

## WSL DIVERSITY REPORT 2023

In this report, we present the activities of the WSL Diversity & Inclusion Office for 2023. In close collaboration with the Directorate and Human Resources, the office promotes the development of an inclusive culture at WSL. It develops and implements strategies and concepts, and conducts evaluations and monitoring to ensure their effectiveness. Our goal is to create a respectful and healthy working environment where all employees can realize their potential and achieve high performance. WSL carries out extensive monitoring in order to develop appropriate and targeted activities and to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures implemented.

### THE WSL GENDER ACTION PLAN

The WSL Gender Action Plan (GAP), based on the ETH Board's Gender Strategy 2021–2024, guides our activities from 2022 to 2024. In 2023, we continued to focus on supporting women in research while also undertaking initiatives to promote a balanced gender ratio across all roles and levels. Additionally, we carried out various activities to raise awareness of and prevent discrimination, bullying, and harassment. The WSL GAP is also available as a bilingual overview version.

Fields of action of the GAP 2022-2024



Fig. 1: Gender Action Plan 2022–2024 – Fields of activity

## ACTIVITIES IN 2023

### Offers for employees

#### Women's Peer Mentoring Group

The WSL Women's Peer Mentoring Group (PMG) continued its impactful work in 2023, marking five years of providing valuable support to young female scientists. The group actively guides participants along their career paths, offering assistance with crucial career decisions and maintaining a dynamic alumnae network. WSL remains committed to supporting this initiative, furthering its goal of promoting the success and development of women in science.

## **FeM-LEAD**

FeM-LEAD is a joint mentoring program of the four research institutes of the ETH Domain, PSI, Empa, WSL and Eawag. It is aimed at women who would like to take on a leadership role in the future. Female scientists, technicians and women in administration can take part.

## **Compatibility coaching for parents and carers of relatives**

In 2023, WSL employees were once again able to reflect on the compatibility of their professional and private responsibilities in two free coaching sessions with external consultants. This offer is aimed at couples and individuals, parents-to-be and those who are already parents, as well as employees who look after or care for adult relatives.

## **“Fix the Leaky Pipeline” and CONNECT**

In 2023, WSL employees were once again able to participate in the career development programs Fix the Leaky Pipeline (ETH Domain) and CONNECT (ETH Domain and others) free of charge or for a relatively low fee, as the programs are supported financially by WSL.

## **Video clips for the International Day of Women and Girls in Science**

On February 11, in celebration of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, WSL focused on the next generation by presenting a series of videos featuring girls interested in careers at WSL and SLF. These films, created by Michèle Kaennel Dobbertin, are available on YouTube.

## **ADVISORY SERVICES AT WSL**

WSL employees have access to both internal and external confidential contact points to address issues of discrimination, bullying and harassment. Furthermore, these contact points offer a low-threshold counseling and coaching service for early conflict resolution or mental stress situations. Personal problems that impact work performance can also be addressed here, with referrals to other specialists if necessary.

Employees can also contact the above-mentioned internal contact point with questions about scientific integrity. For more specific inquiries related to scientific or publication matters, an additional Scientific Integrity Officer is available. In 2023, the WSL advisors assisted with a few conflict resolution cases, none of which required the initiation of an official procedure.

For PhD students and postdoctoral scientists a specialized Coach provides guidance regarding their doctorate or career path.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

### **Follow-up activities after the 2022 employee survey**

In 2022, WSL conducted an employee satisfaction survey. Overall, employees did not perceive significant issues with diversity and inclusion, and WSL's scores were favorable in benchmark comparisons. However, a detailed analysis revealed that women and employees whose native language is not German were more affected by non-scientific misconduct than other groups. Additionally, awareness of the contact points varied across demographic groups. Consequently, WSL developed two sets of measures to address these findings:

## 1) Platform True Stories – Science Friction

The True Stories platform was set up in 2023 to identify discriminatory, exclusionary or harassing behavior and initiate improvements. Employees were able to submit examples anonymously, which were edited and published by the WSL Diversity & Inclusion office to ensure the anonymity of all those involved. Information on contact points and definitions were also provided. Building on this, further activities are planned for 2024, including a first workshop on the topic of "Inclusive working climate", which took place as a pilot project in 2023.

