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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 complains 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



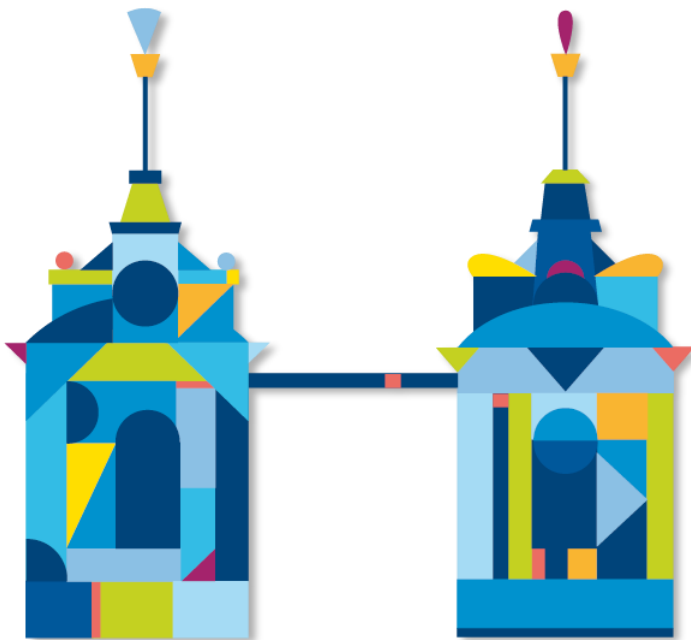
- introduction of **new procedures and stronger practice of existing recommendations and guidelines**
- **introduction of recommendations, guidelines or procedures related to:**
  - **the inclusion of feminatives in job descriptions in work regulations** and their use in **official** documents
  - responding 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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