

**Gender Equality Plan at the W. Szafer Institute of Botany of the Polish Academy of Sciences
(IB PAS): status at the end of 2021 and strategy for 2022**

One of the overarching goals of the Institute is to provide a safe working environment and a space free from any form of discrimination for everyone. In 2017, the IB PAS received the "HR Excellence in Research" award from the European Commission, which obligated the Institute to adhere to principles in line with the "European Charter for Researchers" and the "Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers," and introduced the need for continuous development of human resources and anti-discrimination policies. The rationale behind this strategy is the belief that equality and diversity are crucial values for scientists, fostering progress in research and ensuring an optimal working environment for the academic community.

To implement the discrimination prevention strategy at the Institute, internal analysis based on surveys was conducted in 2016 and 2019. Regarding discrimination based on gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, language, disability, political beliefs, social or economic background, in 2016, 11% of scientific staff (5 out of 44) reported experiencing some form of discrimination in the workplace. However, in 2019, 94% of scientific staff (37 out of 39) stated that discrimination does not exist in their workplace. A brief description of the survey results from 2016 and 2019 related to discrimination and gender equality topics is provided below.

Additionally, the Institute conducted an analysis of all relevant legal acts, such as the "Labour Code" along with its executive acts, and the "Act on the Polish Academy of Sciences," as well as the "Work Regulations at the IB PAS," in order to establish significant and binding principles that enable the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan at the Institute.

For 2022-2023, a new study is planned that will encompass a comprehensive analysis of gender balance and various aspects of discrimination in the context of the ongoing development of a comprehensive Gender Equality Plan at the Institute. In the current year, 2021, the Institute decided not to conduct a survey on possible manifestations of discrimination due to the unique working conditions of scientists during 2020-2021, resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. To a large extent, employees were working remotely, and during their presence at the Institute, they minimized contact with each other; for instance, a shift-based work mode was introduced in each laboratory. Each scientific staff member was provided with a separate room during working hours, and all meetings were conducted online.

Such prolonged limitations on interpersonal interactions among employees did not provide the opportunity to study phenomena arising from daily interactions at an appropriate level. Consequently, this situation would not allow achieving results that could facilitate the preparation of effective actions for the IB PAS in the context of non-discrimination principles and the Gender Equality Plan.

It is also worth noting that the current year, 2021, has been a period of significant changes related to the Institute's restructuring and the introduction of a new organizational structure. Numerous Departments have been transformed into four Research Groups, leading to substantial personnel changes within the core organizational units. Most of the previous reporting relationships have

changed, potentially introducing new challenges in terms of interactions between employees and consequently resulting in various feelings of discrimination or discomfort. Because of these factors, the diagnosis obtained from employee feedback surveys in 2021 might not be highly reliable.

As part of the initiatives outlined in the work environment improvement program, following the schedule set by the implementation of the "HR Excellence in Research" strategy, the Institute plans to conduct a series of workshops for employees in 2022-2023. These workshops will facilitate the early detection of possible discrimination and provide an understanding of the implemented anti-discrimination procedures. These actions largely align with the planned comprehensive and new internal analysis regarding the requirements of a modern Gender Equality Plan.

Furthermore, in this context, IB PAS intends to expand the research to encompass all employees, not solely limited to the scientific staff. This expansion is driven by the understanding that the Gender Equality Plan and the principle of non-discrimination are fundamental in fostering interpersonal relationships in the workplace, regardless of employment type (scientific, technical, or administrative). The Institute aims to create a welcoming work environment for all its employees.

• Good practices adopted at IB PAS

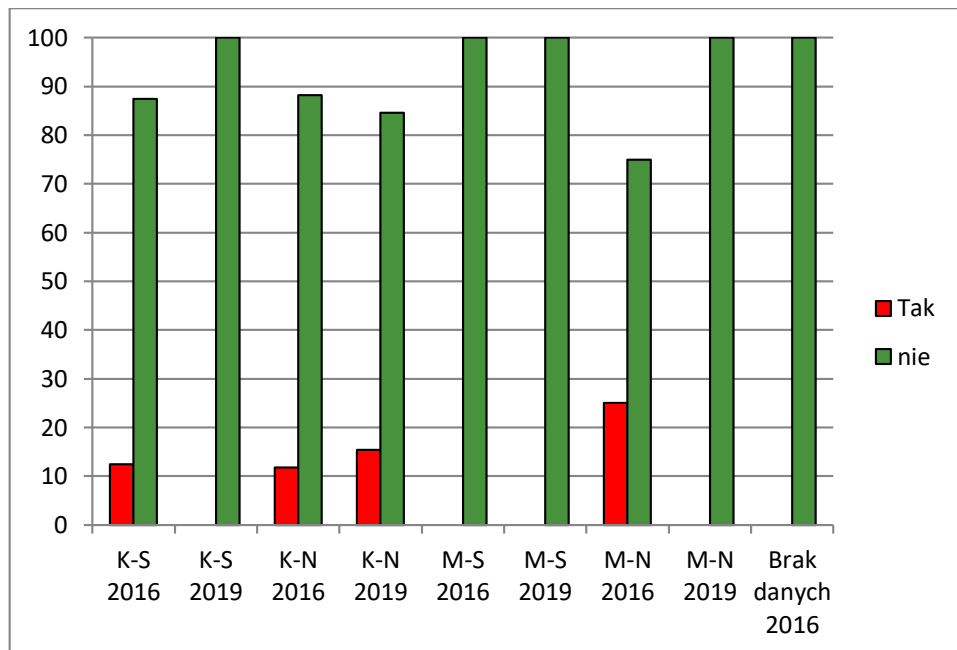
The Institute provides opportunities for both Polish citizens and foreigners to work. In recent years, the Institute has employed individuals from Belarus, Germany, Bolivia, and Egypt. Currently, scientists from Bolivia and Ukraine are employed at the Institute. Furthermore, the Institute supports employees with varying degrees of disabilities. As part of efforts to remove architectural barriers, the Institute installed an elevator for wheelchairs. The Institute acknowledges the significance of maintaining a non-discriminatory work environment and including staff and students from diverse backgrounds within the scientific community. Consequently, a system of early response based on continuous monitoring of potential discrimination is integrated into the Institute's human resources strategy.

