

Evaluation of the Gender Equality Plan for the University of Warsaw and the equality action plan for 2020–2024

Key points

Warsaw, 2025

Introduction

The Gender Equality Plan for the University of Warsaw and the Equality Action Plan for 2020- 2023 (hereinafter referred to as the Plan) – introduced by Order No. 194 of the Rector of the University of Warsaw of 27 August 2020 on the "Gender Equality Plan for the University of Warsaw and the Equality Action Plan for 2020-2023" – is the first comprehensive strategic document of the university devoted to the issue of gender equality and diversity in the broad sense.

The assumptions of the University of Warsaw's Gender Equality Plan were based on a holistic approach to equality issues, taking into account various aspects of the university's functioning and the need to build sustainable structures supporting equality and diversity. The Plan covered not only measures to combat gender discrimination, but also addressed the situation of other groups at risk of exclusion, including people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, people with care responsibilities, and foreign nationals.

As a result of quantitative and qualitative research, document analysis and consultations, a Plan based on five strategic objectives was developed. Each of the objectives was operationalised by identifying specific target groups, a catalogue of actions, indicators for monitoring progress, and the organisational units responsible for their implementation.

The Plan provided for a variety of actions, including

- disseminating knowledge about equality, diversity and anti-discrimination,
- promoting and publicising existing examples and solutions in the field of strengthening equality and diversity,
- counteracting stereotypes that influence recruitment, career development and the image of universities and science,
- supporting women at all stages of their careers, with particular emphasis on post-doctoral academic careers,
- supporting the reconciliation of work and family life, with particular emphasis on care responsibilities.

The Plan sets out **five strategic objectives**, the implementation of which was to lead to lasting changes in the university's equality policy. These objectives have both a legal and institutional dimension:

- **GOAL 1** Raising awareness of the importance of equality issues and strengthening positive attitudes towards diversity.
- **GOAL 2** Supporting the development of women's scientific careers.
- **GOAL 3** Ensuring gender equality in the recruitment of female and male employees and doctoral schools.
- **GOAL 4** Making the combination of work and family life easier.

- **GOAL 5** Increasing balanced sex representation with respect to chairpersons of faculty and university committees, management, expert and reviewer teams, and chairpersons of scientific and popularisation events.

The implementation of the above objectives was aimed at introducing systemic solutions conducive to the implementation of the principle of equal treatment at the university.

The expected effects concerned changes in institutional practices, the creation of new procedures and the improvement of working conditions and scientific development - both in the areas of research, teaching and administration. It was assumed that these objectives are interrelated and reinforce each other, allowing for synergy in activities promoting equality. They were formulated in the spirit of the University of Warsaw's equality policy motto: "**we are all equal**".

Institutional dimension

The University of Warsaw has an extensive, multi-level institutional system supporting activities for equality, counteracting discrimination and counteracting sexual harassment.

It includes both central structures, such as the Chief Equality Specialist, the Equality Observatory (currently in the process of being established), the Committees for Counteracting Unequal Treatment and Discrimination, Mobbing and Other Undesirable Behaviour, and the Academic Ombudsman – as well as local structures in the form of equality representatives in faculties and doctoral schools.

This model is an example of good practice and demonstrates the university's strong commitment to creating a safe, open and inclusive academic environment.

Strengths:

- A key value is the presence of specialised individuals in coordinating positions, responsible for the consistency and implementation of equality policy. The Chief Equality Officer, supported by the Chief Equality Research and Education Officer and the Equality Officer, oversees the coordination of activities across the university. This allows not only for the planning and implementation of systemic activities, but also for monitoring their progress on the basis of data and research;
- The work of the Academic Ombudsman and the Team of Coordinators for Counteracting Unequal Treatment, Discrimination, Mobbing and Other Undesirable Behaviour offers members of the University of Warsaw community real, accessible and multi-faceted assistance. The existence of alternative paths –

from informal support and mediation to formal proceedings – increases the chances of a quick and adequate response to problematic situations.

- Equality officers in faculties and doctoral schools play an important role – they are not only the link between central structures and local needs, but also initiators of equality measures, ambassadors of anti-exclusion policies and the first point of contact for people experiencing inequality.

