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Gender Equality Plan at the W. Szafer Institute of Botany of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IB PAS): status and strategy for 2023

The Gender Equality Plan at the Institute is focused on creating a discrimination-free and safe working environment for all individuals. In 2017, the Institute received the "HR Excellence in Research" award from the European Commission, committing it to uphold principles outlined in the "European Charter for Researchers" and the "Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers." These principles underline the significance of continuous human resource development and anti-discrimination policies. Equality and diversity are seen as vital values for scientific progress and an optimal academic working environment. The Institute also analysed relevant legal acts to establish principles for the Gender Equality Plan, such as the "Labour Code," "Act on the Polish Academy of Sciences," and "Work Regulations at IB PAS."

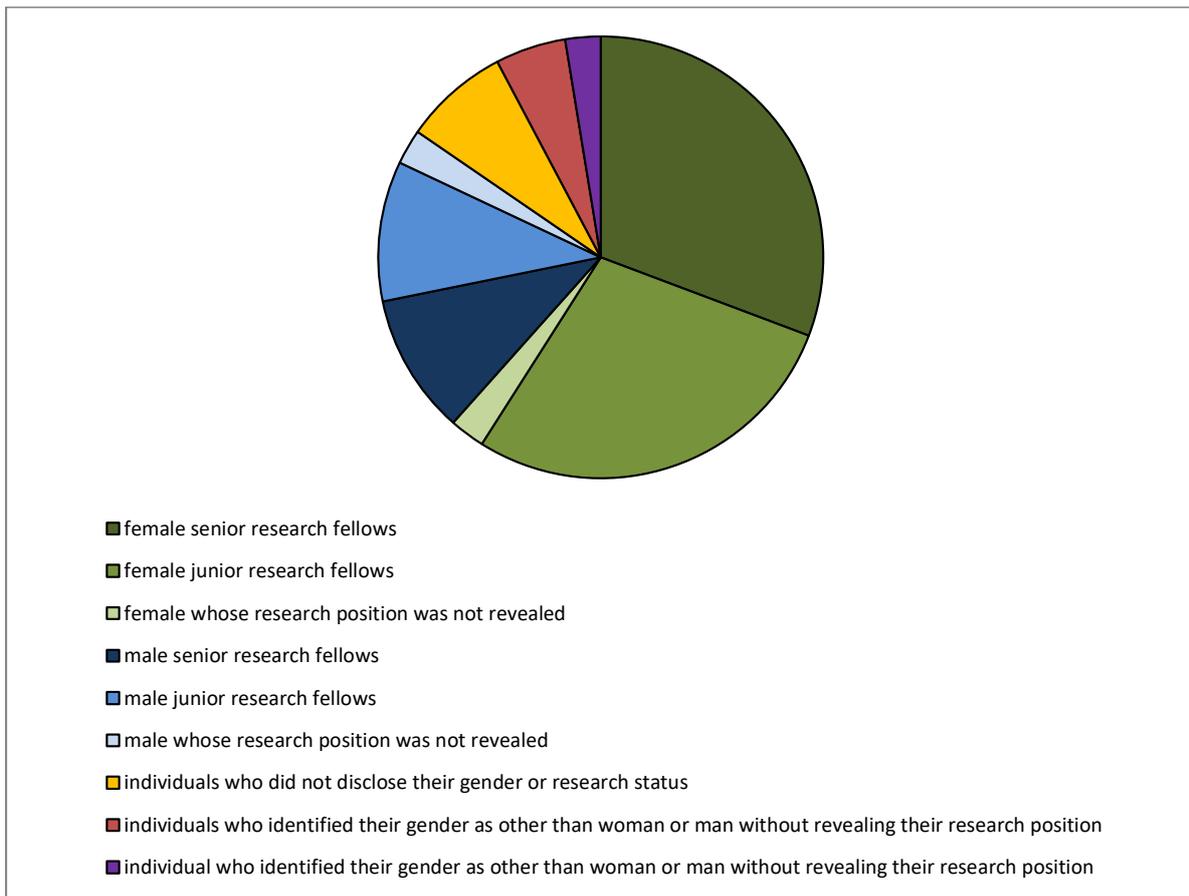
The Institute's good practices include hiring both Polish citizens and foreigners, supporting employees with disabilities, and integrating an early response system to monitor discrimination. To implement its anti-discrimination strategy, the Institute conducted internal surveys in 2016 and 2019. Regarding gender-based discrimination, 11% of scientific staff reported experiencing discrimination in 2016, while in 2019, 94% stated that they had not encountered any discrimination. Surveys in 2016 and 2019 queried staff also about gender balance. A significant majority believed the Institute aimed for gender balance at all levels. However, qualifications were considered more important than gender and the researchers of the Institute prioritize qualifications over gender in recruitment and promotion decisions. The Institute's predominantly female staff, its favourable conditions for women's scientific development, and its initiatives contribute to gender equality. For more details, see previous document („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”).

