

# Gender Equality Plan (GEP) 2026–2028

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# 1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, the European Union has launched a series of Equal Opportunities Action Programmes, with the aim of promoting female employment and raising awareness on the issue of gender equality in all areas of society.

These interventions have progressively led to the integration of gender perspectives into public policies, also involving the research and innovation sector.

In this context, through the Framework Programmes for research and technological development, the European Union has supported concrete initiatives for gender equality, which have involved both organizations conducting research and those funding it.

With the launch of the Horizon Europe Programme (2021-2027) and within the framework of the European Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the European Union has confirmed gender equality as a strategic priority for the research and innovation system.

Among the most relevant measures was the introduction of the obligation for universities, public bodies and research organizations to adopt a **Gender Equality Plan (GEP)** as a prerequisite for accessing European funding.

GEPs represent highly effective strategic and operational tools for promoting cultural and institutional change. The term "gender equality" does not mean that men and women should be identical or present in equal numbers, but rather that they should have equal access to the same opportunities, even at the highest levels, while maintaining their own specificities.

Pursuing gender balance does not mean flattening the differences that characterize our society and that intertwine with other dimensions, such as disability, age, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. On the contrary, it means valuing the richness deriving from the heterogeneity of work groups and countering all forms of discrimination related to such differences, objectively highlighting the merit and skills of each individual. It is widely recognized that, especially in the field of research, diversity within a group fosters innovation, thanks to the exchange of different experiences, approaches and perspectives.

# 2. European guidelines for the preparation of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP)

To comply with European guidelines, a Gender Equality Plan must meet specific requirements, both regarding the drafting process and the content to be included.

Specifically, compliance with **four mandatory requirements** is required, which guarantee the solidity and transparency of the plan, as well as the definition of interventions in **five recommended thematic areas**, to foster real and lasting change.

## 2.1 Mandatory requirements

### Publication and official recognition

The GEP must be approved by the organization's leadership and published prominently on the institutional website.

### Dedicated resources

It is essential to provide human resources, specific skills and a budget dedicated to the implementation of the planned measures.

## **Data collection and monitoring**

Periodic gender-disaggregated data relating to the composition of staff must be collected, using indicators to monitor the progress and effectiveness of actions taken.

## **Training and awareness-raising**

Training activities must be promoted for staff and managers, to disseminate a culture of equality and prevent stereotypes and prejudice, including unconscious bias.

## **2.2 Recommended thematic areas**

To strengthen the impact of the plan, European guidelines recommend intervening through concrete objectives in five strategic areas:

- 1. Balance between private life and work life, and dissemination of an inclusive organizational culture**
- 2. Gender balance in leadership roles and decision-making processes**
- 3. Equal opportunities in selection, hiring and career advancement paths**
- 4. Integration of the gender perspective in research content and training activities**
- 5. Adoption of prevention and countermeasures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment**

## **Clinical Validation from Biopharmaceutical Findings (CVBF)**

CVBF is a non-profit research organization founded in 2000, which also operates as a Contract Research Organization (CRO) since 2002. CVBF brings together prominent academic and associative entities engaged in scientific research and local development.

CVBF's mission is to promote and accelerate the development of medical products, with particular attention to special populations, such as paediatric patients and those with rare diseases. Alongside activities carried out within European Union-funded projects, CVBF offers full CRO services to various types of Sponsors, including academic and private entities, for any product category, from drugs to advanced therapies to medical devices.

Throughout its activities and international collaborations with European and non-European partners, it has developed growing attention to these issues, recognizing the importance of systematically addressing possible gender discrimination.

In this framework, CVBF has chosen to develop its own **Gender Equality Plan 2026-2028**, which represents the natural continuation of the 2023-2025 Plan.

Gender equality for CVBF is not just a formal requirement for participating in international research projects, but a strategic value that directly contributes to business growth, scientific quality and the ability to attract, motivate and retain talent.

With this Plan, CVBF reaffirms its commitment to:

- Guarantee equal opportunities for career, training and professional development for all people, regardless of gender;
- Actively counter discrimination, stereotypes and organizational imbalances that may negatively affect the internal climate;

- Promote an inclusive, respectful work environment oriented towards valuing differences as a resource, also taking into account non-binary gender identities.

In this perspective, CVBF has developed the Family Audit "Plan" (<https://www.cvbf.net/family-audit-2/>), achieving voluntary Family Audit Executive certification, promoted by the Autonomous Province of Trento.

The Plan includes reconciliation actions that are monitored and adjusted annually, with the following specific objectives:

- **Work organization:**
  - Advanced vacation planning.
  - Flexible hours distributed over 12 hours.
  - Encouraging mutual knowledge and sharing of skills.
- **Corporate culture - Diversity, Equality and Inclusion:**
  - Periodic management meetings dedicated to work-life balance.
  - Skills development paths in line with reconciliation needs.
- **Philosophy of corporate empathy:**
  - Attention to the personal needs of all employees, including the most introverted.
  - Assessment of expectations and satisfaction regarding work-life balance.
- **Corporate welfare / People care:**
  - Birth bonus for working mothers.
  - Awards related to career, results and loyalty.
  - Financial support in difficult situations (e.g. illness of a family member).
  - Involvement of families in corporate social events.
- **Territorial welfare:**
  - Creative, educational and cultural initiatives open to employees' families and the community.
  - Collaboration with local institutions to disseminate reconciliation practices.
- **New technologies:**
  - Digitalization and ICT tools to facilitate smart working.

The **Gender Equality Plan (GEP)** is therefore configured as a strategic and dynamic tool: not only a regulatory requirement, but a conscious choice that strengthens corporate reputation, supports innovation, improves the quality of daily work and contributes, in perspective, to generating shared value for people, for the company and for the scientific community. The intent is to consolidate CVBF as an increasingly open and inclusive organization, oriented towards recognizing and promoting the professionalism and skills of its members.

