership and Integrity' training ⁷ Lead for action: HR		x	x	x	x	x
	Close monitoring of the number of scholarships awarded and course types,	x	x	x	x	x	x

⁷ With reference to the following actionpoint of the Gender Equality and Inclusion Policy and Action Plan 2022 – 2024 'At least one member of each selection committee has received gender and diversity training.'



	previously disaggregated by sex (M and F), will now also include X. Lead for action: Education office						
	At least one member of each selection committee has received gender and diversity training. Lead for action: HR		x	x	x	x	x
SO1.2	We strive to integrate gender and diversity into our research and teaching content, when deemed relevant						
	Actions related to gender equality and inclusion, stemming from the student participation meeting, will be taken up in the Gender & Diversity Working Group meetings Lead for action: Education office (in collaboration with Gender and diversity working group)	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Training in intercultural competence(s) for students and exploring in which format and for which student population Lead for action: : Desk for Education Support and Coordination (DESC) in collaboration with student services	Exploration in view of student cohort 2025-2026	Roll out training				
	Training in intercultural competency for staff and explore in which format and for which staff target group Lead for action: HR		Exploration	Roll out training			
	Gender and diversity are a transversal dimension which continues to be integrated in ITM's educational offer. Pilot a Gender and Diversity scan mapping in educational offer two courses to assess the relevance for teachers and students Lead for action: Educational coordinators in consultation with course coordinators		x	x			
	Students will be explicitly informed, beyond ITM's code of conduct, that discrimination based on gender, or any other kind of diversity marker is not tolerated at ITM Lead for action: student support and education coordinators	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Beyond International Women's Day (8 March) and International Day of Women and Girls in Science (11 Feb), ITM will commemorate the Brussels (May) or	x	x	x	x	x	x



	Antwerp Pride (August), International Day of the Girl Child (11 Oct), International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 Nov) based on ITM's relevant research results and activities. Lead for action: Communication unit						
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SO2	We aim to provide an inclusive research, education and working environment reflected through a community that students, staff, visiting partners and guests feel part of, which is safe, respectful, supportive and enables all to reach their full potential						
OO2.1	ITM provides an inclusive research, education and working environment for students and staff						
Actions	ITM enforces an active anti-discrimination policy as implemented in the code of conduct: all staff sign a statement and are informed about where to report complaints, which are addressed appropriately and with the requested degree of confidentiality Lead for action: Quality unit (in collaboration with HR)	X (part 1)	X (part 2)				
	Staff are supported through professional development to enhance awareness of inclusive language and imagery in teaching and course material. Lead for action: : Education and IT@ITM (EdIT) in collaboration with DESC and Gender & Diversity working group			x	x	x	
	Develop a checklist on inclusive language and imagery to support staff in preparing presentations, policy documents, written materials, and other communications. Lead for action: joint lead WG Gender & Diversity and Communication unit		x				
	Develop a gender and diversity bias training which is offered at all staff during recruitment, including bystander training. Lead for action: HR			x	x	x	
	Questions on 'gender & diversity' are added to the 'well-being survey' for personnel. The survey results include gender-disaggregated data.			x	x		



	Lead for action: SHE in collaboration with Gender & Diversity working group						
	An awareness campaign highlighting ITM's values is launched, explicitly mentioning that Implicit bias, transgressive behaviour, potentially hurtful statements and behaviour are not tolerated at ITM and beyond. The campaign also highlights the disciplinary procedures for staff and students (in partnership), ensuring these are clearly communicated. Lead for action: Safety, Health Environment (SHE) unit (in collaboration with student support, communication unit and WG gender equality & diversity)		x			x	
	Explore possibilities for supporting parenthood and promoting work-life balance. Lead for action: HR		x				
O2.2	ITM's infrastructure is adapted to the needs of students and staff						
	Promote accessibility of buildings for disabled people (cf. to be included in the master plan for buildings). Lead for action: SHE (in collaboration with technical management)	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Female staff and students are informed about their right to breastfeed or pump safely and discreetly during working hours, as well as the availability of designated breastfeeding/pumping areas. Lead for action: SHE in collaboration with Gender & Diversity Working Group	x			x		
	Provide female hygiene products in toilets Lead for action: SHE (in collaboration with technical unit)	x					
	Provide training on safeguarding during fieldwork Lead for action: SHE unit		x	x			



SO3	To establish our medical services as a model of excellence in gender equality and diversity, ensuring that all patients receive equitable, respectful, and inclusive care. We will integrate gender and diversity considerations into all aspects of our clinical practice, research, and community engagement, fostering a safe and supportive environment for both patients and staff.						
	Implementation of protocols to ensure that all patients, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics, receive equitable and respectful care. Lead for action: Clinic	x	x	x	x		
	Provide ongoing training for medical staff on gender sensitivity, diversity, and inclusion. Lead for action: SHE unit (in collaboration with Clinic)		x	x	x		
	Ensure the availability of gender-adapted medical kits through the travel clinic Lead for action: SHE unit (in collaboration with Travel Clinic)		x				
	Install gender neutral toilets, besides M/F toilets, Lead for action: SHE (in collaboration with technical management)	x	x				
	Integrate gender and diversity considerations into clinical research and innovation projects. Lead for action: Research/Capacity building project (in collaboration with communication unit)	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Advocate for policies that support gender equality and diversity in healthcare at local, national, and international levels. Lead for action: Clinic (in collaboration communication unit)	x	x	x	x	x	x
SO4	We are committed to equitable partnerships, recognizing the global and diverse cultural contexts in which we work. We aim to foster gender mainstreaming in our partnerships.						
Actions	Assessment of the current state of gender integration in the FA5 program within ITM and our partner institutes	x					



