

GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

Version V — Renewal for the HRS4R period 2026–2029

Working draft for internal review — prepared alongside the HRS4R Internal Review and Action Plan 2026–2029

Prepared by the HR Award / GEP Working Group, July 2026

1. What We Have Already Done

Over the previous implementation periods, we carried out a series of concrete steps on gender equality that we now build on.

In order to further increase the awareness of gender-related issues, we organised a series of lectures focused on these topics. In 2022, Mgr. P. Špondrová gave the lecture “Gender in Leadership”, focused on women's position in scientific leadership roles, followed in 2023 by her lecture “Equality between Men and Women”, addressing gender stereotypes, their negative impact on both women and men, and anti-discrimination law.

“Successful Women of our Institute” webpage. We created the webpage presenting selected leading female scientists from IBP together with their scientific achievements:

- Prof. RNDr. Jana Kašpárková, Ph.D. — biophysicist studying the molecular and cellular mechanisms of effective antitumour metallopharmaceuticals; recipient of two Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) grants; her work has been cited over 6,000 times.
- Judit Šponer, Ph.D. — senior scientist working on the origin of life problematics, known for her research on prebiotic RNA synthesis and non-enzymatic polymerisation of nucleotides; a recipient of the GAČR President's Award (2022); author of about 120 publications cited around 5,000 times.
- Prof. RNDr. Eva Bártová, DSc. — Director of the Institute since 2017, researcher in chromatin structure, epigenetics and DNA repair; member of EMBO since 2020; coordinator/investigator of numerous EU and international projects; cited over 2,500 times.
- Prof. RNDr. Michaela Vorlíčková, DrSc. — pioneer of circular dichroism spectroscopy of nucleic acids in the Czech Republic and one of the first researchers worldwide to study DNA quadruplexes; recipient of the G. J. Mendel Honorary Medal of the Czech Academy of Sciences (2015).

We also organised methodical courses that, although formally open to all employees, were primarily attended by women researchers. These included, for example, advanced Excel and biostatistics courses, which we consider an indirect but a highly effective tool for supporting women's professional development.

Recruiting and retaining outstanding women scientists. We continued our mission to attract talented women scientist at an early stage of their career. A notable example is Hana Polášek-Sedláčková, a promising young scientist who previously worked in Copenhagen in the group of Jiří Lukáš (one of the most highly cited Czech scientists working abroad). She was recruited to IBP, where she has now been working for several years. She holds an EMBO Installation Grant, received the Lumina Quaeruntum award from the Czech Academy of Sciences, and has submitted an ERC project that is currently in the final stages of evaluation. She illustrates well the Institute's ability to recruit and retain outstanding female talent to start their independent-research career stage.

The “Returns” (“Návraty”) project. The most significant achievement of this period was the successful application for OP JAK “Returns” project, which we have been implementing since 1 January 2026. Its primary aim is to support women's return to research after maternity/parental leave. As part of the preparation, we held a series of meetings with women returning after maternity leave, informing them about the possibility of applying for a return grant. Interest was high, and as a result, four researchers prepared their project proposals. The preparation was not simple - each project required a substantial set of documents (project proposal, budget, mentor and support-team involvement, mobility and training plan, etc.) - and our working group actively helped them through the process. All four submitted projects were approved by the Grant Council for funding (see Section 4 below for further details).

In the area of reconciling work and family life, we continued to operate an early childhood care group (Children's corner) open to pre-school children of our employees. We also regularly organise Summer Schools for employees' children (twice a year - one is running right now and is fully booked) and Children's Days, each attended by dozens of children and adults.

2. Introduction and Purpose

Purpose. This is the fifth version of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) of the Institute of Biophysics of the Czech Academy of Sciences (IBP), updated for the 2026–2029 HRS4R implementation period. It revises the previous version (GEP IV, August 2024) in light of: (i) the results of the 2026 HRS4R employee questionnaire survey and GAP Analysis; (ii) the approval and launch of the OP JAK project "Returns to Research at the Institute of Biophysics of the CAS after a Career Break" (the "Návraty"/"Returns" project), including the four internal return grants approved by the Grant Council on 18 June 2026; (iii) the Gender Issues action (Action 16) of the revised HR Award Action Plan 2024–2026 and its carry-forward into 2026–2029; and (iv) the Institute's intention to apply for the Horizon Europe "EU Award for Gender Equality Champions".