### 3. Context Analysis

#### Context analysis

The Gender Equality Plan 2026-2028 was developed following a detailed internal analysis, known as gender audit, carried out by the "Gender Equality" Working Group with the support of the Human Resources office. The objective of this survey was to acquire a realistic and transparent understanding of CVBF's composition and dynamics in relation to gender equality, in order to define concrete and consistent actions to be implemented over the three-year period.

CVBF is an organization composed of approximately 30 people, characterized by a female prevalence at all company levels. The CEO position is held by a man, while the President and all area managers are women. The staff, in fact, is mostly female, both in operational roles and in middle management. This configuration reflects a consolidated trend in recent years, particularly between 2016 and 2024, during which women have consistently represented the majority of the workforce.

#### Dedicated resources

The drafting of the document was entrusted to a specific **"Gender Equality" Working Group**, established within CVBF and composed of figures from different company areas, tasked with defining objectives, actions and operational tools consistent with the five thematic areas provided by Horizon Europe, calibrating them to CVBF's size, mission and specific characteristics. The identified resources are:

Rosa M. D'Ignazi - Administration Financing and Legal Head

Benedetta Mascolo - Legal Officer

Giulia Maggi - Biostatistician/Data Manager

Maria Rita Fagone - Quality Assurance

Flogert Dollani - Communication

#### Publication and official endorsement

The Plan, after being shared with the CEO and with the Human Resources department, was approved by the **Board of Directors** on 11.12.2025.

- **Presentation and Approval of the Document**

The **CVBF GEP** will be published as an official document, approved by the **Board of Directors** and made available in public form on the **CVBF institutional website**. Publication will guarantee maximum transparency and visibility of the commitments made by the organization regarding gender equality.

- **Monitoring and Reporting**

The **CVBF GEP Team** will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the activities planned in the Plan. On an annual basis, the team will:

- Implement the actions defined in the GEP;
- Collect and publish **gender-disaggregated data** regarding staff, positions of responsibility, and the **Board of Directors**;
- Prepare an **annual monitoring report**, useful for evaluating progress made and identifying areas for improvement.

The data and analyses collected will form the basis for **internal reporting** and public communication of the Plan's results.

- **Training and Awareness-raising**

The GEP includes a series of **training actions** and **awareness-raising initiatives** aimed at promoting knowledge and awareness of issues related to gender equality. These activities will involve **all CVBF staff** and will be aimed at:

- Promoting an inclusive organizational culture;
- Fostering respect and valuing of differences;
- Preventing gender stereotypes and discrimination;
- Supporting equal opportunities in scientific and management careers.

### **Ongoing Commitment**

CVBF is committed to ensuring that the implementation of the GEP is a **dynamic and participatory process**, based on continuous improvement and listening to staff needs. The Plan will be subject to **periodic review**, so as to keep it consistent with regulatory, scientific and organizational evolution.

## **4. Objectives and Actions**

### **Key Points**

#### **4.1 Work-life balance and organizational culture**

Started with the Family Audit Plan, the agile and smart working methods introduced in recent years will be maintained and monitored, with particular attention to staff satisfaction and equal access to these tools for men, women and, in the future, non-binary people.

A peculiar aspect of CVBF is in fact the strong female prevalence (approximately 70-75% of staff): this situation, while on the one hand constitutes a positive element in terms of empowerment, on the other hand requires attention to prevent the issue of reconciliation from being perceived as a "female issue."

For this reason, the Plan also provides for initiatives to **more actively involve male staff**, for example by encouraging the use of parental leave and promoting a culture in which organizational well-being is experienced as everyone's responsibility and right, regardless of gender.

Objective	Action / Tool	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline
<b>Improve work-life balance for all people</b>	Start/maintain path for National Gender Certification	All staff	Employees' families	Start 2026; annual progress check; possible certification 2027-2028
	Establish a Working Group to ensure work-life balance	All Staff	Employees' families	Monitor GEP adherence to employees' needs, ensuring agile and flexible work, parental support
	Internal campaigns to promote parental leave use by men	Male employees	All staff	First campaign 2026; annual monitoring
	Monitoring smart working and flexibility usage	All staff	All staff	Annual HR report from 2026
	Internal questionnaire on satisfaction with reconciliation policies	All staff	HR, Management	First administration 2026; biennial repetition

## 4.2 Gender balance in leadership positions

CVBF starts from an organizational configuration that sees all area management functions held by women, a result that confirms the company's historical attention to valuing female talent even in top roles.

The Plan aims to maintain this balance over time, preventing it from becoming a "static" fact, but transforming it into a real process of growth and generational change.

Annual monitoring actions will be initiated to verify the trend of female and male presence in positions of responsibility and to ensure that future choices are based on transparent and inclusive criteria.

Alongside this, CVBF will promote training sessions for management on topics such as implicit bias and inclusive leadership, so as to consolidate an approach that values skills and is not limited to guaranteeing numerical balances.

Objective	Action / Tool	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline
<b>Guarantee gender balance in top roles</b>	Annual monitoring of gender composition in positions of responsibility	Managers, HR	All staff	Annual
	Definition of transparent criteria for appointments and advancements	HR, Management	All staff	2026; revision 2027
	Training paths on inclusive leadership and bias for managers	Managers and coordinators	All staff	2026-2028

## 4.3 Gender equity in recruitment processes and career progression mechanisms

Guaranteeing equal opportunities does not only mean favouring an equitable distribution between women and men in top roles, but also building selection, evaluation and growth processes that are truly transparent and inclusive, from the earliest stages of the professional path.

Despite being a reality characterized by a strong female prevalence, CVBF recognizes that even in this context there may emerge risks of involuntary bias or disparities in career paths, which it is important to prevent and monitor systematically.

