

NCEN Gender Equality Action Plan

Introduction

The Nordic Convergent Evolution Network (NCEN) is committed to promoting gender equality, diversity and an inclusive scientific culture. The network brings together researchers at different career stages, with approximately equal representation of women and men. At the time of establishing the network, the core group consisted of 7 women and 9 men, and we expect the membership to develop towards an approximately 50/50 gender balance as new members join. Most NCEN members are early-career researchers, typically 2-7 years after their PhD.

This is an important career stage for professional development and progression towards independent research careers. Researchers at this stage face a range of challenges, including establishing independent research groups, developing research programmes, obtaining funding, building collaborations and progressing towards permanent positions and professorships. These challenges can intersect with gender and other structural factors. NCEN therefore aims not only to promote equal participation in the network, but also to create a supportive community where members can share experiences, opportunities and strategies for navigating academic careers.

Convergent evolution, in which different evolutionary lineages independently develop similar traits or adaptations, provides a powerful framework for understanding the repeatability and predictability of evolution. Expertise relevant to convergent evolution is distributed across countries and disciplines in the Nordic region, including ecology, evolutionary biology, palaeontology, genomics, evo-devo and experimental evolution. NCEN brings together researchers working across these different fields and provides a platform for developing collaborations that would be difficult to establish within individual institutions or disciplines.

The network brings together researchers and research environments from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, with participating institutions including the University of Oslo, Lund University, the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Stockholm University, the Swedish Museum of Natural History, the University of Copenhagen, the University of Helsinki and Uppsala University. The geographically close but scientifically diverse nature of the network provides opportunities for researchers to exchange expertise, visit each other's research environments and develop collaborations across institutional and national boundaries.

Starting in 2026, NCEN will implement a programme of activities including an in-person kick-off meeting, bimonthly digital seminars, funded research visits, collaborative publications and a final open conference. The network will also develop educational and public-engagement activities, including materials for Nordic schools and a public exhibition at the Natural History Museum in Oslo.

Gender equality and inclusion will be integrated throughout these activities. NCEN will seek to provide equitable opportunities for members to take leadership roles, contribute to collaborative publications, represent the network externally and develop their professional networks. The network will also support flexible participation and take different life circumstances and caring responsibilities into consideration when planning activities. In addition, NCEN will create opportunities to discuss gender equality in science, career progression, establishing and running

independent research groups, work-life balance and other challenges faced by researchers at the early stages of independent academic careers.

Through these efforts, NCEN aims to enhance scientific creativity and collaboration while contributing to a supportive environment in which researchers of different genders and backgrounds can develop their careers. We aim to build a network where members can support each other in navigating the academic career system, share opportunities and expertise, and develop the confidence and collaborations needed to pursue independent research careers and leadership positions.

The Gender Equality Action Plan sets out the commitments and actions NCEN will take to support these goals and describes how progress will be monitored throughout the network period.

Gender Balance and Diversity in NCEN - Status and Gaps

NCEN currently has an approximately balanced representation of women and men. At the establishment of the network, the core group consisted of 7 women and 9 men, and the membership is expected to develop towards an approximately 50/50 gender balance as new members join. The network is currently led by two women, and the Organizing Committee also includes a female coordinator and a male PhD student supporting the organisation of network activities.

The current composition therefore provides a strong baseline in terms of overall gender representation and leadership. At the same time, numerical balance alone does not necessarily ensure equal access to visibility, leadership opportunities, authorship, professional networks or career development opportunities. These aspects can be particularly important at the early-career stage represented in NCEN, where researchers are developing independent research profiles, establishing research groups, applying for funding and progressing towards permanent positions.

Rather than attempting to assess the career positions of individual members, NCEN will monitor participation and opportunities at the network level. This will include attention to the gender balance of workshop and seminar leaders, project and publication leadership, external representation and other visible roles. The aim is not to impose a fixed gender distribution for individual activities, but to identify patterns over time and ensure that opportunities are broadly and fairly distributed.

NCEN also recognises that inclusion is influenced by factors beyond gender. Members come from different career stages and socioeconomic, ethnic, and disciplinary backgrounds, and have diverse genders and sexual orientations. Members also have different personal circumstances, including caring responsibilities and varying possibilities for travel and participation. The network will therefore support flexible participation and seek to create an environment in which members with different backgrounds and circumstances can contribute and benefit from the network.

The GEAP builds on this existing baseline by focusing on maintaining gender balance while also ensuring equitable access to leadership, visibility, authorship, career development and participation throughout the network period.

Commitments and Activities

1. **Gender balance and monitoring** - monitor gender balance in participation, leadership and visibility across the network.
2. **Leadership, visibility and representation** - provide equitable opportunities to lead, contribute and represent NCEN externally.
3. **Authorship and recognition** - ensure transparent and fair allocation of credit and opportunities to lead collaborative outputs.
4. **Inclusive participation and flexible working** - support flexible participation and make involvement compatible with different life circumstances and caring responsibilities.
5. **Career development and awareness** - support ECR career development and create space to discuss gender equality, career progression and work-life balance.