Discrimination prevention, equal treatment, and gender balance are pivotal to the Institute's values and objectives for a diverse, inclusive, and progressive academic community. For this reason, the Institute organized workshops at the beginning of 2023 to aid mobbing and discrimination detection and anti-discrimination procedure understanding. This aligns with a new internal analysis for the Gender Equality Plan and resulted in new questions added to regular survey among scientific staff.

The Institute's restructuring in 2021 brought changes in personnel and structure. Therefore, the results from employee surveys in 2023 for past 4 years might not be fully reliable for a current situation.

Survey results from April, 2023

The survey spanned the entirety of April 2023. Over the course of this month, a total of 39 individuals participated in the survey. Concerning gender, the breakdown of participants was as follows: 24 respondents were female research fellows, 9 respondents were male research fellows, 3 individuals identified their gender as something other than woman or man, and 3 individuals chose not to reveal their gender or research status. In relations to the research position, 16 individuals represented senior research staff and the same number of persons represented junior research Staff. Other employees did not reveal their research status. (See figure below)



For the first time in this survey, respondents were given the option to identify not only as female or male, but also to indicate a gender different from the traditional binary categories of woman and man. Notably, the survey results highlighted that three individuals did not identify themselves strictly as either woman or man. This development holds significant importance for the Institute's commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment. The inclusion of non-binary and other gender identities in the survey results underscores the Institute's dedication to recognizing and respecting the full spectrum of gender experiences.

The fact that some respondents do not identify within the traditional gender binary has brought to light the need for the Institute to pay special attention to gender balance and inclusivity in its future initiatives. This data provides valuable insights into the complex

landscape of gender diversity within the Institute's community. Moving forward, the Institute can build upon these insights to ensure that its policies and practices not only reflect the evolving understanding of gender but also actively promote an atmosphere where everyone feels respected and valued, regardless of their gender identity.

In conclusion, the inclusion of non-binary and alternative gender identities in the survey results marks an important step towards greater inclusivity and understanding within the Institute. By acknowledging and addressing the various ways individuals perceive and experience their gender, the Institute is taking meaningful strides towards creating an environment that truly upholds the principles of equality and respect for all. This new information will undoubtedly guide the Institute's future endeavours in advancing gender balance and fostering a diverse and harmonious academic community.

Mobbing

One of the key aspects examined in the survey was workplace harassment, often referred to as mobbing. This aspect holds significant importance as it directly impacts the well-being and professional satisfaction of employees within the Institute. Harassment in the workplace can manifest in various forms, including verbal abuse, exclusion, intimidation, and other demeaning behaviours that create a hostile environment.

According to the survey results, a small percentage of respondents (7.7%) reported experiencing mobbing during their employment at the Institute in the past four years. The respondents included a female senior research fellow, a female whose research position was not disclosed, and an individual who identified their gender as other than women or men, without disclosing research position.