In this perspective, the Plan provides for actions aimed at strengthening gender equity in recruitment processes, starting from annual monitoring of the number of applications received, broken down by gender, so as to identify any imbalances in the selection phases.

To guarantee maximum transparency and inclusivity, the **mixed composition of selection committees** will also be ensured, with a balanced presence of women and men both in the technical component and in the HR component.

Particular attention will also be paid to the phase following entry into the company, through monitoring access to training, updating and professional development paths, verifying that opportunities are offered in a balanced way to all staff, regardless of gender.

Furthermore, the possibility for candidates to indicate "prefer not to answer" to the question on gender will be introduced in online application forms, to fully respect the freedom of self-determination.

Finally, periodic monitoring of the **average pay differential** between women and men is planned, with the aim of identifying any discrepancies and planning, if necessary, targeted interventions to reduce structural differences still present.

These actions are part of a broader path aimed at guaranteeing not only numerical parity, but also substantial equity in growth and talent development paths within CVBF.

Objective	Action / Tool	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline
<b>Guarantee equal opportunities in access to positions</b>	Annual monitoring of applications received and selected by gender	HR	All staff	Annual (2026-2028)
	Ensure mixed gender composition of selection committees	HR, selection managers	Candidates	Annual
<b>Protect freedom of self-determination</b>	Insert "prefer not to answer" in online gender question	Candidates	HR, Management	2026
<b>Promote equal opportunities in career development</b>	Monitoring access to training, courses and growth paths by gender	HR	All staff	Annual
	Evaluation and updating of tools to verify pay equity	HR, Working Group	All staff	First evaluation 2026; annual updates if needed

## 4.4 Integration of gender in research content

As a Clinical Research Organization, CVBF participates in the design and management of clinical studies in collaboration with national and international partners. In this context, the Plan aims to strengthen attention to gender not as an abstract principle, but as a practical aspect to be evaluated at every stage of projects.

Concretely, this means that in protocols, datasets and statistical analyses it will be considered, when scientifically relevant, whether and how gender may influence clinical results, patient recruitment or interpretation of collected data.

Internal awareness-raising on these issues will also be promoted, through dedicated training sessions for scientific and regulatory teams, to spread awareness that gender differences can also affect research outcomes.

The final objective is not to insert "gender" formally, but to improve the scientific quality of projects and contribute to more inclusive, useful and representative research of the different populations involved.

Objective	Action / Tool	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline
<b>Strengthen attention to gender in clinical projects</b>	Project mapping to identify where to integrate gender variables	Scientific group	Partners, patients	2026; revision 2027
	Internal training on "sex and gender analysis"	Scientific team	All staff	2027
	Sharing results and best practices in internal meetings	Scientific team	All staff	Ongoing

## 4.5 Prevention and combating harassment and discrimination

Guaranteeing a safe, respectful work environment free from discrimination is not only a legal obligation but represents one of the fundamental values that CVBF has chosen to place at the centre of its operations.

The Plan provides for the updating and more widespread dissemination of the Code of Ethics and dedicated internal policies, so as to make them tools that are truly known and concretely used by all people working in the company, including external figures and consultants.

To further strengthen this commitment, a procedure will be introduced that allows reporting of any incidents even anonymously, protecting confidentiality and ensuring fair and impartial handling of reports.

Alongside this, CVBF will promote training and awareness-raising sessions for all staff, to increase awareness of how daily behaviours, language and relationships can contribute to building a truly inclusive and respectful climate.

Furthermore, when the **Modello Organizzativo ai sensi del D.Lgs. 231/2001** is adopted, CVBF has chosen, although not obliged, to explicitly refer to the **Red Code** as a reference for the prevention and combating of harassment and gender-based violence. A choice that testifies to the company's

willingness to go beyond simple regulatory compliance, to clearly reaffirm that respect and protection of personal dignity are non-negotiable principles.

**Table 5: Prevention of harassment and discrimination**

Objective	Action / Tool	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline
<b>Strengthen tools and internal culture</b>	Update Code of Ethics and adopt anonymous reporting procedure	All staff	All staff	2026; annual monitoring
	Training on inclusive language and micro-aggressions	All staff	All staff	Annual
	Insert reference to Red Code in MOG 231	Management, Compliance	All staff	At time of MOG adoption

## 4.6 Data collection, monitoring and reporting

To make the commitment provided by the Gender Equality Plan effective and verifiable, CVBF has defined a structured system for periodic collection and analysis of internal data, which allows measuring progress made and guiding any corrective actions.

Every year the main gender-disaggregated indicators will be detected and updated, such as the composition of staff broken down by role and level, average salaries, access to parental leave, number of applications received and participation in training initiatives.

These data will be analysed by the "Gender Equality" Working Group which will have the task of evaluating their trend, identifying any criticalities or deviations from the set objectives and formulating improvement proposals.

The results will then be shared with Management at least once a year, so as to integrate the gender dimension into decision-making processes, HR policies and the definition of company priorities.

In a perspective of continuous improvement, CVBF also considers the opportunity to progressively align itself with the standards provided by **UNI/PdR 125:2022**, the practice that defines a management system for gender equality.

This would mean building a more formalized set of indicators, establishing clear and measurable quantitative objectives — such as increasing the percentage of men who use parental leave or progressively reducing the pay differential — and providing for annual reporting to compare the results achieved with what was planned.

In this way, monitoring would not only be a formal requirement, but would become a concrete tool to understand the impact of actions initiated, make progress transparent and guide future choices with greater awareness.