• Discussion of non-discrimination and gender balance issues as explored in surveys conducted among scientific staff in 2016 and 2019

In 2016, the survey involved 44 participants, with 75% being women and 23% men. Among them, 50% held positions of habilitated doctor or professor (independent scientific staff), while 48% had doctoral or master's degrees. One individual did not include metric responses. In 2019, the survey was completed by 39 individuals, comprising 77% women and 23% men. Among the respondents, 59% were independent scientific staff, and 41% were non-independent staff, i.e., individuals with doctoral or master's degrees.

In both 2016 and 2019, the same question (question number 10) regarding the principle of non-discrimination was asked: "Have you, while working at the Institute, encountered a case of discrimination based on gender, age, ethnic, national or social origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, language, disability, political beliefs, social or material status, or scientific discipline?" Respondents could answer either affirmatively or negatively. The survey results are presented in the

figure below, taking into account the division of scientific staff based on gender (K - female, M - male) and the level of scientific advancement (S - independent staff, N - non-independent Staff; „tak” = „yes”, „nie” = „no”).



In 2016, 89% of the employees (39 out of 44) reported that they had not encountered any form of discrimination in the workplace. However, 5 individuals mentioned having experienced issues related to discrimination, including 4 women. Among the women belonging to the non-independent staff group, reasons for discrimination included "religion/belief" and "political/religious beliefs/social status." Additionally, one female independent scientific staff member noted discrimination based on "lower pay for women." One woman in this group of scientific staff did not provide information about the type of discrimination experienced. Among men, only one non-independent scientist indicated experiencing age-related discrimination.

In 2019, 94% of the scientific staff at the Institute (37 out of 39) stated that they had not encountered discrimination in their workplace. Two female from the non-independent scientific staff group provided affirmative responses, although they did not provide details about the specific areas of experienced discrimination.

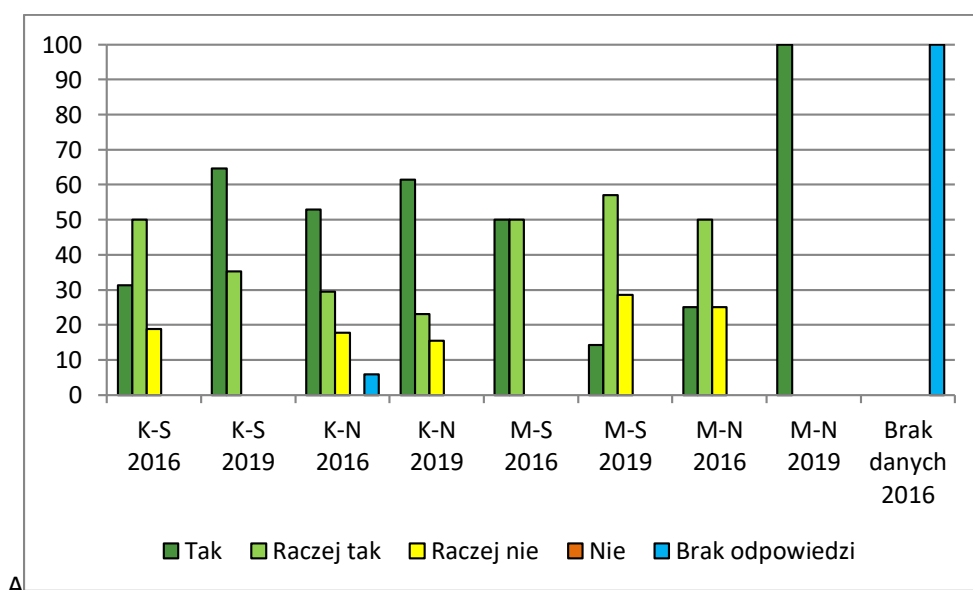
Based on the results of both surveys at the Institute, it was summarized that the majority of scientific staff did not experience discrimination, and as a result, no corrective actions were implemented in this aspect. It was also observed that in the latest survey, there was a lower proportion of affirmative responses indicating the occurrence of discrimination. This suggests that actions related to overall improvements in the work environment and conditions have indirectly influenced the survey results from 2019 in this area. For instance, a new salary regulation was adopted, emphasizing that the same work warrants the same compensation regardless of gender. Additionally, the levels of functional and task-related allowances were standardized, eliminating discretionary elements and ensuring uniform rates for all. A system for appointing scientific staff representatives to participate in informational, consultative, and decision-making bodies was also introduced, allowing employees at