Regarding the identity of the mobber, one person stated that it was their supervisor and co-worker, another person mentioned a co-worker, and the third person identified a worker from as the mobber, suggesting an existence of staffing. No one claimed that employer or person managing the Institute was responsible for mobbing.

When asked if they reported the issue of mobbing to their supervisors, Disciplinary Officer, or Institute Director, two individuals answered affirmatively, while one person indicated that they did not report the problem. In terms of receiving help, two individuals stated that they did receive help after reporting the mobbing incident, whereas the third person did not seek assistance. Regarding the resolution of the mobbing problem, the two individuals who received help reported that the issue was resolved. However, the individual who did not ask for help stated that the problem remained unresolved.

Based on these responses, it is evident that mobbing has been experienced by a small number of employees at the Institute. While some individuals sought help and reported the issue, indicating that the problem was resolved in those cases, there are still instances where

the issue persists. Addressing mobbing and providing support to those affected is crucial in fostering a healthy and respectful work environment at the Institute.

Undesirable behaviours

Another forms of undesirable behaviours were surveyed. 30.8% (12 individuals) respondents reported experiencing undesirable behaviours while working at the Institute in the past five years. These individuals consisted of 4 female senior research fellows, 2 female junior research fellows, 1 female whose research position was not revealed, 2 male senior research fellows, 1 individual who did not disclose their gender or research status, and 2 individuals who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position.

Regarding the type of undesirable behaviour, 2 individuals reported harassment or intimidation (1 female senior research fellow, 1 male senior research fellow), 2 individuals reported humiliation or ridicule (2 female senior research fellows, 1 female junior research fellow, 1 individual who identified their gender as other than woman or man), 6 individuals reported insulting (1 female senior research fellow, 1 female junior research fellow, 1 male senior research fellow, 1 individual who did not disclose their gender or research status, 2 individuals who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position), and 5 individuals reported isolating or eliminating colleagues from the team (2 female senior research fellows, 1 female junior research fellow, 1 female whose research position was not revealed, 1 individual who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position). No other types of behaviour were indicated.

In terms of the person responsible for the undesirable behaviour, 8 individuals (66.7%) stated that it was a supervisor, including cases of harassment or intimidation (2 cases), humiliation or ridicule (2 cases), insulting (4 cases), and isolating or eliminating colleagues from the team (3 cases). 3 individuals (40%) reported a co-worker as responsible, including cases of humiliation or ridicule (2 cases), insulting (2 cases), and isolating or eliminating colleagues from the team (2 cases). 1 individual (8%) mentioned a worker as staffing, reporting a case of humiliation or ridicule. No one claimed that the employer or person managing the Institute was responsible for the undesirable behaviour.

Regarding reporting the problem, 5 individuals reported it to supervisors, Disciplinary Officers, or the Director of the Institute, while 7 individuals did not report it. Out of those who reported, 3 individuals received help, while 2 did not. In terms of problem resolution, 2 individuals who reported their cases and received help stated that the problem was solved, 1 individual who reported the case did not solve the problem despite receiving help, 1 individual reported that the case was in progress after reporting and receiving help. Additionally, 2 individuals who did not report their problems claimed that their problems were solved.

Regarding sexual harassment, 100% of respondents answered negatively, indicating that they were not victims of sexual harassment while working at the Institute in the past five years.

The survey highlights instances of undesirable behaviour within the Institute, including harassment, humiliation, ridicule, insults, and isolating colleagues. While some cases were reported and received assistance leading to problem resolution, there were also cases where the issue was not reported or remained unresolved. Addressing and preventing undesirable behaviour is crucial to fostering a respectful and inclusive work environment at the Institute.