	Lead for action: International Cooperation Office						
	Development of a user-friendly Gender M&E Tool with quantitative and qualitative indicators with attention towards intersectionality tailored to FA5 program countries, including pilot testing in selected countries Lead for action: International Cooperation Office	x					
	Provision evidence-based recommendations for a sustainable gender monitoring strategy Lead for action: International Cooperation office	x	x				
	Develop and integrate a systematic approach to gender across all phases of the next programme cycle (Framework Agreement 6) Lead for action: International Cooperation Office		x	x	x	x	x
	Map working groups, networks, and committees related to gender and development, and ensure active participation. Lead for action: International Cooperation Office		x	x	x	x	x
S05	We embed gender mainstreaming, inclusion and equity in our management, policy, support, monitoring and decision-making processes.						
	Disseminate Gender & inclusion Action plan to ITM staff & students. Lead for action: communication unit in collaboration with WG Gender Equality & Inclusion	x					
	Working group has (bi)monthly meeting to ensure that specified actions are implemented. Lead for action: coordinator of WG Gender Equality & Inclusion	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Designation and implementation of gender focal points, including the process for their selection, terms of	x	x	x	x	x	x



appointment, rollout, and training Lead for action: WG Gender Equality & Inclusion						
Implement the ITM Code of Conduct, specifically addressing actions related to unacceptable behavior Lead for action: Quality unit	x					
Gendered figures + progress on actions are integrated in ITM's annual reporting Lead for action: Quality unit (in collaboration with relevant units)	x	x	x	x	X	x
Allocate resources for training, events and workshops on gender equality and inclusion within the budgets of the relevant units. Lead for action: Management Committee	x					
Allocate resources as earmarked working time for members of Gender & Diversity Working Group, Gender Focal Points and units involved in implementing the Gender Equality & Inclusion Action Plan. Lead for action: Management Committee	x					
Composition of boards and committees: evolution towards a maximum representation of 50 to 60% of the same gender instead of one-third benchmark. Lead for action: Management Committee			x			

In addition to the new actions, ITM will continue the actions previously implemented under the earlier Gender & Diversity Policy and Action Plan, which have positively contributed to gender equality and inclusion within the institute:

- Thinking of the gender & diversity dimension throughout the research cycle
 - **Lead for action:** Researchers submitting research proposals
- Celebrate International Women's Day (8 March) & International Day of Women and Girls in Science (11 February)
 - **Lead for action:** Communication unit
- Beyond the annual alumni webinar series on gender held for the International Day for Women and Girls in Science (11 February) and International Women's Day (8 March), ITM will organize quarterly seminars/webinars on gender and discrimination for students and staff.



- **Lead for action:** Education office
- ITM ensures its communication is inclusive, representative of its diverse community, and positively reflects its commitment to diversity. Care is taken to avoid tokenism and implicit bias across all channels—online and offline—including the website, intranet, reports, flyers, podcasts, and social media.
 - **Lead for action:** Communication unit
- ITM is mindful of gender and diversity in all events, seminars, symposia, and media appearances, aiming for diverse and representative speakers and panels.
 - **Lead for action:** all ITM staff
- ITM ensures that in its reward, evaluation & promotion and processes bias in terms of gender & diversity is avoided. With regard to student selection first academic selection and in second step gender & diversity is taking into account. Adding to this the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) agenda in selection process of bursaries and key target groups
 - **Lead for action:** HR and education office
- The visibility and accessibility of confidential advisors and ombudspersons is increased for students and staff as well as the procedures better explained
 - **Lead for action:** SHE unit
- Gender will continue to be implemented as a cross-cutting theme in the DGD-ITM programme (FA5), along with the ongoing monitoring of gender-disaggregated data within FA5
 - **Lead for action:** International Cooperation office
- Student selection is conducted in two stages: first, based on academic performance, and second, considering gender and diversity. Additionally, the selection process for bursaries and key target groups aligns with the 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB) agenda.
 - **Lead for action:** Education office
- To further strengthen the diversification of our student population and to further increase the geographical diversity of external teaching
 - **Lead for action:** Education office
- ITM will actively participate in Antwerp Pride events by setting up pop-up safe spaces using 20 safe space chairs at various locations throughout the celebrations. These spaces will facilitate conversations about diversity and safety, demonstrating ITM's commitment to equality and inclusion while engaging with the broader community to promote these values.
 - **Lead for action:** clinic
- On the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia, and Intersexphobia (IDAHOT), ITM will issue a statement on social media and within the clinic to highlight the importance of combating discrimination and fostering inclusivity. Supportive messages and materials will be displayed in the clinic to reinforce this commitment.
 - **Lead for action:** clinic
- ITM will continue to raise awareness on the International Day Against Racism and Discrimination. In 2024, ITM clinic launched its campaign, which promoted the clinic as a “safe space.” The initiative involved placing safe space stickers and visual elements throughout the clinic, and capturing photos of staff and patients who support equality and non-discrimination. This campaign fosters an inclusive environment where everyone feels safe and respected, regardless of personal background.
 - **Lead for action:** clinic
- To celebrate International Women's Day, ITM will organize a clinic-wide event encouraging staff and patients to wear purple in solidarity with gender equality. Last year, the clinic distributed purple Easter eggs and pins, inspired by the HRC initiative, to raise awareness and recognize the valuable contributions of women in healthcare.
 - **Lead for action:** clinic