Scope. The GEP applies to all employees of the Institute, across research categories R1–R4 as well as technical and administrative staff. Its general goal is to implement approaches, procedures and strategies that reduce gender bias and discrimination, and to make IBP's gender-equality achievements visible both internally and to external evaluators (HR Award Site Visit, Horizon Europe eligibility review).

Relationship to the HR Award Action Plan. The GEP is not a stand-alone document: its Actions are cross-referenced with, and reported through, the HR Award (HRS4R) Action Plan - in particular Action 16 "Gender Issues" - so that a single evidence base (WG minutes, statistics, monitoring reports) serves both processes and the annual reporting to the Council for Research, Development and Innovation and to the European Commission.

3. Governance and Responsibility for Implementation

The Director of IBP takes the overall management decisions and bears final responsibility for GEP implementation. The Steering Committee for the HR Award is the supervisory body monitoring the GEP Action Plan, and it is responsible for all GEP objectives, activities, strategies and reports. The Working Group (WG) for the HR Award - the same body that runs the HRS4R Action Plan - is the executive body responsible for developing, implementing and executing the GEP actions; it currently involves representatives of all Institute departments and of all R1–R4 categories. HRS4R Admin coordinates the organisation of the WG for both the HR Award and the GEP.

New for 2026–2029: the WG's gender-equality sub-group takes on an explicit, additional role of supporting the "Návraty" ("Returns") grant holders through the course of their projects — see Section 4.4 — in addition to its existing Actions on recruitment, leadership, training and social equality.

4. Current State of Gender Balance at IBP (2026)

The following data are based on the 2026 HRS4R employee questionnaire survey (n=77–82) and the 2026 GAP Analysis, and updates the baseline used in GEP IV:

- Institute leadership: the Institute is headed by a woman Director. Of the ten departments, nine are headed by men and one by a woman. None of the nine members of the Institute Council is a woman (Council members are elected by the Assembly of Scientists, so this cannot be changed by management decision alone).
- The Institute has deliberately tried to compensate the imbalance in department-head positions by prioritising women for deputy department head positions, which are appointed directly by the Director: of the ten deputy department heads, six are women, and four are men. This is both a partial counterweight to the current department-head imbalance and a pipeline of experienced candidates the Institute intends to build upon for future department-head selections (see Action 5).
- Early-career category R1 (V1 salary category) remains strongly female (9 women to 1 man), consistent with the general demographic pattern in the biological/biomedical sciences.

- Salaries: the multi-year convergence of women's and men's salaries within each career category, already noted in GEP IV, continues.
- Perceived equality of opportunity for women to become heads of department was rated only 3.82 on the survey's 1–5 scale — confirming that leadership imbalance, not pay or formal rules, is now the central open gender issue.
- The “Returns” (“Návraty”) project is very positively perceived (mean rating 4.29/5 for its contribution to women's career progression). Together with gender equality, parental support and working conditions, this is one of the most positively rated topics in the whole 2026 survey.

Interpretation. Compared with the initial and interim phases, the recruitment-, pay- and family-support-related gender gaps have narrowed substantially and are now Institute strengths. The remaining structural gap is concentrated at department-head and Council level, and the new Action Plan below concentrates effort there, while consolidating the “Returns” project as the Institute's flagship gender-equality achievement for the renewal period.

5. The "Returns to Research after a Career Break" (Návraty) Programme

The OP JAK project "Returns" to Research at the Institute of Biophysics of the CAS after a Career Break" is the most significant new element of the GEP in this period. It converts the general commitment of previous GEP versions (Action 1: support for women returning from maternity/parental leave) into a funded, structured and monitored institutional grant scheme.

5.1 Legal and methodological basis

The scheme operates under the Director's directive establishing the Internal Support Programme "Returns to Research after a Career Break", together with the accompanying scheme document (Schéma návratových grantů) and feasibility study (Studie proveditelnosti), which set out eligibility (career break due to parental/maternity leave, long-term illness, or care for a close person), the composition and independence of the Grant Council (GR), the two-stage evaluation procedure (administrative check, then independent expert review with one internal and one external reviewer per project), and the monitoring and reporting obligations described below.

5.2 First Call (2026): results

The first call ran from 18 March to 30 May 2026, was evaluated during June 2026, and was approved by the Grant Council on 18 June 2026, chaired by RNDr. Aleš Kovařík, CSc., with doc. RNDr. Stanislav Kozubek, DrSc. as scientific coordinator of the project. Four submitted proposals were recommended for funding in full, each having been assessed on originality, objectives, methodology, team quality, budget, and research environment (including HR Award/HRAW, gender, open science and PR criteria), and each having had its career break and the realism of its return plan formally assessed as compliant with the programme's aim.