1. Gender balance and monitoring

Commitment	Action	Responsible	Timeline	Comments
Maintain balanced gender representation in NCEN	Monitor gender balance among members and in visible network activities, including workshops, seminars and leadership roles	Organizing Committee	Annually	Current membership is approximately 50/50 women and men
Identify potential imbalances in participation and leadership	Review participation data and discuss potential measures, such as encouraging members of an underrepresented gender to take on leadership roles, if systematic imbalances emerge.	Organizing Committee	Annually	Focus on patterns over time rather than individual activities

2. Leadership, visibility, and representation

Commitment	Action	Responsible	Timeline	Comments
Provide equitable opportunities to take leadership roles	Actively encourage members of underrepresented genders to lead workshops, seminars and collaborative projects	Organizing Committee / project leaders	Ongoing	Leadership opportunities should be distributed across the network
Ensure balanced	Consider gender	Organizing	Ongoing	Aim to reflect the

representation in external communication and outreach	balance when selecting NCEN representatives, speakers and members featured in outreach activities, website content, social media and other public communication	Committee		diversity of the network in how NCEN is presented externally
Distribute visibility opportunities across career stages and backgrounds	Rotate opportunities to represent NCEN externally where appropriate	Organizing Committee	Ongoing	Avoid repeatedly relying on the same members

3. Authorship and recognition

Commitment	Action	Responsible	Timeline	Comments
Ensure fair and transparent recognition of contributions	Apply transparent authorship principles based on actual contributions	Project/workshop leaders	Ongoing	We are currently making authorship guidelines. NCEN membership or leadership does not automatically confer authorship
Provide equitable opportunities to lead publications and projects	Encourage a diversity of members to take first-author and project-lead roles	Project/workshop leaders	Ongoing	Particularly relevant for members that are very early in the career.

4. Inclusive participation, work-life balance and career development

Commitment	Action	Responsible	Timeline	Comments
Support ECRs in navigating academic careers	Organise discussions/seminars on topics relevant to early-career researchers, including career development, establishing an independent research group and balancing research with other responsibilities	Organizing Committee / NCEN members	Annually / Ongoing	Topics will be shaped by members' interests and needs

Create space to discuss gender equality in academic science	Organise a seminar or discussion on gender equality in science, including potential barriers and experiences related to career progression	Organizing Committee	During the network period	Could include discussion of gender, career stage and caring responsibilities
Support members with different caring responsibilities and life circumstances	Give reasonable notice of meetings, deadlines and activities and avoid unnecessary workload	Organizing Committee	Ongoing	NCEN aims to be a supportive network that gives members energy rather than adds to their workload
Support flexible participation	Offer flexible ways of participating in NCEN activities where practical, including hybrid participation and different ways of contributing to seminars, workshops and projects	Organizing Committee / project leaders	Ongoing	Particularly relevant for members with caring responsibilities, health-related constraints or other circumstances affecting their ability to participate in person

5. Organisational culture and awareness

Commitment	Action	Responsible	Timeline	Comments
Foster an inclusive and supportive network culture	Encourage all members to contribute ideas, ask questions and take initiative	All NCEN members / Organizing Committee	Ongoing	Particularly important in interdisciplinary activities
Encourage members who may be less likely to self-nominate	Actively invite a broad range of members to contribute to workshops, seminars and projects	Organizing Committee	Ongoing	Especially relevant for leadership opportunities
Raise awareness of gender equality and unconscious bias	Include gender equality and inclusive collaboration as part of discussions about	Organizing Committee	During network meetings	Could be incorporated into future network meetings or seminars

	network culture			
Respectful and safe participation	Communicate expectations for respectful conduct at NCEN activities and ensure that members know who they can approach if they experience or witness harassment, discrimination or other inappropriate behaviour.	Organizing Committee	Ongoing / During network meetings	Could be written into the NCEN network values and expectations

Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

The NCEN Organizing Committee is responsible for implementing the actions described in this Gender Equality Action Plan. Gender balance and inclusion will be considered when planning network activities and distributing opportunities for leadership, visibility, collaboration and external representation.

Progress will be monitored throughout the network period, with a more systematic review carried out annually. The Organizing Committee will monitor overall gender balance and participation in leadership and visible roles, including workshop and seminar leadership, project and publication leadership, and external representation. Where patterns of imbalance are identified, the Organizing Committee will consider appropriate measures when planning subsequent activities.

The implementation of the GEAP will be reviewed towards the end of the network period. The final evaluation will assess which actions were implemented, identify any remaining challenges and consider which practices should be continued in future NCEN activities.