## True Stories - Science Friction

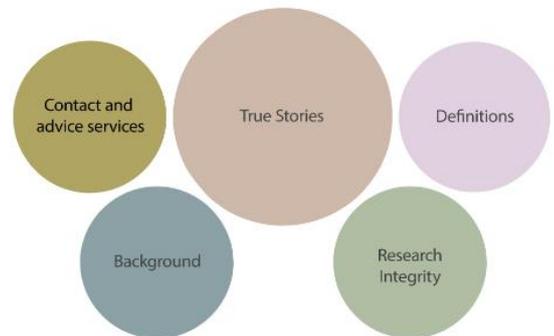


Fig. 2: Intranet page on "True Stories"

## 2) Communicating the advisory services in all research and support units

In 2023, the D&I representative conducted presentations across all research and support units, outlining the WSL's advisory services. These presentations also covered low-threshold conflict management and mental health topics. Additionally, the D&I representative met with all heads of research and support units to discuss equality, diversity, and inclusion topics, where many best practices were exchanged and potential challenges addressed.

### Further Activities

#### JEDI Pilot Workshop

In 2023, the WSL Diversity & Inclusion office launched a pilot workshop together with a diversity practitioner to promote discussion of diversity issues in research and support unit groups. The workshop focused on different aspects of identity, how belonging is experienced in different contexts and how participants can take these issues further in their group.

#### Participation of WSL in the working group "Diversity Strategy for the ETH Domain"

WSL represented all four research institutes of the ETH Domain in the working group for the development of the 2025-2028 strategy on diversity, equality and inclusion, which was chaired by the ETH Board.



Explanation of the advisory services and measures for the advancement of women at an altitude of 3,200 meters on mount Titlis for the Mountain Hydrology and Mass Movements Research Unit.  
The surroundings can be seen on the left, the event room on the right hand side.

### **Newsletter for Equity**

The Newsletter for Equity is a joint project of WSL, PSI and Empa and, from 2024, also Eawag. It reports regularly on the activities of the WSL Diversity & Inclusion department, on group activities for an inclusive working environment and on current discussions in the research landscape and society.

### **Sexual harassment awareness day at Swiss institutes of higher education**

In 2023, WSL represented the four research institutes of the ETH Domain on the steering committee for planning the activities for the Switzerland's Sexual Harassment Awareness Day at institutes of higher education on 23 March. On the day itself, numerous activities and lectures were held to raise awareness, including a workshop at WSL titled "Recognizing, avoiding and responding to microaggressions".

### **Workshops in the area of work life balance and mental health**

- Workshop on reconciling different areas of life and maintaining a healthy work-life balance
- Stress and resilience workshops on the Health and Safety Day at WSL with the offer of individual follow-up coaching sessions with up to three sessions.

### **Additional or ongoing activities of the D&I representative and HR**

- Regular gender monitoring and information on gender and equal opportunities by HR and D&I
- Regular exchange with the women's network and the LGBTQIA+ network
- Intensification of cooperation between the D&I representatives of the four research institutes
- Participation in working groups to establish a continuing education program in the areas of D&I, scientific integrity and for early career scientists
- Work trials as part of IV reintegration measures, extension of employment in some cases (HR)
- Implementation of subsidized language courses (HR)
- Activities on Swiss National Future Day 2023

## **EQUALITY – PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT POSITIONS**

In the Gender Action Plan, WSL set a goal to achieve a balanced gender ratio in hiring, aiming for 50 to 60% of hires to be women. By employing more female scientists, including those at doctoral and post-doctoral levels, as well as technical staff, WSL aims to

- Strengthen the role model function of women for other women,
- Increase the pool of female candidates for promotion,
- Enhance women's sense of belonging,
- Make equal opportunities a standard practice.