Areas requiring strengthening and development:

- The multitude of institutions and procedures, while ensuring flexibility, can also cause confusion. It is recommended to streamline the system for submitting complaints and requests and to clearly present the available support channels, e.g. in the form of an integrated information platform and a transparent map of procedures. A clear definition of the roles and competences of individual bodies will increase the sense of security and willingness to use support mechanisms.
- Formalising the functioning of the Equality Observatory as an analytical and research unit, which will be a valuable resource supporting data-based decision-making and enabling the formulation of accurate recommendations;
- It is crucial to provide regular, specialised training for people performing functions related to counteracting discrimination and mobbing – committee members, coordinators, spokespersons and representatives, new employees and students. This training should cover not only legal and procedural basics, but also soft skills, including recognising microaggressions, responding to situations of psychological violence, elements of mediation and psychological support.
- The functional workload of key positions (especially the Chief Equality Officer and the Academic Spokesperson) requires monitoring and, if necessary, an increase in human, financial and space resources. Effective and rapid processing of reports requires administrative support and sufficient working time.
- The implementation of a diverse and participatory equality policy requires greater involvement of representatives of the student and doctoral communities, both in information activities (campaigns, training, debates) and in the design and consultation of systemic solutions. Increasing the role of student councils in equality activities will allow for a better response to the specific needs of members of the University of Warsaw community;
- It is recommended to develop mechanisms to standardise the implementation of equality the network of representatives, systematic exchange of experiences and good practices, and publication of reports on the implementation of local activities. In addition, it is worth considering the implementation of a system of awards for departments particularly involved in promoting equality and combating exclusion.

In summary, the institutional foundations of the equality policy at the University of Warsaw are solid and well-designed. Their further development should move towards consolidation and professionalisation of activities, deepening internal education, and consistent dissemination of equality standards and tools at all levels and in all organisational units of the University of Warsaw.

This approach will increase the effectiveness of interventions, strengthen the culture of openness and shared responsibility, and make the University of Warsaw an institution that genuinely supports diversity.

GOAL 1. Awareness of the importance of equality issues and strengthening positive attitudes towards diversity

In summary, the University of Warsaw is undergoing a process of cultural change that requires both the continuation of systemic measures and the strengthening of everyday equality practices in the workplace, in research and in education. Further investment in information and training activities and initiatives supporting a community-based approach to equality is recommended. A lasting, profound and participatory change in organisational culture is key to the effective implementation of the Inclusive Gender Equality Plan 2025-2029.

Key areas for further action include:

- strengthening the role of organisational leaders (deans, heads of units) as promoters of a culture of equality – through training, expert support and feedback from the community;
- systematic dissemination of knowledge about support tools and procedures – in particular among new members of the community and students, with an emphasis on clear, accessible communication;
- developing attitudes of responsibility and mindfulness – through educational activities focused on recognising microaggressions, exclusionary language and hidden forms of inequality;
- further developing initiatives that promote equality, e.g. the Pink Box;
- incorporating equality and inclusivity into mental health and wellbeing strategies – recognising that a sense of justice and safety is an important factor for the entire university community.

GOAL 2. Supporting the development of women's academic careers

Activities aimed at female doctoral students and young researchers have been well received and have brought measurable benefits to participants, providing a valuable starting point for further support for women in science. However, these initiatives are still project-based and limited in scope, and there is a lack of consistent, systemic mechanisms for supporting women's careers at the university level.

A significant gap remains in the lack of continued support at subsequent stages of the career path (e.g. postdoctoral studies, professorship). In addition, the monitoring of equality data is carried out in an unsystematic and scattered manner, which makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the measures taken and to plan further interventions.

In view of the above observations, it is necessary to take measures to strengthen and systematise support for women in science, including:

- continuing and institutionalising existing initiatives (the University of Warsaw Doctoral Students Network "Young Female Researchers") and extending them to subsequent stages of academic careers,
- the introduction of annual monitoring of data from a gender perspective (postdocs, promotions, grant leaders),
- standardisation of good practices in units – with a clear collection cycle and promotional support,
- educational activities to counteract unconscious barriers in assessment and recruitment processes,
- implementation of a comprehensive mentoring programme taking into account the specific nature of scientific disciplines in order to counteract entrenched gender divisions, particularly in STEM and social sciences, it is worth implementing mentoring programmes that promote diversity and support women in technical disciplines and men in social sciences and humanities.

GOAL 3. Improving gender balance in the recruitment of employees and in doctoral schools

The University of Warsaw has a regulatory system covering the recruitment processes for academic teaching positions and doctoral schools. The documents introduced create a solid framework for equal opportunities, the elimination of bias and transparency of actions. However, the effectiveness of these solutions depends on their consistent application, systematic supervision and links to educational activities.

In order to strengthen the effects of the implemented regulations, it is recommended to:

- introducing regular monitoring of the participation of women and men at all stages of the recruitment process, taking into account the division into units and disciplines;
- mandatory training for members of recruitment and competition committees on gender equality, anti-discrimination and unconscious bias;
- regular evaluation of the impact of the adopted principles on recruitment results and employment structure;
- dissemination of good practices and examples of effective recruitment ensuring balanced gender representation across the academic community.