Objective	Action / Tool	Direct Target	Indirect Target	Timeline
<b>Monitor Plan effectiveness</b>	Annual collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data (salaries, roles, leave, applications, training)	HR, Gender Equality Working Group	All staff	Annual
	Share results with Management	Management, HR	All staff	Annual
<b>Strengthen monitoring system</b>	Evaluation of alignment with UNI/PdR 125:2022 and possibility of certification	Management, HR	All staff	Evaluation 2026; possible implementation 2027-2028

## 4.7 Description of CVBF's Gender Equality Plan

Thematic Area (TA)	Objectives	Focus
<b>TA1. Balance between private and work life and organizational culture</b>	Promote and consolidate a corporate culture that supports the balance between personal and professional life, actively involving all staff, including male staff	Maintenance and improvement of tools already active (smart working, flexible hours, welfare platform); start of path for National Gender Certification; internal campaigns to encourage parental leave use also by men
<b>TA2. Gender balance in leadership positions and decision-making processes</b>	Guarantee over time the female representation in top roles, now fully achieved, and make decision-making processes more inclusive	Annual monitoring of gender composition in top and coordination roles; definition of transparent criteria for appointments; training paths for managers on inclusive leadership and unconscious bias topics
<b>TA3. Gender equity in recruitment and career development processes</b>	Guarantee equal opportunities in access and professional growth, avoiding involuntary exclusion mechanisms	Monitoring of applications received by gender; attention to gender balance in selection committees; possibility for candidates to choose "prefer not to answer" on gender; monitoring of equal access to training, progressions and benefits
<b>TA4. Integration of gender perspective in clinical projects</b>	Evaluate, where scientifically relevant, the impact of gender in research activities and data management	Mapping of ongoing projects; specific training for research teams on "sex and gender analysis"; insertion of gender variables in datasets and protocols when relevant
<b>TA5. Prevention and combating harassment and discrimination</b>	Strengthen tools and internal culture to guarantee a safe, respectful and inclusive work environment	Update of Code of Ethics; adoption of a procedure for anonymous reporting; periodic training for all staff on inclusive language and respectful behaviors; explicit reference to Red Code in MOG 231 under adoption
<b>TA6. Monitoring, reporting and certification standards</b>	Measure Plan effectiveness, guarantee transparency and guide future choices	Annual collection of gender-disaggregated data (staff, salaries, leave, applications, training); analysis by "Gender Equality" Working Group and sharing with Management; evaluation of alignment with UNI/PdR 125:2022 to introduce KPIs and measurable objectives

## 4.8 Conclusion

With the adoption of the Gender Equality Plan 2026-2028, CVBF confirms and strengthens its commitment to building an increasingly inclusive, fair and respectful work environment, capable of valuing the contribution and skills of all people who are part of it. It is part of an organizational strategy aimed at encouraging policies suitable for reducing the gender gap with consequent benefits for staff well-being, in addition to the reputational and ethical impacts of the professional growth of all resources.

The identified actions are not limited to meeting the requirements provided by Horizon Europe, but represent a strategic and cultural choice: making gender equality a lever for growth, scientific quality and organizational well-being.

