



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF BIOSAFETY ASSOCIATIONS

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Biosafety and Biosecurity: A Need for Leadership



International Federation of
Biosafety Associations

Introduction

Cultivating diversity, equity and inclusion in biosafety and biosecurity is a key priority for the International Federation of Biosafety Associations. In April 2021, the [IFBA's Equity-Focused Coordinating Committee's report](#) brought into focus the need for greater integration of DEI principles in the biosafety and biosecurity workforce, with a particular need for specific initiatives aimed at gender and age. In addition to working directly with biosafety professionals, the ECC is engaging with decision and policy makers, institutional top management, and other influential leaders to elevate DEI policy and program implementation at the organizational level. An engaged leadership with a solid commitment to DEI will positively impact all workers, including those on the frontlines, in the safe and secure handling of biological materials.

“While governments have the most visible role in facilitating women’s equal representation and participation in decision-making, parliamentarians and local elected officials—as well as UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector—all have a role to play.”

[COVID-19 & Women’s Leadership: From an Effective Response to Building Back Better](#), UN Women, 2020



INCLUSION



DIVERSITY



EQUITY

Why a Diverse & Inclusive Biosafety and Biosecurity Workforce?



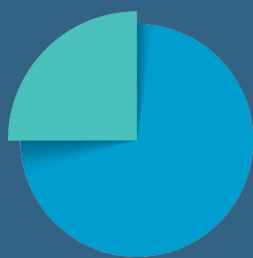
- Reinforcing robust DEI programs helps every employee feel valued and fosters a culture of responsibility for managing biological risks
- A diverse biosafety workforce is more innovative and make better risk-based biosafety & biosecurity decisions
- Benefiting from the insights of women and their collaborative leadership style results in more effective and sustainable biosafety and biosecurity approaches
- Youth bring new paradigms to the workforce and can re-examine familiar biorisk control measures with fresh perspectives
- Older workers offer a unique perspective from years of experience
- Building an inclusive work environment instills greater trust between employees and leadership and higher levels of accountability

“Women have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response, making up 70 percent of health care workers globally. However, they have been systematically excluded from the decision-making processes on how to address the impacts of the pandemic. UNDP and UN Women urge governments to ensure women not only have equal participation in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, but also have equal decision-making power and leadership opportunities.”

Women’s Absence from COVID-19 Task Forces and [COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#), United Nations Development Program, UN Women & Gender Inequality Research Lab, 2021

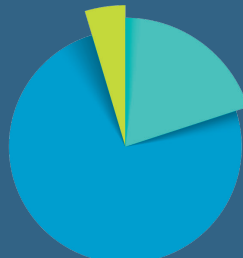
COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker

Women remain absent: COVID-19 task force participation



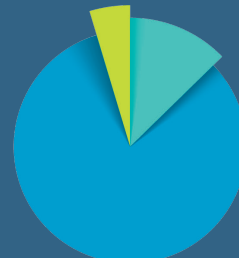
24%

of members of task forces are women



19%

of leaders of task forces are women. 5% are woman/man co-chaired



84%

of task forces are majority men and 4% have parity

“Most importantly, we look to young people to be the ultimate force for change, at the local, national and international levels, to make the world safer and more secure for all.”

[Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament](#), United Nations Secretary General, 2018

Moving from DEI Awareness to Action

Grounded in research of best available practices, and drawing on their collective experience, the IFBA's ECC has identified 10 recommended action steps for high-level policy/decision makers and institutional top management to move beyond raising awareness and take meaningful action on DEI within their organizations.

- 01 Recognize the value of mobilizing underrepresented countries from the Global South during multilateral biosafety & biosecurity discourse.
- 02 Regularly host dedicated DEI discussions with all populations in the organization and demonstrate commitment to these principles.
- 03 Identify and support leaders and non-managerial biosafety professionals to serve as DEI champions in the organization.
- 04 Ensure women's and youth's equitable and meaningful representation in all biosafety and biosecurity program development and decision making.
- 05 Avoid portraying the biosafety and biosecurity workforce as being more appropriate for one gender or a specific age group.
- 06 Ensure fair visibility for men, women and all age groups in all communications related to biosafety & biosecurity.
- 07 Recognize the competency of young biosafety professionals with extensive biosafety & biosecurity experience and other credentials including Professional Certification in lieu of a formal doctoral degree.
- 08 Support the professional growth of both younger and older scientists through mentorship and other initiatives which foster self-reinforcing professional networks.
- 09 Pay explicit attention to the specific needs of frontline women laboratory workers and support staff (e.g. providing appropriately sized personal protective equipment).
- 10 Provide means by which all biosafety & biosecurity professionals can achieve a better work-life balance. Expand access to paid family and sick leave, work-sharing, and other social protections for workers with care responsibilities.

Guiding Principles for DEI Leadership Strategies

Lasting change requires a combined top-down and bottom-up approach with ongoing bidirectional communication. Leadership and top management need to “see” the workplace from the bottom-up and identify experiences across the whole organization. DEI strategies should identify experiences and values across the whole organization and be relevant for each person.

DEI initiatives should consider the development of progress indicators beyond representation quotas which address diversity, but do not adequately consider equity or inclusion. Equity and inclusion indicators specific to biosafety and biosecurity professionals provides a more complete picture of their respective experiences.

DEI strategies should be core to the organization’s everyday work, ongoing and implemented over the long term. While there is considerable value in dedicated DEI workshops and resources, policy and program outcomes should be sustainable.

Effective DEI programming should appropriately consider and address all implicated biosafety & biosecurity professionals across sectors, identities, cultures and geographic areas. Policy- and decisionmakers should consider how each group may benefit from and contribute to DEI interventions.

Connections should be made between DEI and its strong relationship to biosafety and biosecurity policy and programming. The principles of DEI are generally familiar to biosafety/biosecurity professionals and leadership, yet its tangible relevance to biosafety and biosecurity remains abstract and may not be immediately evident.

For further information, please visit the [IFBA Equity-Focused Coordinating Committee website](#)