GOAL 4. Facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life

An analysis of the results of the "Being a Parent at the University of Warsaw" survey shows that the University of Warsaw has a solid foundation for the further development of a modern and effective WLB support policy. Many tools and solutions have already been introduced, both at the formal and practical levels. Although not all of them are yet widely known and used, their presence is met with genuine interest and positive reception among university employees. This indicates a clear expectation that these tools should be more accessible, more flexible and more widely communicated.

The main challenge for the next stage is not so much the creation of new tools as the consistent strengthening, dissemination and standardisation of available forms of support across the entire University. It is also crucial to adapt them to diverse life situations, especially for groups at risk of exclusion, such as single parents or carers of children with special needs.

An important element of this change should be to strengthen the community dimension of the University as a work environment that is friendly to families, carers of dependents and diversity. Achieving this goal requires not only central policy, but also the active involvement of unit managers, local leaders and members of the University of Warsaw community themselves. Equality in balancing work and family life must be seen as a shared value and implemented not only in strategic documents but also in everyday organisational practice.

Based on the data collected, areas requiring further development have been identified:

- disseminating knowledge about available tools – raising awareness and improving communication about available solutions supporting WLB;
- ensuring equal access to support – eliminating differences between organisational units in the implementation and use of tools;

- adapting solutions to diverse needs – taking into account the specific situation of single parents and carers of dependents;
- developing and formalising flexible forms of work – including the promotion of remote work, task-based work and flexible working hours;
- monitoring WLB needs and the implementation of available solutions.

GOAL 5. To increase balanced gender representation in: chairing faculty and university committees, management staff, expert and review teams, and chairing scientific and popularisation events.

The University of Warsaw is taking systematic steps to increase gender equality in leadership, expert and decision-making roles. Analysis of data from recent years shows that although progress is visible, especially in terms of the increasing number of women on committees, councils and boards, there are still areas that require support and development.

Consistent implementation of the Plan's objectives contributes to breaking down structural and cultural barriers, but a full transformation of the organisational culture requires further coordinated action.

Strengths:

- Increased representation of women in decision-making structures: there has been a noticeable gradual increase in the proportion of women in leadership roles, including in Disciplinary Scientific Councils and Senate committees. In some bodies, such as the University of Warsaw Senate, gender parity has been achieved, which should be considered a significant achievement of the university's equality policy.
- Strong female presence in teaching and administration: Professional groups related to teaching and administrative positions are characterised by a significant predominance of women, which indicates their active participation in the functioning of the university. This also provides a potential basis for the development of career paths for women towards managerial and expert positions.
- A diverse employment structure conducive to balance: The most gender-balanced group remains research and teaching staff, which creates good conditions for further promoting equality in access to prestigious academic and organisational roles.

Areas requiring support and further action:

- Uneven representation of women at the highest levels of academic careers: despite the overall gender balance among academic teachers, women are still significantly less likely to hold professorial positions. This points to the need to develop measures to support the advancement of women, such as mentoring, transparent career paths and institutional support.
- Low participation of women in STEM faculty leadership. This phenomenon reflects broader trends in STEM fields and requires targeted measures to support women in these areas, including information campaigns and mentoring. Similarly, men should be supported in fields dominated by women.
- Decline in the representation of women on the University Council and the Rector's College: a declining participation of women in the most important university management bodies - the University Council and the Rector's College - has been identified. Maintaining gender balance at the highest levels of management needs to be given priority in future strategic actions.
- The need for continuous monitoring and integration of equality policy into human resource management: Gender equality should be treated not only as an element of social policy, but also as a component of institutional development strategy. Regular data analysis, evaluation of results and implementation of recommendations should be standard practice in human resource management.

Summary and recommendations

The University of Warsaw has implemented many valuable initiatives, expanded institutional structures and mechanisms for responding to undesirable behaviour, and launched dedicated programmes for women at the beginning of their academic careers. Many of these activities were project-based, which highlights the need to embed them permanently in the university's structures.

Positive changes are also visible in the structure of gender representation, the functioning of equality mechanisms, increased awareness, and the professionalisation of anti-discrimination activities. The introduction of effective gender equality measures at the University of Warsaw in 2020-2024 has certainly contributed to the creation of a more inclusive academic environment.

The assessment of the degree to which the objectives set out in the Plan have been achieved should therefore be **treated as an assessment of the direction and quality of the actions taken**, rather than as a precise accounting of quantitative results. The evaluation also identified certain shortcomings: the lack of regular analyses of equality data, the limited scale of some actions, insufficient support at subsequent stages of

women's careers, and the need to embed actions more firmly in the organisational culture and to increase the involvement of the academic community.

Another conclusion of the evaluation is the need to further develop monitoring tools and clearly assign actions to objectives so that the next edition of the Plan can be evaluated more effectively and progress towards equality can be better measured and made more transparent. The recommendations are divided into five main areas, corresponding to the logic of a systemic approach to equality policy.

