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## **EFTA GENDER EQUALITY POLICY**

The EFTA Secretariat is a place of equality and mutual respect among employees, who shall be treated fairly and enjoy equal opportunities. Staff at the Secretariat shall not be discriminated against on the basis of gender, and have equal access to advancement, training and responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

### **AIM**

The aim of this equality policy is to ensure equal conditions and opportunities for employees at the Secretariat, free from gender bias, and to raise awareness of gender equality in all the work of the Secretariat. This policy is intended to contribute to gender balance in all positions, internal committees and working groups in the Secretariat. It is designed to help ensure that all staff are respected and valued on their own merits, and that talent and human resources are used as effectively as possible. The policy is also aimed at counteracting any stereotypes concerning gender roles.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General is responsible for the implementation of this policy and shall appoint a Gender Equality Group composing of participants from staff and management, including participation from the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO).

#### **Gender Equality Group**

The Gender Equality Group is competent for monitoring and overseeing progress in implementing this policy, and can propose actions and remedies to the Secretary-General.

#### **Management**

Senior management and directors of all divisions should champion the implementation of the policy, and are obliged to inform the Secretary-General if they detect any deviations from or

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<sup>1</sup> This Gender Equality Policy constitutes guidelines and is based on and subordinate to the EFTA Staff Regulations and Rules.

failings in the policy. The status of implementation of this policy shall be discussed at least once a year at regular meetings of EFTA management.

## **Human Resources**

Human Resources (HR) shall ensure that a briefing on gender equality, as well as this policy, is included in all induction and orientation sessions for new staff. HR shall report once a year to the Gender Equality Group on gender in staffing, and provide other gender-related data to the Gender Equality Group. HR shall ensure that vacancy announcements are not biased and are addressed to both genders, and that information on this policy is provided on both the intranet and website of the Association.

### **All staff**

All staff shall contribute to a gender-sensitive work environment.

## **1. Recruitment**

### **Aim**

Positions shall be equally accessible to all genders, and the employee group both as a whole and across different position levels shall be diverse in terms of gender.

### **Actions**

All positions in the Secretariat shall be equally accessible to all genders. Advertisements for vacant positions shall convey the Secretariat's aim of gender balance.

Training shall be given to all staff members who participate in recruitment panels on possible gender bias in the recruitment process.

If there is a significant imbalance between genders, i.e. the under-represented gender counts for less than 40% in the Secretariat / directors / the division / at the position level in question, and if the selection process identifies equally qualified and suitable individuals for the vacant position, gender should be considered a relevant qualifying criterion.

As far as possible, internal committees and working groups that are established by the Secretariat shall have at least 40% representation of each gender.

Each year, in the first quarter, statistics on the gender balance of employees for the different position levels shall be compiled by HR. The results shall include information on the Secretariat as a whole, as well as by management, division, position and duty station. At the same time HR and the Gender Equality Group shall assess whether vacancy announcements from the previous year were in any way imbalanced in terms of gender, and shall report to the Secretary-General.

## **2. Terms of employment, including promotions**

### **Aim**

Decisions on salaries and terms of employment including promotions shall be made in a non-discriminatory way for all employees, free from gender bias.

### **Actions**

For each decision regarding starting grade and step, promotions and special step increases there shall be careful scrutiny to ensure fair treatment, free from gender bias.

All staff on maternity/paternity leave as well as part-time staff shall be considered for promotions and special step increases in the same manner as other staff members.

HR is responsible for ensuring that an analysis regarding salaries, special step increases, promotions and other employment terms of employees is performed, either internally or externally, on a yearly basis. The results of this analysis shall be presented to the Secretary-General and to the Gender Equality Group in the first quarter of each year. The results shall also be presented to staff, in such a way that individual staff members cannot be identified from the data provided. If the above-mentioned analysis reveals unexplained gender differences, these differences shall be brought to the attention of the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General will address them and, in as far as possible, introduce measures to prevent them from arising again, and inform the Gender Equality Group of the outcome.

## **3. Access to training and continuing professional development**

### **Aim**

All employees in the EFTA Secretariat shall enjoy equal opportunities and access to training, continuing professional development (CPD) and career development, free from gender bias.

### **Actions**

Information on employees' training and development shall be registered and collected in an organised manner by HR.

In the annual admin survey, employees shall be asked to evaluate their opportunities for training or CPD, and their use of such opportunities. This information shall be analysed by HR according to gender, area of work and division, and presented to the Gender Equality Group in the first quarter of each year.

Corrective action shall be taken at the appropriate level if gender-based differences are detected as regards opportunities for training or CPD, and/or employees' use of such opportunities.

## **4. Work-life balance**

### **Aim**

The EFTA Secretariat values the importance of striking a balance between work and private life. Terms of employment and work arrangements shall be kept under review in relation to possible changes in the composition of staff and their family situations.

### **Actions**

The Secretariat shall support staff who wish to make use of arrangements for flexible working hours in order to facilitate work-life balance.

Support is given to families with children and all staff irrespective of gender are encouraged to take responsibility for childcare, including making use of paternity/maternity leave and caring for sick children.

Measures shall be taken to facilitate the smooth integration of staff back into the workplace following maternity/paternity leave, including the necessary flexibility to allow mothers to continue breastfeeding and the provision of private facilities in the workplace for breastfeeding.

If workload is found to be excessive or lacking in flexibility, the matter should be discussed with the line manager and a solution sought to address the situation.

In the annual admin survey, staff shall be asked whether they are content with their work arrangements and if they have experienced disparate treatment in regard to working arrangements.

HR shall collect data on the use of flexible and part-time work arrangements and analysed it according to gender and presented to the Gender Equality Group in the first quarter of each year.

## **5. Raising awareness of gender equality**

### **Aim**

All staff are to be respected and valued on their own merits, free from gender bias. The Secretariat shall make its policy and aims in relation to gender equality known, and make an effort to promote gender equality.

### **Action**

The Gender Equality Group and HR shall periodically organise a workshop on gender equality and how gender considerations may affect the work of employees of the Secretariat. This workshop should be attended by management and staff.

The Gender Equality Group shall also identify and inform the staff of workshops and courses on gender equality in which they may wish to participate.

In the annual admin survey, staff shall be asked whether they have been affected by gender bias at the Secretariat.

If the survey results indicate that a member of staff has experienced gender bias at the Secretariat, the Gender Equality Group may make recommendations to the Secretary-General on appropriate actions.

EFTA's values and Gender Equality Policy are promoted by the EFTA Secretariat on the website and in other forums as appropriate.

## **CONTINUOUS FOLLOW-UP**

A status and progress report shall be prepared annually for the Secretary-General by the Gender Equality Group with the assistance of HR. The report shall be published on the intranet in the first quarter of each year for the previous calendar year. Furthermore, a report on the status and implementation of the policy will be included in the EFTA Secretariat's yearly Performance Plan which is submitted to the Council.

This policy shall be evaluated and amended if necessary at least every third year. HR is responsible for initiating the revision work.

This policy is approved for implementation 1 January 2017