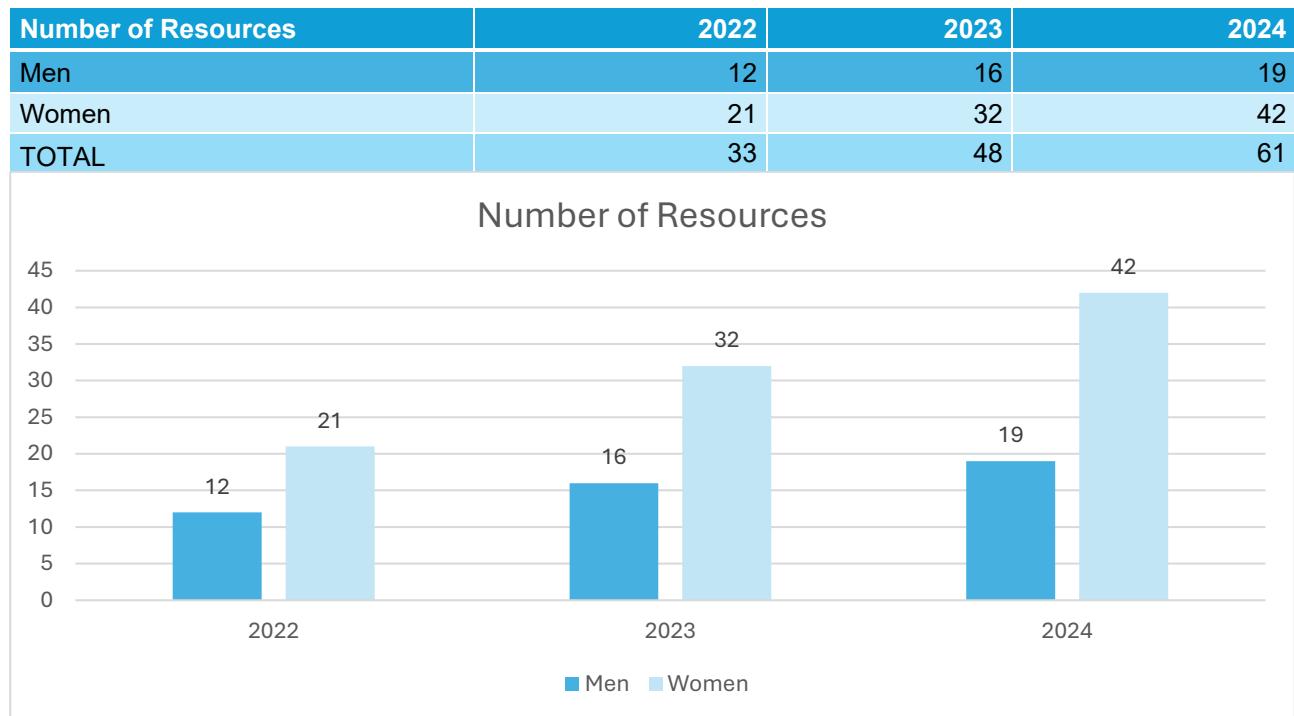
## Annex 1

- **Composition of workforce and management**

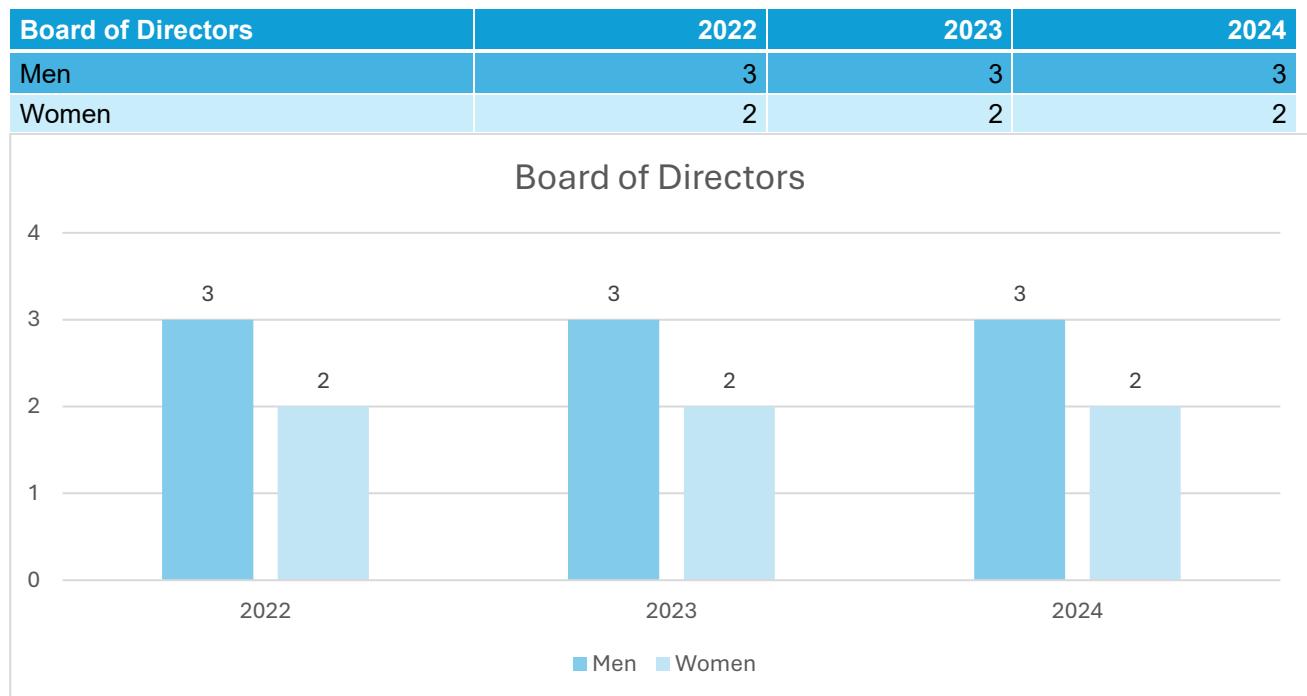
In 2024, women constitute approximately 70% of total staff.

More in-depth analysis by role confirms this distribution: area head positions are predominantly occupied by women, while on the Board of Directors the female presence is comparable to the male presence. At operational and research levels, moreover, women remain the predominant component.