The survey examined the occurrence of unwanted behaviours, specifically focusing on inappropriate invasion of personal space, persistent attempts to contact individuals in private matters, and sexual proposals. The survey results indicate that 100% of respondents answered negatively, indicating that they did not experience these types of unwanted behaviours while working at the Institute. This suggests a positive environment in terms of personal boundaries and respectful professional interactions at the Institute. It is important to maintain and reinforce this positive culture to ensure a safe and comfortable work environment for all employees.

Overall, the survey results suggest the presence of undesirable behaviours within the Institute, particularly related to supervisors. While some individuals reported and received help, others did not report or reported without effective resolution. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment that encourages reporting, provides effective channels for addressing concerns, and ensures appropriate action is taken to prevent and address undesirable behaviours. The absence of reported sexual harassment incidents is an encouraging indication but requires continued vigilance to maintain a safe and respectful workplace for all employees.

The employee when asked if they believed that the working environment at IB PAS is friendly to resolving conflicts between employees, 23.1% (9 individuals) answered negatively. Out of these respondents, 7 individuals answered "rather no" (including 2 female senior research fellows, 1 individual whose research position was not revealed, 1 male senior research fellow, 1 individual who did not disclose their gender or research status, and 2 individuals who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position), while 2 individuals answered "no" (both female junior research fellows). Regarding whether they believed that the Institute effectively counteracts mobbing, 15.4% (6 individuals) answered negatively. All of these respondents answered "rather no" (including 3 female junior research fellows, 1 male senior research fellow, 1 individual who did not disclose their gender or research status, and 1 individual who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position).

Furthermore, the employees when asked if they believed that IB PAS effectively counteracts undesirable behaviour and reacts early to such actions as an employer, 12.8% (5 individuals) answered negatively. Out of these respondents, 3 individuals answered "rather no" (including 1 female junior research fellow, 1 male senior research fellow, and 1 individual who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position), while 2 individuals answered "no" (1 female senior research fellow and 1 female junior research fellow).

The survey results indicate that there are concerns among a portion of respondents regarding the working environment at the institute, particularly in terms of conflict resolution, counteracting mobbing, and effectively addressing and reacting to undesirable behaviour. These findings highlight areas where improvements may be needed to create a more supportive and respectful work environment at IB PAS.

The survey aimed to assess the working environment at the Institute in terms of resolving conflicts, countering mobbing, and effectively addressing undesirable behaviour. The results indicate that a portion of respondents expressed negative views on these aspects. Specifically, 23.1% of respondents answered negatively when asked about the working environment's friendliness to resolving conflicts, 15.4% had negative views on the Institute's effectiveness in countering mobbing, and 12.8% expressed scepticism regarding the Institute's ability to effectively address and react early to undesirable behaviour.

The fact that 23.1% of respondents expressed negative views suggests that there may be room for improvement in creating a more supportive and effective conflict resolution process at the Institute. It is important for the institution to address this concern and provide resources and mechanisms for resolving conflicts between employees.

In summary, the findings indicate that 15.4% of respondents felt that IB PAS may not effectively counteract mobbing. This highlights the need for the Institute to review its policies and procedures to proactively prevent and address mobbing behaviours in the workplace. The survey revealed that 12.8% of respondents had doubts about the Institute's effectiveness in addressing and reacting early to undesirable behaviour. This indicates the importance of having robust policies and procedures in place to prevent and address such behaviour promptly.

Discrimination

Another aspect surveyed at IB PAS was a discrimination, which is a special case of undesired behaviours. Discriminatory behaviours have been identified, including instances of gender and age-based discrimination, as well as specific behaviours like gender-stereotyping comments. Out of the respondents, 10.3% (4 individuals) reported encountering cases of discrimination while working at the Institute in the past five years. These individuals included 1 female senior research fellow, 1 female junior research fellow, 1 female whose research position was not revealed, 1 individual who did not disclose their gender or research status,

and 1 individual who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position. One person reported discrimination based on gender, and three individuals reported discrimination based on age. None of the individuals reported the problem to supervisors, Disciplinary Officers, or the Director of the Institute, and they did not seek help. One person mentioned that the problem was solved.