Grantee	Department	Project title	Career break considered	GR vote (for–against–abst.)
Alice Krumpolcová	DME	Pan-genomic view of the role of repetitive DNA in genome variability of <i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	31 May 2023 – 31 Aug 2025	6–0–1 (approved)
Zuzana Soldánová	DBCMO	Electrochemical, adsorption/desorption and electro-catalytic properties of selected G4 ligands and their interaction with DNA	since 23 Jan 2024	6–0–1 (approved)
Martina Tunzerová, Ph.D.	DCBE	Study of Epigenetic Changes in Response to Genome Damage	1/2019 – 8/2025	6–0–1 (approved)
Eva Vojtková, Ph.D.	DBIS	Bacterial Reprogramming of Melanoma Extracellular Vesicles to Restore Anti-Tumor Immunity	9 Jun 2023 – 1 Jan 2024, parental leave to 31 Dec 2026	7–0–0 (approved)

Each grant runs for two years, with implementation starting from July 2026. Contracts were prepared following the GR decision (task assigned to Ing. Šárka Dvořáková, Ph.D.).

5.3 Support package for returning researchers

- Salary for the returning researcher plus a small mentoring/support team (up to 4 researchers) and a named mentor;
- International mobility - up to 4 weeks at a partner laboratory;
- Funds for further professional training, with emphasis on leadership skills for the project and for future research;
- Childcare / care-related contribution;
- Material and non-investment project costs, co-financed in part by the host department (10% of costs) in line with the OP JAK conditions;
- Expected outputs: at least two publications in impacted, open-access journals per project (fees covered centrally from OP JAK), and preparation of a follow-up project application.

Researchers on a career break who do not apply for a grant continue to be supported in parallel - e.g. through training courses and means of keeping in contact with the Institute (e-mail/internet access, loan equipment) - carrying forward the corresponding commitment from GEP IV.

5.4 Monitoring, reporting and evaluation obligations — implications for the GEP Working Group

This is new work for the gender-equality sub-group of the WG, added to the Action Plan below as Action 8. Each of the four running projects requires:

- Monthly recording of project activities by the grantee and team (activity logs feeding the monitoring reports);
- An annual evaluation after each year of the two-year grant, performed by the original reviewers (who, unlike during the anonymous selection stage, are now known to the grantee and have agreed to continue in this role);
- A final defence (obhajoba) of the project's results at the end of the two-year period, before the Grant Council;
- Consideration of gender aspects in the research itself, Open Access publishing, and data management, where relevant to the topic.

The WG's role is to support grantees in meeting these obligations (reminders, templates for monthly/annual reporting, coordination with the GR secretariat), to track the four projects as a cohort for GEP reporting purposes, and — per the 2026 survey and the Institute's own strategic decisions still pending — to help design what continuity of support will look like once individual OP JAK grants end (see Action 8 below).

6. GEP Action Plan 2026–2029

Actions below carry forward the numbering of GEP IV where the action continues; actions already completed in GEP IV are summarised briefly for continuity of the evidence trail. New or substantially revised actions are marked NEW. This directly incorporates the 2026 GAP Analysis finding that Actions 3.4, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 7.2 and 7.3 remain open and should be carried forward with updated deadlines.

Action 1 — Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

Continues. Gender-balanced selection committees and gender-balanced candidate shortlists remain standard OTM-R practice. The flagship deliverable of this Action for 2026–2029 is the “Returns” project itself (Section 4), which has moved from "planned" (GEP IV) to "funded and running" (four grants, from July 2026) stage.

Action 1.1 (continuing) Support of women returning from maternity/parental leave to apply for “Returns” grants

Responsibility: WG, “Returns” project management. Target: to raise awareness of the scheme among eligible women and support quality applications for future calls. Indicator: number of eligible women supported/applying. Timing: ongoing, next call planned from 2027. Status: IN PROGRESS.

Action 2 — Gender-related inappropriate manners

Action 2.2 (unconscious bias / inappropriate behaviour training) is COMPLETED. Action 2.1 (cultural-habits lecture and discussion, Brno region) remains open; new due date Q1 2027. The whistleblowing channel for complaints, including gender-related ones, remains in place.

Action 3 — Changes at the cultural and institutional level

Actions 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5 and 3.6 were COMPLETED (recruitment wording, targeted advertising, "Successful Women" webpage, meeting/scheduling practices).