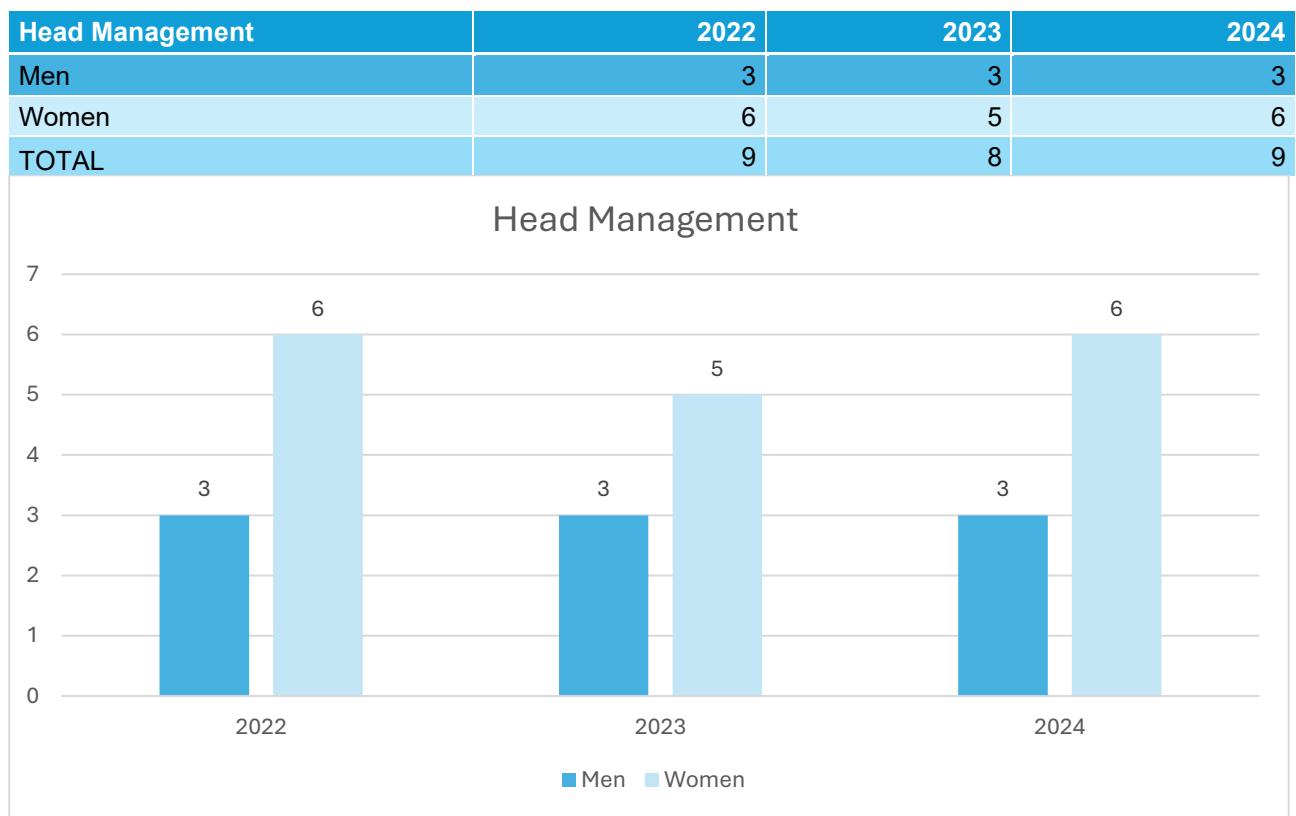
**Figure 1: Number of Resources**



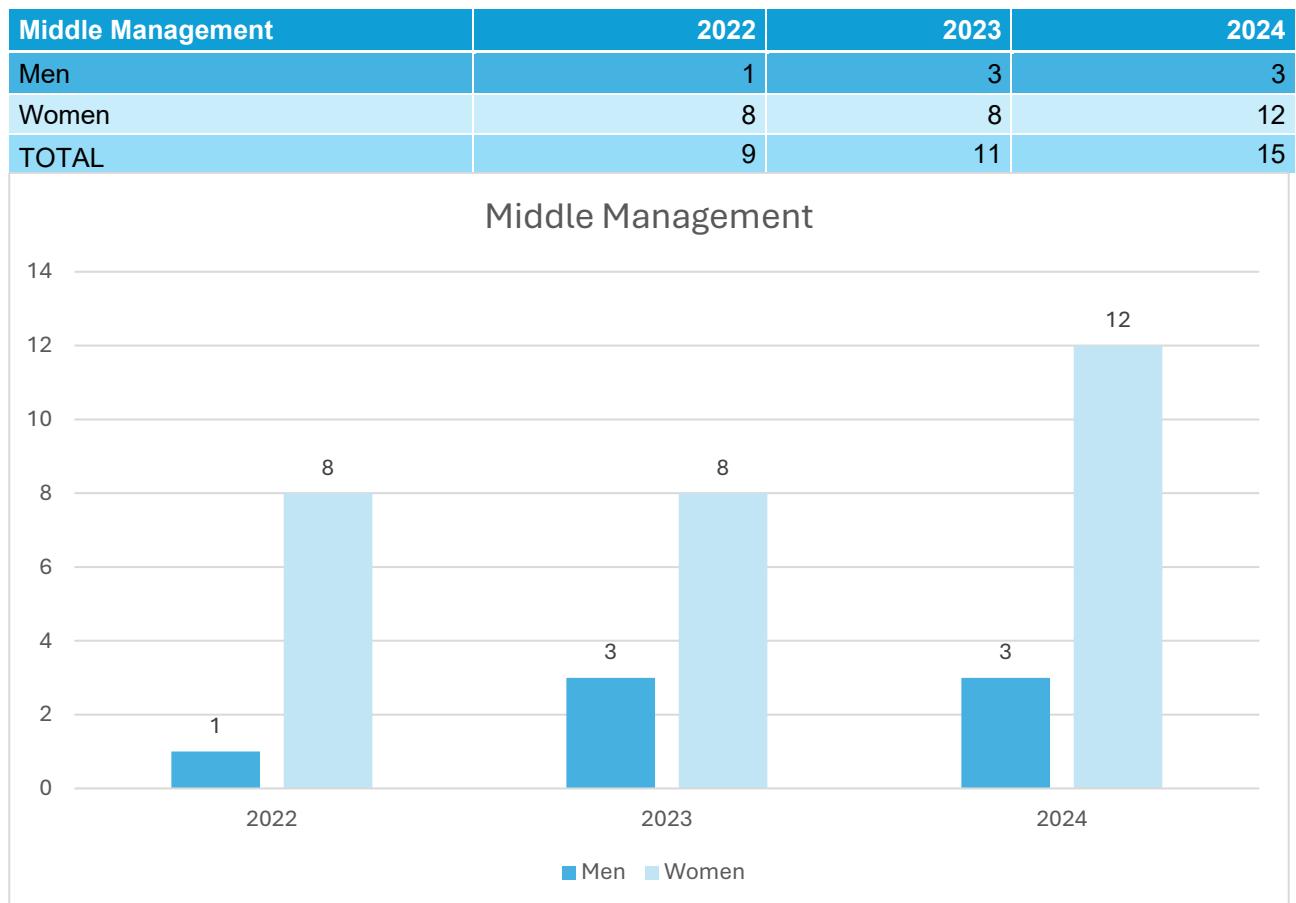
**Figure 2: Composition of CVBF board members**