Below there is a list of specific discriminatory behaviours experienced by respondents:

- Comments or jokes referring to gender stereotypes: 5 individuals reported experiencing this behaviour, including 2 female senior research fellows, 1 individual whose research position was not revealed, 1 male senior research fellow, and 1 individual who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position.
- Being judged or treated better or worse because of sex: 2 individuals reported experiencing this behaviour, including 1 female whose research position was not revealed and 1 male senior research fellow.
- Inappropriate personal addressing: 2 female senior research fellows reported experiencing this behaviour.
- Negative comments about clothes and appearance: 1 female senior research fellow reported experiencing this behaviour.
- Attributing achievements based on gender: 1 female whose research position was not revealed reported experiencing this behaviour.
- Contesting competencies based on gender: 2 individuals reported experiencing this behaviour, including 1 female whose research position was not revealed and 1 individual who identified their gender as other than woman or man without revealing their research position.
- Questioning career opportunities due to gender: 1 female whose research position was not revealed reported experiencing this behaviour.
- Manifestation of positive distinction or privilege gained because of gender: 1 female whose research position was not revealed reported experiencing this behaviour.
- Regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation, all respondents answered negatively, indicating that they did not experience negative comments or discriminatory behaviour related to sexual orientation. Similarly, all respondents answered negatively when asked about experiencing sexual comments or jokes.

The survey results highlight instances of discrimination based on gender and age, as well as behaviours such as gender-stereotyping comments or jokes. It is important for the Institute to address and prevent such discriminatory behaviours to foster an inclusive and respectful work environment for all employees.

Corrective Action Plan for addressing mobbing and undesirable behaviours at IB PAS

The survey results have showed that it is essential to implement corrective actions to address the issue of mobbing and ensure a safe and respectful work environment for all employees. Undesirable behaviours have been also identified through the survey as a concern at the Institute, including instances of harassment, humiliation, ridicule, insults, and isolating colleagues. To ensure a respectful and inclusive work environment, a comprehensive corrective action plan will be implemented. The survey revealed specific areas where improvements are needed, and the following corrective actions are proposed: 1) Preparation and implementation of Anti-Mobbing Policy; 2) Awareness and training programs concerning professional communication.

Preparation of Anti-Mobbing and Anti-Discriminatory Policy

Clear and accessible channels for reporting instances of mobbing will be established. It should be ensured that all employees are aware of the reporting process and will be encouraged to come forward without fear of retaliation. A specific Anti-Mobbing and Anti-Discriminatory Policy with clear reporting mechanisms that outlines the Institute's commitment to preventing mobbing, the consequences of engaging in mobbing behaviour, and the steps that will be prepared. This will also refer to all undesirable behaviour such as harassment, humiliation, ridicule, insults, and isolating colleagues, among others. This will include immediate response system to address reported mobbing incidents. We will designate responsible individuals who will handle reported cases promptly and impartially. The head of this team will be Disciplinary Officer. The team will conduct thorough and unbiased investigations into reported mobbing incidents to take appropriate actions based on the investigation's findings, including disciplinary measures when necessary, to ensure that mobbing and other undesirable behaviours are addressed effectively.

The aim of this Anti-Mobbing and Anti-Discriminatory policy will be also to establish a system for ongoing monitoring and assessment of the effectiveness of the implemented corrective actions. Also, existing disciplinary policies will be reviewed and revised to ensure they address undesirable behaviours effectively. A tiered approach to disciplinary actions will be implemented, escalating consequences for repeat offenders or severe cases. Once a year, the progress in addressing mobbing incidents will be reviewed and necessary adjustments based on feedback and outcomes will be made. In case of new reported cases, comprehensive support for individuals who reported mobbing incidents will be provided.