Action 3.4 (ongoing) - Institutional-website message on the higher representation of women in leading positions

Responsibility: WG, communications. Target: visible institutional statement of intent alongside the planned 2026 website relaunch. Indicator: statement published. New due date: Q4 2026, aligned with the general website/PR modernisation already planned for that year. Status: IN PROGRESS.

Action 4 — Gender-related research outputs

Action 4.1 (lecture on the gender dimension in research outputs) remains open. New due date: Q4 2027, to be organised together with the wider training-portfolio update (see Renewal Review training findings - most-requested topics: project management, management in science, science popularisation, wellbeing).

Action 5 — Gender-related improvements in leadership

This is the Institute's central remaining gender gap (Section 3) and the highest-priority Action for 2026–2029.

Action 5.1 (carried forward) — Special care and career management for women with leadership potential

Responsibility: department leaders, mentors of the “Returns” project. Target: build a visible pipeline from the six current women deputy department heads (and from “Returns” grantees) toward department-head and Institute Council candidacies. Indicator: number of women under structured career-development support; number of female candidacies for department-head elections. Timing: 2026–2029, first checkpoint Q4 2027. Status: IN PROGRESS.

Example of good practice: *Hana Polášek-Sedláčková, young scientist recruited to IBP after working in Copenhagen in the group of Jiří Lukáš (one of the most highly cited Czech scientists working abroad), illustrates the kind of talent this Action aims to attract, support and retain. She has worked at IBP for several years, holds an EMBO Installation Grant, received the Czech Academy of Sciences' Lumina Quaeruntur award, and has an ERC project currently in the final stages of evaluation.*

Action 5.2 (carried forward) — Improve gender balance in leadership

Responsibility: WG. Target: to increase motivation of female candidates for leadership positions and for the Institute Council. Indicator: number of motivated candidates; outcome of the next department-head and Council elections. Timing: during the next recruitment/election cycle for each leadership position; annual review Q4 each year. Status: IN PROGRESS — reported annually to the Steering Committee.

Action 6 — Changes on the interpersonal level

Actions 6.2 (equal access to present at international conferences) and 6.3 (fair distribution of roles in research teams) are COMPLETED/confirmed by the 2026 survey.

Action 6.1 (carried forward) — Support young women joining international networks and contacts

Responsibility: WG, department heads. Target: move from general mobility support (already strong, 100% of PhD mobility applications approved in 2025) to specific measures targeted at women joining international networks, building on the mobility component of “Returns” grants. Indicator: number of women participating in international collaboration/networks. New due date: 2027. Status: IN PROGRESS.

Action 7 — Changes on the individual level

Action 7.1 (continuing) — Participation of women in summer schools and family-oriented activities

Summer Schools for employees' children (biophysics, biology, chemistry, ages 6–12) and Children's Day continued through the period: two Summer Schools in 2024 (15–19 July: 7/9 children; 12–16 August: 9/9 children; ~10–12 IBP mentors) and one in 2025 (28 July–1 August: 7/9 children; ~10 mentors), coordinated by Aleš Daňhel, Jana Poláková and Hana Křivánková. Children's Day was held in 2024 (~40 children, ~50 adults) and 2025 (~45 children, ~50 adults). The early childhood care group ("Elánek") continues to operate at its maximum capacity (around 6 children/semester) and remains highly appreciated in the employee surveys. These activities continue on the same basis in 2026–2029, with the WG's gender-equality sub-group now also using them as a channel to reach “Returns” grantees and other parents balancing a return to research with childcare.

Action 7.2 (carried forward) — Participation of women in training/courses for leading scientists

Responsibility: WG. Target: overcome gender stereotypes and prepare women for management/team leadership. Indicator: ratio of women/men participating. New due date: end 2026, to be linked to the leadership/management-skills strand of the renewed training portfolio. Status: IN PROGRESS.

Action 7.3 (carried forward) — Participation of women in mentoring and leadership programmes

Responsibility: WG. Target: build competence, confidence and formal/informal networks for women, including through the mentoring structure already built into the “Returns” project. Indicator: ratio of women/men in mentoring/leadership programmes. New due date: end 2026. Status: IN PROGRESS.