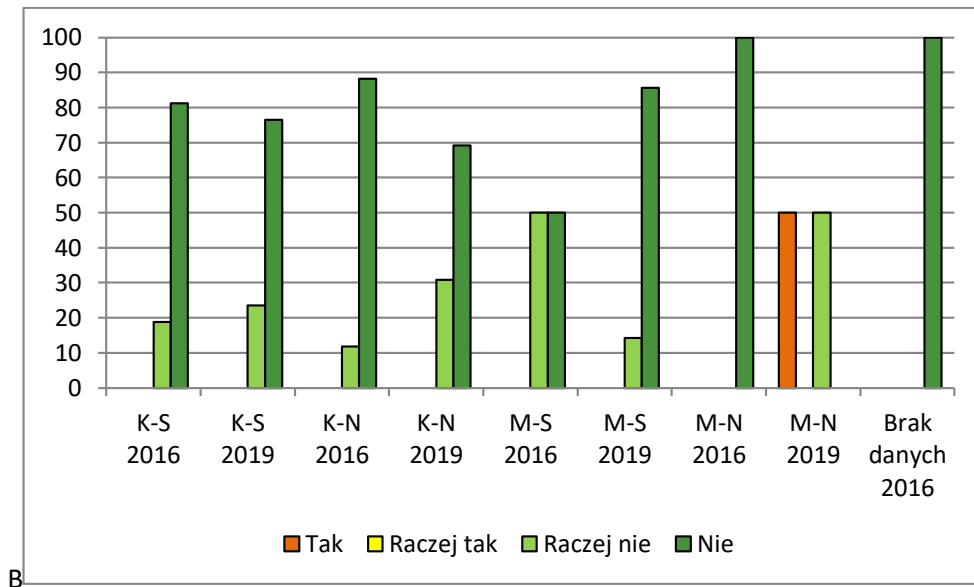
various stages of their scientific careers to have an impact on decision-making bodies and not feel discriminated against based on factors like age.

The issue of discrimination is often closely linked with gender imbalances in leadership and decision-making positions. It is important to emphasize that in recent years, almost three-quarters of all scientific staff in the Institute have been women, who have also widely held significant roles and participated in decision-making bodies. Due to this, even before conducting the surveys in 2016 and 2019, it could be assumed that the Institute provided favourable conditions for the scientific development of women. According to the "European Charter for Researchers" and the "Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers," employers are encouraged to ensure representative gender balance at all levels of the scientific workforce without compromising on quality and qualifications. To assess the perception of gender balance, two questions were posed to scientific staff in 2016 and 2019.

The first question was: "Do you believe that IB PAS, as an employer, aims to ensure representative gender balance at all levels of the workforce?" The second question was: "Do you believe that for IB PAS, as an employer, gender is prioritized over qualifications as a criterion?" Four possible responses were provided: yes („tak”), rather yes („raczej tak”), rather no („raczej nie”), and no („nie”). The results are presented in the figures below (A - first question and B - second question). In 2016, one person did not provide an answer to the first question (in blue).

For the first question, the majority of respondents, both from the independent and non-independent scientific staff groups in both surveys, believed that the Institute aims to ensure gender balance at all levels of the workforce. For the second question, a decisive majority of all surveyed employees answered that qualification criteria are prioritized over gender criteria. Only in 2019 did one out of the two men representing non-independent scientific staff members state that gender plays a greater role than qualifications.





The employment structure at the Institute indicates a dominance of women in the working environment. However, the survey results revealed that employees believe that gender balance is maintained at IB PAS. As a scientific institution subject to continuous evaluations of research quality, the Institute primarily values the qualifications of its employees. In this aspect, scientific staff members also confirmed that competencies and qualifications ultimately determine the selection of suitable individuals for specific positions. Gender plays a secondary role. Nevertheless, the Institute pays special attention to appointing representatives of different genders from the scientific staff in informational, consultative, and decision-making bodies, ensuring diversity and equality in the work environment.

An important aspect in the realm of gender equality is ensuring equal treatment of women and men, considering the different paths of scientific development that arise from responsibilities related to childcare, mostly shouldered by women. Based on survey results from 2016 and 2019, employees rate the working conditions quite favourably, which allow them to balance their family and professional lives, subsequently leading to enhanced research productivity. The question regarding working conditions was open, and the most convenient options for respondents included: a) flexible working hours, b) the possibility of working from home, and c) part-time work. Most respondents positively evaluated the overall career development opportunities.

Future in-depth research in this area will allow for a new assessment of working conditions, with a particular focus on gender equality and equal treatment of women and men, as well as individuals with a different sense of gender identity.