

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Poland

COUNTRY: Poland

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

The principle of equality between women and men is embedded in the Polish Constitution, the Labour Code and the Act on the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions. The Act on Implementation of Several European Union Regulations on Equal Treatment of 3 December 2010 aims to counteract violation of equal treatment and to determine the measures and authorities responsible for the prevention of equal treatment. The so-called Act on Equality prohibits unequal treatment due to gender (among other grounds) in professional education, including continuing education, professional development, change of profession and professional practice. However, it does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender in the scope of education and higher education. Sexual harassment is important in the context of gender equality and is regulated by the Penal Code (Act of 6 June 1997) and the Act on Equality.

Gender equality is scarcely mentioned in the legal regulations on higher education. The Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science (Law 2.0, the Constitution for Science) does not address gender equality as a goal or value for higher education institutions (HEIs) and research organisations. There are no regulations or measures on gender equality in decision-making, career development, harassment and mobbing, or inclusion of gender in research and teaching. The only measures related to gender equality aim to support parents and pregnant women, both students and employees. For students, they include the right to an individual study programme and the right to take leave (up to one year). For academic teachers, they cover regulations on working time (someone who is pregnant or raising a child under the age of four shall not work mandatory overtime) and the extension of periodic assessment due to maternity/paternity/parental/child care or health leave (extended by the time corresponding to the length of absence).

Policy framework

Before 2018, the Polish National European Research Area (ERA) roadmap was not available (ERA Progress Report 2018, Poland 2019). Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research are addressed in the National Action Plan (NAP), submitted in 2019 in response to the ERA Roadmap (2015–2020) Priority 4. Although the Polish NAP defines priorities for gender equality, it does not define gender equality and gender equality objectives in context analysis, nor does it translate all priorities into specific actions. It fails to raise awareness of structural barriers or to address the integration of gender into content. Instead, it focuses on reconciling work and private life. The actions planned in the NAP have yet to be implemented^[1].

Since 2011, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy has run the programme, “Babies+”, with additional modules implemented in 2014 (e.g. “Babies in Academia”). The programme provides financial support to universities that have (or are setting up) nurseries or childcare centres, or hiring a day carer at universities for young children (under the age of three). “Babies+” is regulated by the Act of 4 February 2011 on the care of children under the age of three.

Other stimulatory initiatives

L’Oréal, in cooperation with UNESCO, the Ministry of Science and Education and (since 2016) the Polish Academy of Science, conducts the programme “For Women and Science”. It aims to promote and encourage scientific achievements of women researchers. Since 2001, 105 women have been granted a scholarship to continue their work.

The *Perspektywy* Education Foundation manages the national campaigns “Girls as Engineers!” and “Girls go Science” in cooperation with the Conference of Rectors of Polish Technical Universities (under the remit of the Minister of Science and Higher Education, the Minister of National Education, the Minister of Administration and Digitisation, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment). The campaigns promote technical and engineering studies among high school girls. Over 150,000 girls have participated in the campaigns, during which time the share of girls involved in science, technology, engineer and mathematics (STEM) increased from 29 % to 37 %.

The *Perspektywy* Education Foundation also offers the project “Lean in STEM”, which supports the creation of women’s networks and mentoring in the technological industry and STEM sectors. More specifically, it promotes technical and scientific education and careers for young women in the technological industry and other STEM-related areas, not only through “Lean in STEM”, but also through virtual meetings in “Inspiration Academy – Girls in STEM”, “Technological Teatimes” (offline meetings in technological companies) and the conference “Women in Tech Summit 2018”.

The “Foundation Women Scientists – Polish Women Scientists Network” created the “Women Experts” database to promote women’s achievements and expertise across different disciplines. From 2013 to 2019, the Foundation held the competition “Innovation is a Woman” for women researchers who developed an innovative solution to promote the achievements of women in the scientific and research sectors.

The National Science Centre (NCN) is a government agency established to support basic research in Poland. It supports equal access of women and men to research funding. The main measures promote equal representation of women and men in expert teams and reviewer teams. They ensure that expert panels are chaired by both women and men, monitor the participation of women and men in particular calls for proposals, and publish gender-disaggregated data on women’s and men’s participation in calls for proposals. The NCN set out measures to encourage women researchers to apply for funding. For example, it introduced internal regulations on maternity leave and parental leave in addition to those set out in the Labour Code (women researchers may add 18 months for every child born or adopted to the scope of data assessed under each call for proposals). It also promotes women role models by publicising the achievements of grant winners.

Key actors

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment contribute to the promotion of gender equality in research. To date, however, their intervention has been quite limited. The Ministry of Science and Higher Education contributes financially to the L’Oréal scholarship and appoints representatives to the jury.

