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WARSZAWSKI

# Equality at the University of Warsaw

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH CONCLUSION

in preparation for the new edition of the Inclusive Gender Equality Plan for the University of Warsaw for the years 2025-2029

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- research objectives:
  - **to identify and analyse changes in knowledge and awareness** following the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan in 2020–2024
  - **to identify the current experiences** of people representing various University groups in relation to unequal treatment, discrimination and sexual harassment
- **learning about needs and expectations of the academic community regarding equality and diversity activities** that could be implemented in the new **Inclusive Gender Equality Plan**
- group interviews (focus groups) with the following groups:
  - students
  - **doctoral** students
  - persons working in research and/or teaching – **with a doctoral degree**
  - persons working in research and/or teaching **with a postdoctoral degree/professorship**
  - persons working **in administration** or other **non-academic positions in faculties and units**
  - persons working **in administration** or other **non-academic positions** at the central level
  - members of dean's **councils**
- 97 people volunteered for the study
- among the 58 people participating in the interviews: 37 women, 19 men, 2 non-binary persons

# KEY CHANGES IN RELATION TO THE 2019 SURVEY



- **increasing** the respondents' **knowledge** of **basic concepts** (i.e. discrimination, sexual harassment, mobbing) and their **manifestations**
- **increased knowledge** of respondents regarding **desirable and undesirable behaviours** in the context of discrimination, sexual harassment and mobbing
- **increasing awareness and expectations** regarding pro-equality activities
- **initiating a discussion** on how equality should develop at the University of Warsaw in the coming years

# KEY POINTS



- the university structure is considered as **highly hierarchical** while **role, position and formal status** as **key factors in how employees are treated** and in access to resources, support and development opportunities
- **persons lower in the university hierarchy have limited trust in** anti-discrimination **procedures and guidelines**, their **effectiveness**, and **the protection** of persons reporting there is belief of **lack of recognition** for people working in **administration and doctoral students**
- there are significant difficulties in balancing work and family life, including **insufficient family-friendly infrastructure**, **stereotypical views about mothers**, **exclusion of women planning motherhood**, while **childless people** are seen as **fully available** and ready to take on additional work
- the LGBT+ community reported **discriminatory comments**, reluctance to **use inclusive language**, feeling of **exclusion** and lack of ways for **formal recognition** of gender identity
- regarding mental health, there is a problem with **no possibility of long-term treatment and sick leave** due to poor health, **attributing stereotypical characteristics and lack of solutions** regarding neuroatypical people **insufficient competence of teaching staff** to work with neuroatypical people and those with mental illnesses/disorders
- the key **reasons** for sexual harassment issues considered were power imbalance between **staff and female students** and **lack of effective mechanisms** to protect victims and the reason for not filing complaints was the fear of **retaliation, disclosure of identity**, lack in confidence in the **effectiveness of procedures**

# KEY POINTS REGARDING BEING A FOREIGNER



- **limited intercultural and language skills** among administrative staff and teaching and research personnel
- **insufficient cooperation between units in terms of a systematic approach to the integration** and support of people from abroad
- **misunderstandings and communication difficulties**, including intercultural tensions
- **marginalisation and feelings of exclusion** among people from outside Poland
- people who do not know Polish are met with **distance and a lack of real support at the faculty level** (lack of materials and communications in English; formal procedures not adapted to their situation)

“

*When it comes to **not knowing Polish**, it is sometimes simply **seen as their fault**: yes, they don't know Polish, so let them learn it, let them find out.*

“

*... **English-speaking students** who are not Polish citizens **experience various problems to which we are not sufficiently sensitive**. This applies to both teachers and administrators.*

# OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE GENDER EQUALITY PLAN 2020 - 2024



- changes related to the Gender Equality Plan (2020-2024) are recognised, but there is little awareness of specific actions
- difference in the assessment of the Plan in line with the university hierarchy:
  - those lower in the hierarchy - a sense of frustration a feeling that the actions are superficial - consequently, little faith in the effectiveness of equality measures and not taking advantage of them and general lack of trust in procedures
  - management staff - feeling that the Plan adds to their workload and that they do not have sufficient competence to fully implement it, or downplaying its impact, concerned about false accusations and length of procedures
- The greatest challenges in implementing measures at the unit level are:
  - general aversion to equality solutions and treating them as "left-wing ideology"
  - lack of conviction about the importance of equality demands
  - resistance among older staff and reluctance to change
  - ridicule or trivialisation of reported discriminatory behaviour
  - insufficient communication about equality activities at the University of Warsaw
  - organisational problems (e.g. ensuring parity in various bodies in feminised/masculinised departments)