The real good news is that the proportion of women in leadership positions increased again, rising from 26.2% in 2022 to 28.4% in 2023. Since 2015, the proportion of women in this segment has increased from 15.2% to remarkable 28.4%.

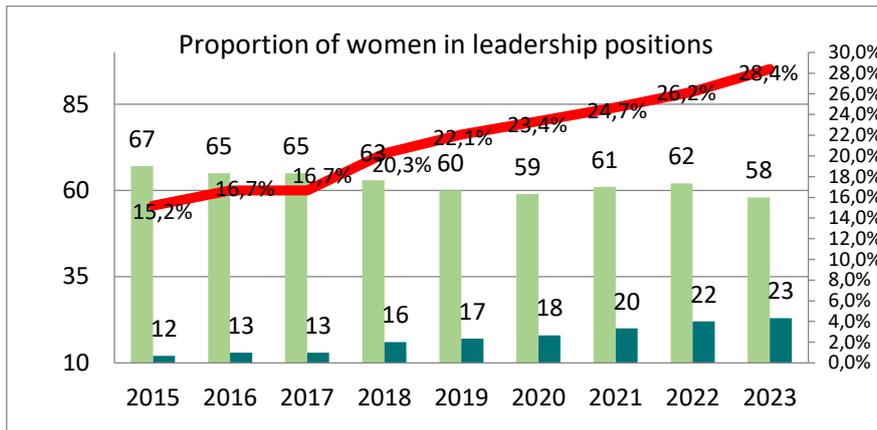


Fig. 3: Development of the proportion of women in leadership positions in head count and percentage

One male and four female scientists were hired on so-called career positions (Tenure Track) in 2023. These positions have the potential to be turned into permanent scientific positions.

However, we must concede that in 2023 WSL fell short of its target, achieving 42% female hires instead of the desired minimum of 50%, but remained within the 40 to 60% range agreed upon with the ETH Board (previous year: 49%).

At the end of 2023, women constituted 39% of the workforce (previous year: 38.5%), with 38% in scientific roles as in the previous year and 29% in technical roles (previous year: 27%). These figures indicate that efforts must be intensified in the coming years to achieve the long-term goal of a balanced gender ratio at all levels.

In 2023, 118 positions were filled (previous year: 89), 35 of which were filled in accordance with the GAP criteria by a recruitment commission.

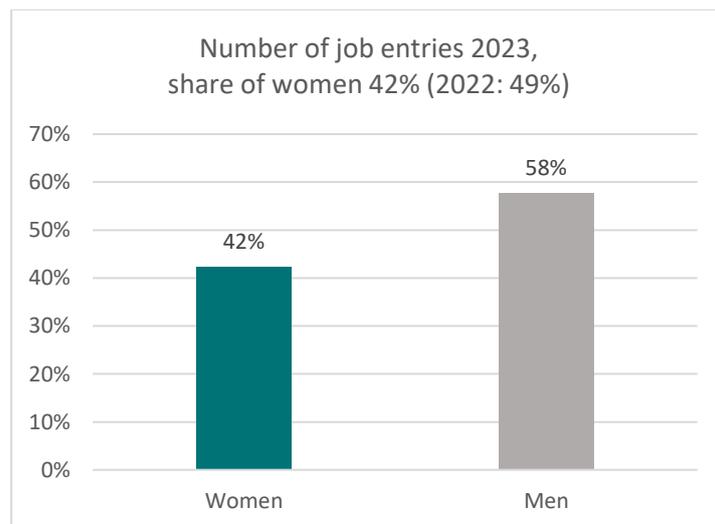


Fig. 4: Number of admissions – all employees

In 2023, WSL fell short of its 50% target for female employees, achieving 42% (down from 49% in the previous year). While this figure remains within the 40-60% range agreed with the ETH Board, it represents a decline. The Equal Opportunities Representative plans to discuss potential strategies with research unit heads to restore figures to 2022 levels where possible.