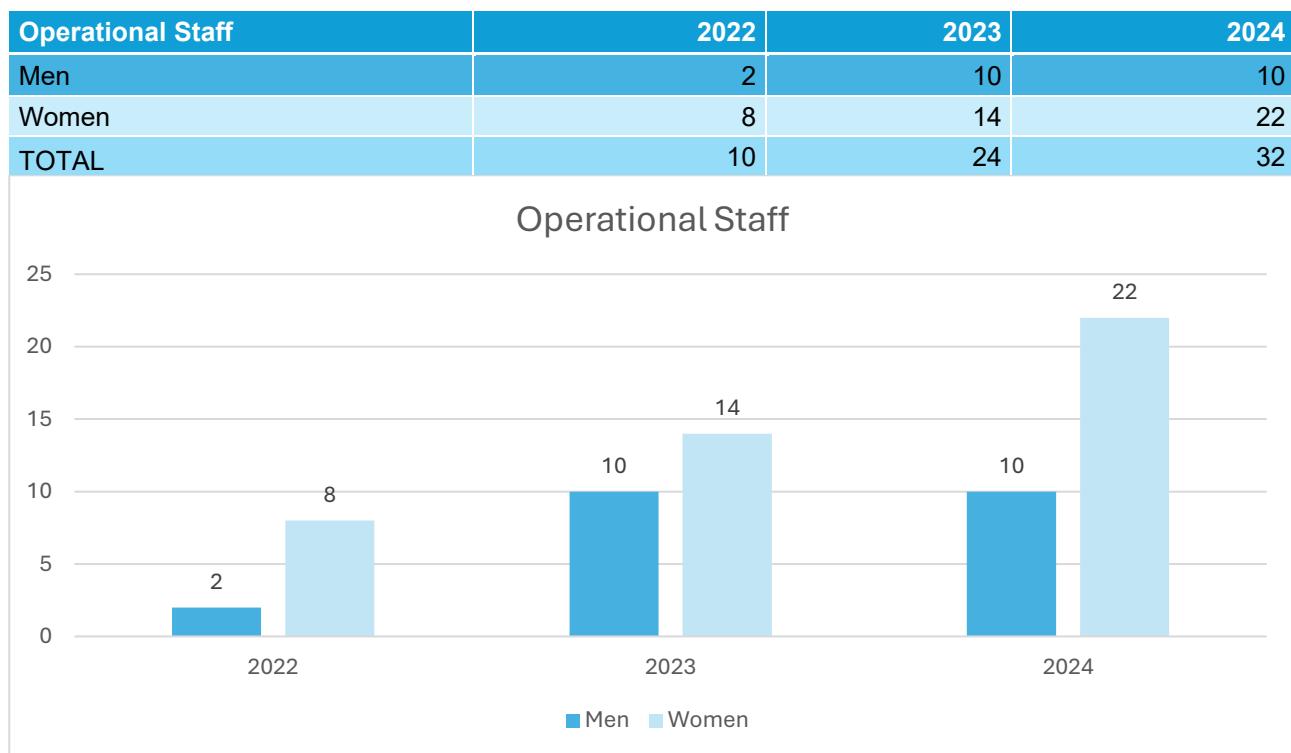
**Figure 3: Composition Head management**



**Figure 4: Composition Middle management**



**Figure 5: Composition Operational Staff**



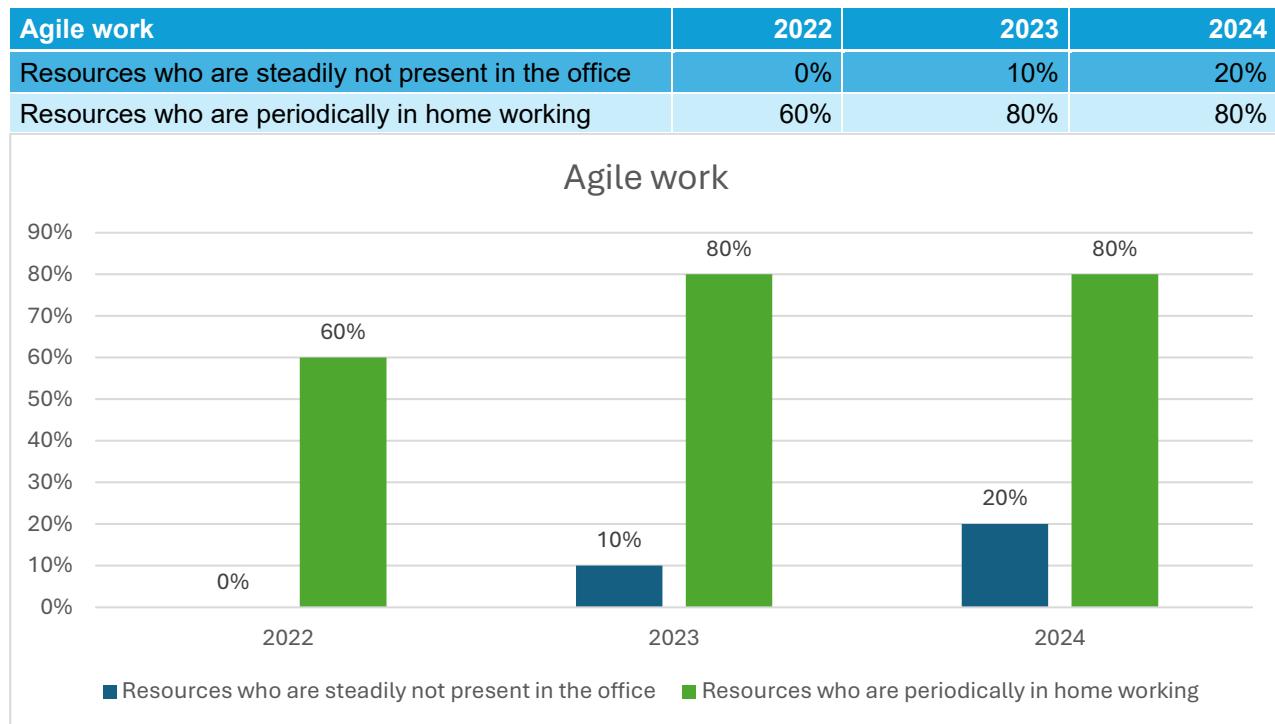
- In the composition of CVBF's employment contracts, a prevalence of permanent contracts is noted.
- Regarding contractual types, most staff (95%) are hired with an employment contract.
- Among collaborators, interns and trainees, a female prevalence is also observed. However, among external consultants a higher share of men emerges, highlighting a differentiation in collaboration models.
- **Recruitment and professional development**

A significant fact concerns applications received over the years, which confirms the strong female presence also in the recruiting phase. Between 2022 and 2024, in fact, most applications for open positions came from women; in 2024 alone, for example, out of 60 total applications, 45 came from female candidates and 15 from men.