# PROPOSALS FOR NEW INCLUSIVE GENDER EQUALITY PLAN



- **handbooks and guides in shorter formats** (e.g. leaflets, 1-2 page brochures)
- **a short brochure with the most important information and a link to the most important information** – sent by email **to all persons starting work or studies** at the University of Warsaw
- **an email with the most important information and links on anti-discrimination at the beginning of the academic year** to people starting work or studies at the University of Warsaw
- **simple infographics** (various topics related to counteracting discrimination, sexual harassment, unequal treatment)
- development of **a new Communication Strategy for Equality Activities** at the University of Warsaw
- **developing nursery and kindergarten infrastructure** (new facilities, more places)
- **making it possible to work remotely**, including staff, especially for parents of children under 4
- **increasing the reach of** inclusive training by: **introducing compulsory equality training** for all, especially for new employees, introducing **training for foreign students**, introducing **a greater number and variety of equality courses for people working in administration, technical and security staff, doctoral students and students**
- **expanding the topics** covered in training to include topics related to working with people **on the spectrum, ADHD, mental disorders and illnesses, training on trips and field activities**, topics related to **building relationships with students without reducing distance**

# REQUESTS RELATED TO THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW SOLUTIONS

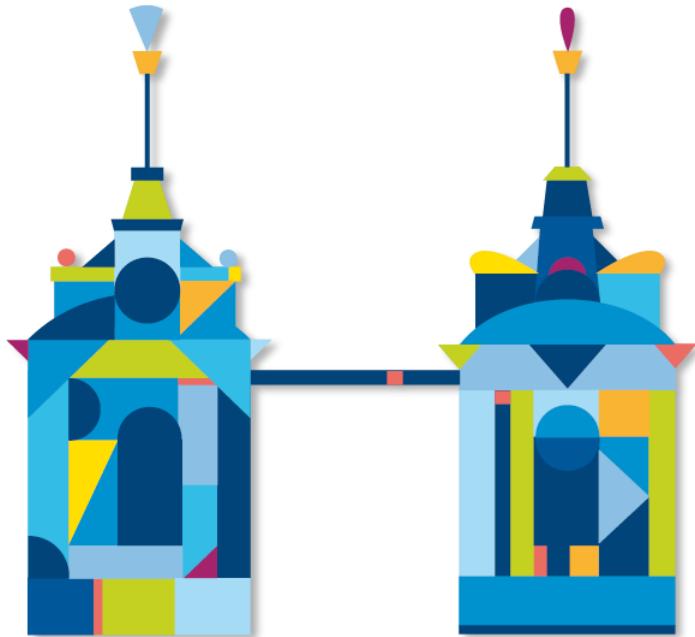


- introduction of **new procedures and stronger practice of existing recommendations and guidelines**
- introduction of **recommendations, guidelines or procedures** related to:
  - **the inclusion of femininates in job descriptions in work regulations** and their use in **official documents**
  - responding to **mental health issues among students**
  - procedures to increase **salary transparency and regulating the hours of meetings and sessions**
  - **official communication in two languages** – Polish and English – at every level (centrally and in individual units)
- **increasing the resources** (financial and human) of **the equality team, the Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Anti-Mobbing Committee**
- **raising awareness among university authorities and unit authorities** (greater translation of declarations into practice)
- **information campaign at the unit level** to raise awareness **of the appointment** of representatives and **their competences**
- **creating an overlay for USOS** for transgender and non-binary persons, enabling them **to change their official university email address**
- creating **quiet spaces/quiet zones** for neurodiverse people or those with mental health issues
- introducing a university service - **hourly childcare for people working at the University of Warsaw**

# CHANGING ATTITUDES IS A CHALLENGE FOR THE INCLUSIVE GENDER EQUALITY PLAN



- **greater awareness of the challenges** associated with discrimination and unequal treatment, but **actions** are often **taken for image reasons**
- **relatively little interest in** the qualitative part **of the survey** may suggest that within the community:
  - **there is little interest in the issues of equality** and anti-discrimination; and/or
  - **there is a lack of** (perceived) **safe spaces** to openly talk about one's experiences related to these topics
- during the interviews, the topics discussed were "safe", rather than "**uncomfortable**"
  - e.g. the use of appropriate pronouns, issues related to non-binary and transgender identity **were discussed** because "we are still learning" and therefore **making mistakes is justified**
  - topics "rooted" in **the formal structure**, resulting from **a culture of consent, established practices** and institutional hierarchies, e.g. discrimination against young female academics, foreigners, administrative staff
- **The new Inclusive Gender Equality Plan** should **focus more on shaping attitudes** than on developing knowledge about discrimination alone. In the new Plan, **it is important to shape**:
  - **awareness of why equality and anti-discrimination measures are important**
  - **awareness of the individual, collective and organisational consequences** of unequal treatment
  - **awareness of how having privileges can distort the perception** of discriminatory behaviour
  - **attitudes and skills related to empathetic communication**
- in the new Plan, **members of management** (university, research units, administrative units, teams) should be **covered by a range of measures specifically targeted at them**, shaping their attitudes and competences.



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