Further figures relating to gender equality:

	2023	Target until end of 2024
Proportion new female hires	42% (51%)	40–60%
Total proportion of women	39% (38.5%)	40–60%
Proportion of women in scientific positions	38% (38.5%)	40–60%
Proportion of women in technical positions	29% (27%)	33%
New appointments with recruitment committee according to GAP 2022-2024	35 (30) Total: 118 (89)	no target

Tab. 1: Further figures relating to gender equality; the figures in brackets refer to 2022

Job entries by scientific positions (PhD, PostDoc and scientific and technical staff) are shown in Fig. 5. The graph shows that WSL must continue to take care to recruit enough women in order to avoid a negative trend.

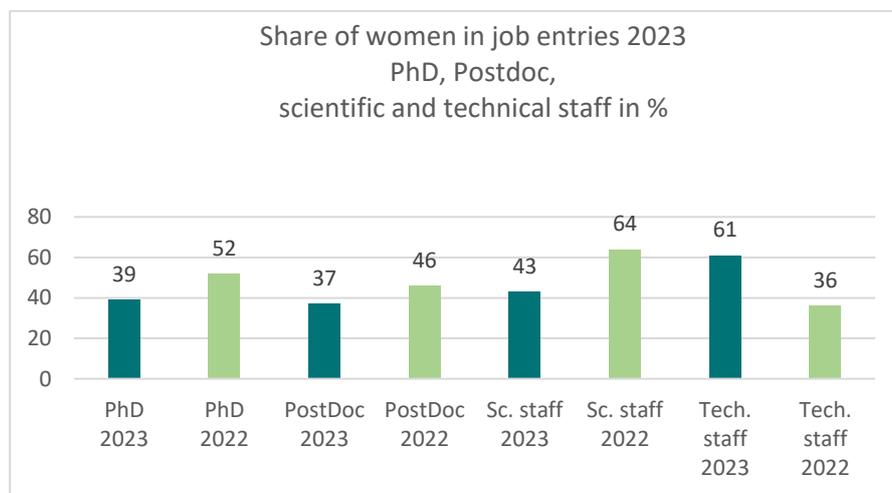


Fig. 5: Share of women in job entries PhD, PostDoc, scientific and technical staff 2023 in %

Seven women and eleven men were employed in the support area called “Planning and Logistics” in 2023. Due to the low numbers and the diversity of the area, no chart is provided.

## FURTHER DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

In terms of gender distribution by age group, it is not surprising that the percentage of women is increasing towards the bottom, with the exception of the segment of apprentices. For some years now, the proportion of female students at universities has been increasing in some of the subjects relevant to WSL. At ETH Zurich, for example, the proportion of women studying environmental sciences is now

50%.<sup>1</sup> However, this should not be taken as the main explanation for low numbers in the past. There have always been qualified candidates in STEM professions at all levels, especially internationally.<sup>2</sup>