1. Institutionalisation and sustainability of actions

Objective: To strengthen stability and consistency of equality policy across the University

- Increasing the involvement of departments (*e.g. incorporating equality measures into the strategic plans of individual units*)
- Strengthening the staff of the Equality Team (*expanding the team, e.g. in terms of specialisation - counteracting sexual harassment, coordinating equality policy with representatives from various levels, including faculties and research units*);
- Ensuring the continuation of programmes supporting women at an early stage of their careers (*permanent funding and development of the UW Doctoral Student Network and the "Young Female Researchers" programme, promotion of the initiative throughout the UW*);
- Extending support to subsequent stages of the career path (*mentoring and development groups for women with postdoctoral degrees, "Leaders in Science"*);
- Ensuring stable and long-term financial backing and institutional framework for the effective and systematic implementation of equality policy

2. Monitoring and analysis of equality data

Objective: Data-driven decision-making and monitoring of the effectiveness of actions

- Implementation of systematic, integrated data reporting broken down by gender, age, career stage (*data on employment, promotions, grants, doctoral and postdoctoral studies, composition of bodies*),
- Standardisation of data collection on reports of discrimination and mobbing (*common system for reporting and analysing the impact of formal and informal proceedings; Ombudsman; committees*);
- Conducting regular surveys (*e.g. survey on experiences of unequal treatment among staff, students and doctoral students every 5 years, surveys on specific groups at risk of exclusion*).

3. Education and organisational culture

Objective: Shaping attitudes and building a culture of respect and inclusion that promotes equality and diversity

- Extension of mandatory training in equality and anti-discrimination (*e.g. regular training for management, recruitment committees, doctoral students and equality officers, new employees and students starting their studies*);
- Promoting equality awareness among students and doctoral students (*e-courses or webinars, podcasts*);
- Strengthening information activities and social campaigns (*annual equality campaign involving students, graphics on campus, podcasts, educational films, increasing the visibility of the benefits of implementing the Plan; cooperation with the University of Warsaw Foundation*);
- Promoting good practices (*award system for faculties for good practices*);
- Involvement of student and doctoral student councils in the creation and implementation of activities (*e.g. as partners in information campaigns*).

4. Structural coherence and availability of support

Objective: To facilitate navigation through the support system and increase the transparency of procedures

- Develop a clear map of procedures and contact points (*continuous updating of the website plus a step-by-step description of what to do in case of discrimination, mobbing, ethical problems*);
- Strengthening support for equality officers in departments (*training, forum for exchange of practices, inter-departmental supervision*);
- Increasing the visibility of the equality structure in the university's internal communication (*tab, regular newsletters, integration with the USOS platform and welcome emails*).

5. Representation of women in decision-making bodies and structures

Objective: Strengthening the presence of women in prestigious, visible and decision-making positions

- Monitoring and publishing data on gender representation in university bodies (*rector's and dean's councils, senate committees, university council*);
- Introduction of equality targets in nominations and elections (*recommendation to take into account the principle of % representation of one gender when appointing committees*);

- Encouraging participation in committees through mentoring and leadership training (*leadership programme for women, training cycles*).

Recommendations for GEP 2025-2029

1. It is worth to review the existing goals and supplement them with new areas (e.g. the perspective of gender mainstreaming in teaching and research). It is recommended to analyse the existing goals in terms of their consistency, relevance and completeness, taking into account:

- the changing needs of the University of Warsaw community,
- new equality priorities (e.g. combating digital exclusion, inclusive teaching, support for people with disabilities, neurodiverse persons, support for the LGBTQ+ community),
- recommendations resulting from evaluations (e.g. expanding activities for postdocs/habilitation candidates, WLB also in terms of men as carers, e.g. promoting paternity leave, strengthening the monitoring and reporting system).

2. Each objective included in the GEP 2025-2029 should be operationalised through clearly defined and specific actions. This means that each objective should be assigned a set of actions that will directly contribute to its achievement, along with the definition of the target group, deadline, responsible entities and performance indicators. This structure not only facilitates progress monitoring, but also ensures transparency and the possibility of a realistic assessment of the effectiveness of the equality policy being implemented.

3. It is worth assigning specific implementation parameters to each action: target group, deadline, responsible units and a measurable indicator (number of people trained, number of documents, number of programme participants, number of events, number of meetings, measurable increase in "something", etc.).

4. Each indicator should be operationalised (measurable, realistic and embedded in specific actions). It will be crucial to apply the SMART principle, according to which goals should be: S - Specific, M - Measurable, A - Achievable, R - Relevant, T - Time-bound.

5. The target value of the indicator should be specified (it can also be refined in the course of further work).