As an independent equality body, the Commissioner for Human Rights safeguards the implementation of the principle of equal treatment, including in HEIs and research organisations. The Commissioner analyses, monitors and supports equal treatment of all people, as well as preparing and issuing independent reports and recommendations on discrimination-related projects. Its most recent interventions include: statement on the speech on the “proper upbringing of girls” by the advisor of the Ministry of Education and Science; monitoring the implementation of anti-mobbing and anti-bullying procedures in HEIs; request for a position adopted by the Ministry of Science and Education on taking maternity/paternity/parental leave into consideration during the evaluation phase to ensure equal rights for all employees; and a statement on misinformation campaigns on gender and gender equality policies.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

In 2020, the University of Warsaw (UW) became the first and (so far) only university in Poland to implement a Gender Equality Plan (GEP). The GEP is based on five goals, identified through research on the needs of the UW community, expert consultation, and a review of solutions in European universities. The GEP covers several areas, including awareness-raising, developing women’s scientific careers, gender equality in recruitment, work-life balance, and balanced sex representation.

As part of its Human Resources Strategy, Kraków University of Technology published its “Guidelines for the recruitment of academic teachers at Kraków University of Technology” on 1 October 2019. The document advises recruitment committee members on carrying out a transparent recruitment process. The Guidelines recommend applying the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, as well as taking an appropriate gender balance into account during the selection of committee members.

The Jagiellonian University created and facilitated the Gender Equality Central and Eastern Europe Community of Practice (GEinCEE CoP) within the Horizon 2020 project “Communities of Practice for Accelerating Gender Equality and Institutional Change in Research and Innovation across Europe 2018-2021” (ACT). The CoP has institutionalised collaboration between HEIs in the CEE region and fostered an institutional shift towards gender equality. It provides a platform for the creation and exchange of knowledge and resources, such as the Gender Equality Audit and Monitoring (GEAM) survey to collect data and monitor gender equality progress, and an online map of gender equality bodies, legislation and practice in the CEE region. As of September 2021, GEinCEE CoP had 20 official members – universities and research institutes from Czechia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Ukraine, as well as two collaborators.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Anti-discrimination Commissions/Equal Treatment Commissions

Anti-discrimination and Equal Treatment Commissions have been established at HEIs and research organisations (e.g. UW, Pedagogical University of Kraków, University of Łódź, University of Wrocław). They are responsible for institutional change and awareness-raising, including: (1) monitoring equal treatment based on sex, age, race, religion, disability and sexual orientation; (2) drafting an equal treatment policy and proposals on issues related to unequal treatment and discrimination; (3) recommending actions and formulating conclusions in cases of discrimination; (4) supporting and advising victims of discrimination; (5) preventing discrimination on any legally protected ground; (6) recommending training and organising anti-discrimination awareness campaigns; and (7) investigating cases of discrimination/unequal treatment.

Anti-mobbing Commissions/Committees

Anti-mobbing Commissions or Committees have been installed in most HEIs and research organisations (e.g. Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Medical University of Gdańsk, Medical University of Warsaw, Poznań University of Economics and Business, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, University of Gdańsk, University of Łódź). Although their names and scope differ, they are primarily responsible for actions preventing discrimination and mobbing, identifying instances of mobbing/sexual harassment, conducting explanatory procedures in cases of mobbing/discrimination, formulating proposals to mitigate mobbing/sexual harassment, and conflict resolution.

Proxy for gender equality

Most HEIs and research organisations have established an administrative position dealing with gender equality. They usually operate in a broader framework and address: (1) equal treatment (e.g. Rector's Proxy for Equal Treatment, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Gdańsk University of Technology, Pedagogical University of Kraków, Poznań University of Economics and Business, Spokesperson of Trust at Warsaw University of Technology, Academic Ombudsman at the University of Warsaw); (2) safety and security (e.g. Rector's Proxy for Student Safety and Security at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, University of Wrocław); (3) discrimination and mobbing (e.g. Rector's Proxy for Prevention of Mobbing at Silesian University of Technology, Rector's Proxy for Prevention of Mobbing and Discrimination at the University of Gdańsk); and (4) social responsibility (e.g. Rector's Proxy for Social Responsibility at Poznań University of Economics and Business, University of Łódź, University of Wrocław). More rarely, they focus on gender equality specifically (e.g. Equal Opportunity Chief Specialist at UW, Gender Equality Coordinator at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw). Their responsibilities include awareness-raising and prevention tasks, establishing cross-sectoral cooperation and policy-making initiatives, and examining cases of discrimination.

Footnotes

[1] Wroblewski, A., *Report on Monitoring of ERA Priority 4 Implementation*, 2020, https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/D3.2_MonitoringERApriority4implementation.pdf