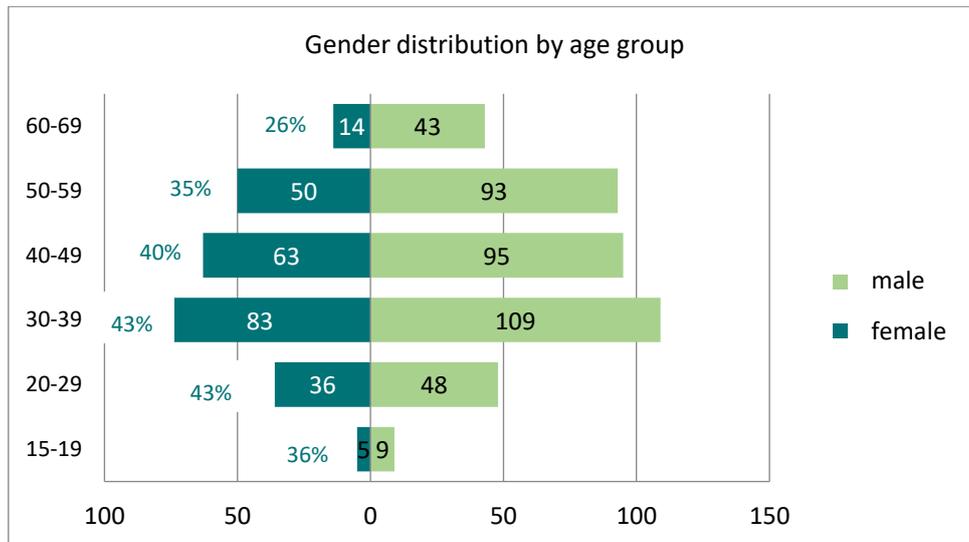


Fig. 6: Gender distribution by age group

WSL's national mandates, such as long-term forest monitoring and avalanche warning services, along with its forestry roots, contribute to a higher proportion of Swiss employees compared to other Swiss research institutions. Nevertheless, international staff make up a significant 28% of the workforce, rising to 50% in scientific roles. WSL values its international character and maintains bilingual communication in German and English for daily operations, including intranet content, internal presentations, and email communications.

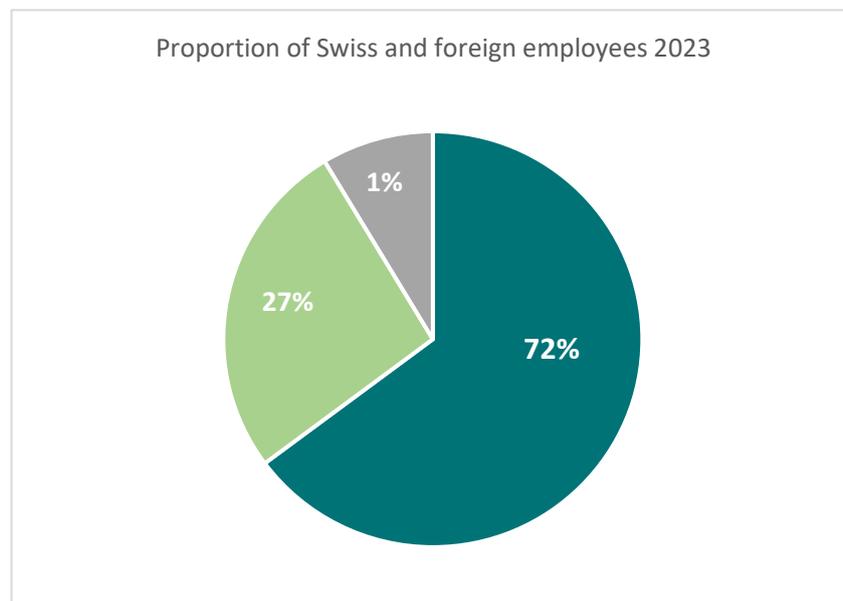


Fig. 7: Proportion of Swiss and foreign employees - dark green: CH / light green: EU / gray: other

<sup>1</sup> ETH Zürich, [Equality Monitoring 2023](#).

<sup>2</sup> [UNESCO Institut for Statistics](#), cited from «ETH Library - Geschlechterunterschiede in MINT-Studiengängen: Eine deskriptive Analyse», 2022.

## **Conclusion and Outlook**

Supportive measures and fostering a cooperative culture where all can actively participate are crucial for achieving genuine equal opportunities for women and minority groups. WSL recognizes this responsibility and offers a wide range of support for both employees and organizational culture. While measures to increase women in management positions have shown positive results, further efforts are still needed.

In 2024, WSL will establish a Diversity Committee to develop a comprehensive strategy for equality, diversity, and inclusion. This committee will collaborate with the D&I Representative and ensure a coherent approach in coordination with the Directorate.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that WSL conducts forward-looking, creative scientific research at the highest level. This is enabled by the diversity of our people and their unique ideas and approaches. The Diversity & Inclusion Representative supports this process and, along with HR and the Directorate, remains available to address questions and concerns.

Author: Urte Reckowsky, WSL Diversity & Inclusion Representative

### **Contact Details**

**Eidg. Forschungsanstalt WSL**

Zürcherstrasse 111

CH-8903 Birmensdorf, Schweiz

Phone +41 44 739 29 31

[urte.reckowsky@wsl.ch](mailto:urte.reckowsky@wsl.ch)