Action 8 (NEW) — Monitoring, mentoring support and sustainability of the “Returns” programme

Detailed description: The WG's gender-equality sub-group supports the four 2026 “Returns” grantees (and future cohorts) through: collecting and consolidating monthly activity records into the required monitoring reports; coordinating the annual evaluation by each project's reviewers; preparing grantees for the final defence (obhajoba) at the end of the two-year grant; and, in coordination with the Director and Steering Committee, preparing a strategic decision on what support will continue for returning researchers once individual OP JAK grants end (an open question flagged in both the Renewal Review and the 2026 survey).

GEP Principle(s): Non-discrimination; Working conditions; Gender balance; Career development. Responsibility: WG (gender-equality sub-group), Grant Council secretariat, project management. Timing: continuous from July 2026; annual evaluations Q3 2027 and Q3 2028; final defences Q2/Q3 2028 (first cohort); sustainability decision by Q4 2028. Indicator(s)/Target(s): 4/4 monitoring reports submitted on time each year; 4/4 annual evaluations and final defences completed; at least 2 publications per project in open-access, impacted journals; sustainability model for post-grant support adopted by Q4 2028. Status: NEW / IN PROGRESS.

Action 9 (NEW) — Application for the Horizon Europe "EU Award for Gender Equality Champions"

Detailed description: The Institute will prepare an application to the EU Award for Gender Equality Champions (HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-GENDER-Prize), using this GEP and its evidence base — in particular the “Returns” programme — as the core of the submission. Given that IBP has implemented successive GEP versions since 2022 (this being GEP V) with a demonstrable, multi-year record of institutional change (recruitment, leadership pipeline, working conditions, and now a funded return-to-research scheme), the Institute will apply in the "Sustainable Gender Equality Champions" category, which recognises a significant and sustained record of GEP implementation; the "Inclusive" category may be considered as an alternative if the application team decides to foreground intersectional elements (e.g. combining gender with career-break/age or citizenship dimensions, which the Institute already addresses under Action 7 of the HR Award Plan).

GAP Principle(s): Gender balance; Career development; Public engagement. Responsibility: Director, WG, HRS4R Admin. Timing: application preparation second half of 2026, submission per the official call deadline (to be confirmed from the published call document). Indicator(s)/Target(s): application submitted; thematic coverage of at least 4 of the 5 Horizon Europe GEP thematic areas demonstrated (work-life balance and culture; leadership and decision-making; recruitment and career progression; gender dimension in research content; measures against gender-based violence/harassment); qualitative and quantitative evidence of progress compiled (survey ratings, Returns statistics, leadership pipeline data). Status: NEW.

7. Monitoring Indicators — Summary Overview

Area	Baseline (2026)	Target 2029	Source
Women as department heads	1 / 10 (10%)	Increase; active candidacies supported (Action 5)	GAP Analysis 2026
Women deputy department heads	6 / 10 (60%)	Maintain as leadership pipeline	GAP Analysis 2026
Women on the Institute Council	0 / 9	At least one female candidacy per election cycle	GAP Analysis 2026
Perceived equality of opportunity (women → dept. head)	3.82 / 5	Measurable increase vs. 2026 baseline	2026 HRS4R survey
“Returns” grants: monitoring reports on time	n/a (new)	4 / 4 each year	GR / project management
“Returns” grants: publications	n/a (new)	≥ 2 open-access papers per project	GR / project management
“Returns” project satisfaction	4.29 / 5	Maintain / improve	2026 HRS4R survey
Ratio women/men in leadership training (Action 7.2/7.3)	not yet tracked	Baseline established, then increase	WG records

8. Timeline 2026–2029

- 2026 Q3–Q4: contracts for the 4 “Returns grants finalised; monthly monitoring begins; website statement on women in leadership (Action 3.4); Horizon” Europe prize application prepared.
- 2027: Action 2.1, 6.1, 8 checkpoints; first annual evaluations of “Returns” grantees (from Q3); training actions 4.1, 7.2, 7.3 delivered; leadership-pipeline review (Action 5).
- 2028: second annual evaluations and first final defences (obhajoba) of “Returns” grantees; sustainability model for post-grant support adopted (Q4); mid-term GEP review.
- 2029: full-cycle review of GEP V against the 2026 baseline; preparation of GEP VI for the following HRS4R period.

Prof. RNDr. Eva Bártová, Ph.D., DSc.

Prepared by the HR Award / GEP Working Group, Institute of Biophysics, Czech Academy of Sciences — July 2026. This document updates "Gender Equality Plan IV" (August 2024) and should be read together with the HRS4R Internal Review, the revised HR Award Action Plan 2026–2029, and the 2026 GAP Analysis.