- **Work-life balance through contractual flexibility**

CVBF promotes agile work methods among staff members and implements ICT systems to support remote work.

**Figure 6: Agile work statistics**



CVBF encourages forms of part-time work when these contribute to maintaining a balanced relationship between professional and personal life.

### **Labor Contracts**

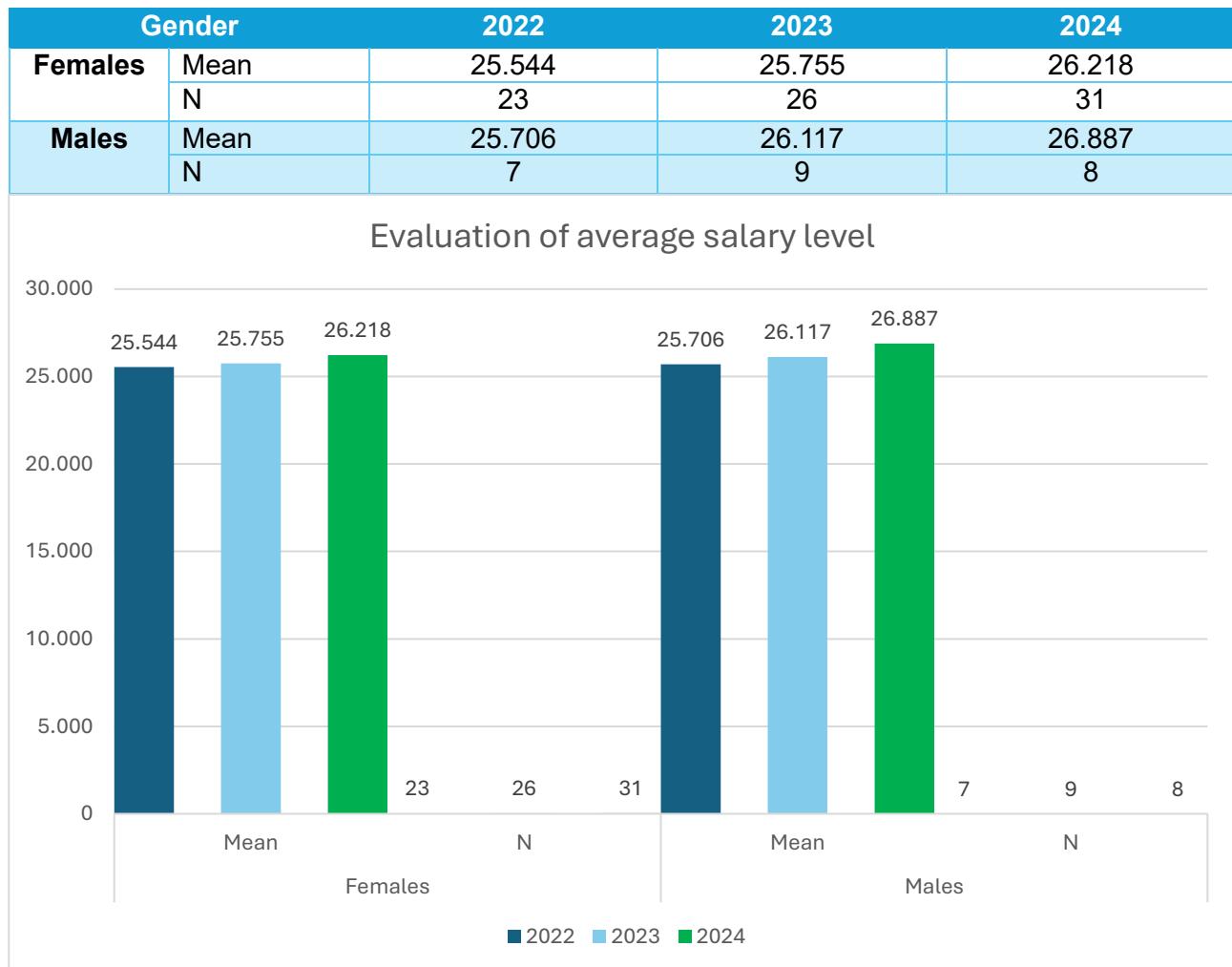
Labor Contracts	2022	2023	2024
Full time	70%	70%	70%
Part time	30%	30%	30%



- **Equity and average salary levels**

From a salary perspective, analysis of average annual salaries has highlighted a historical difference in favor of men, which however compared to years before 2022 has decreased and must be interpreted. In 2024, for example, the average salary of women is approximately €26,218, compared to €26,887 for men. Taking into consideration that part-time contracts are predominantly female, the difference in salary levels between men and women, while remaining, is more subtle.

**Figure 7: Evaluation of average salary level**



From the internal analysis, some strengths clearly emerge, such as the high female presence in coordination positions, a positive corporate climate attentive to the needs of balancing private and work life, as well as consolidated experience in adopting flexible and smart working methods. At the same time, some aspects to improve have been identified: the limited use of parental leave by male staff, the persistence of a historical wage differential, the need to formalize and strengthen corporate policies for preventing discrimination and micro-aggressions, as well as the importance of promoting constant awareness-raising on the use of inclusive language, also towards non-binary gender identities, although currently not present in the staff.

Finally, the evidence that emerged guides the actions provided by the Plan in coherence with the five thematic areas outlined by Horizon Europe, which concern the balance between life and work, organizational culture, gender representation in leadership positions, integration of the gender dimension in research content, prevention and counter-measures against harassment and discrimination, as well as data collection, monitoring and reporting.