- Awareness and Training Programs concerning professional communication

Comprehensive awareness and training programs on workplace mobbing for all employees will be developed and implemented. First steps were done in 2019 and 2021, when workshops for the management team were organized. Also, in January 2023 a dedicated workshop focusing on mobbing and discrimination and their prevention was conducted for all employees, separately for management team and other employees. Their program

emphasized the different forms of mobbing, its impact on individuals and the organization, and the importance of reporting incidents promptly. The workshop received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the participants, underscoring the significant value of such gatherings within the prevention strategy. Therefore, specialized training on recognizing signs of mobbing and undesirable behaviours, handling reported cases, and creating a positive and respectful work environment will be continued.

Workshops and training sessions for all employees will be conducted, with a focus on supervisors and senior staff, to raise awareness about undesirable behaviours, their impact, and strategies for prevention as well as necessity of proper interpersonal communication at workplace. Based on recent survey, employees representing supervisors were reported as individuals caused problems, therefore, additional training on how to interact with their colleagues and avoid any undesired incidents or other undesirable behaviours will be provided. Specialized training on effective communication, conflict resolution, and respectful interactions will be provided to supervisors and senior staff to enhance their leadership skills. (as continuation of the ones undertaken in 2019 and 2021). It is crucial to organize these events regularly, considering the changes within the management team over the last four years. The reorganization of the Institute has resulted in shifts in leadership, emphasizing the importance of ongoing skill development.

In the final months of 2023, a meeting with employees is scheduled during which the survey results will be discussed, and a clear strategy regarding the reporting process will be presented. The importance of the Disciplinary Officer's role will be emphasized during this session. The management of the Institute will work on fostering a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable seeking help and reporting incidents. Also, the actions will aim at encouraging open communication and providing assurance that reports will be treated confidentially and without any negative consequences.

By proactively implementing these corrective actions, the Institute can address the issue of mobbing effectively, create a culture of respect and inclusivity, and ensure the well-being and satisfaction of all its employees. Addressing and preventing undesirable behaviours, including discrimination, is a vital component of creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive work environment at the Institute. By implementing this corrective action plan, the Institute aims to foster a positive workplace culture where all employees can work without the fear of harassment or discrimination and contribute to their full potential. The commitment to these actions reflects the Institute's dedication to the well-being and professional development of its staff.

Gender balance

The survey results regarding gender balance at IB PAS indicate positive perceptions overall. In terms of gender representation in committees at the institute (No. 17.3), 89.7% of respondents expressed positive views, with 48.7% responding "rather yes" and indicating a balanced gender representation. However, there were a few respondents (10.3%) who answered negatively, suggesting room for improvement in achieving gender balance in these committees.

In response to whether the Institute aims to ensure a representative gender balance without compromising quality and qualification criteria (No. 17.1), 94.9% of respondents provided positive answers. Similarly, when asked if the Institute prioritizes equal opportunity policy in recruitment over competence criteria (No. 17.2), 89.7% of respondents answered negatively, indicating that competence criteria are not overridden by gender considerations.

Regarding the development of women's scientific careers at the institute (No. 17.4), the majority of respondents (92.3%) answered negatively, indicating that they do not perceive a phenomenon inhibiting the development of women's scientific careers. However, a small percentage (7.7%) responded positively or "rather yes," suggesting that there may be some concerns or challenges related to the advancement of women's careers that need to be addressed.

Overall, the survey results demonstrate positive perceptions regarding gender balance at the Institute. The majority of respondents believe that the institute aims for a representative gender balance, prioritizes competence criteria in recruitment, and does not inhibit the development of women's scientific careers. However, there is still room for improvement, particularly in achieving gender balance in committees. These findings can inform efforts to foster a more inclusive and equitable research environment at the institute.

The Institute's workforce composition shows a notable predominance of women, while survey results indicate that employees perceive gender balance to be maintained at IB PAS. The Institute takes special care to appoint diverse gender representatives in decision-making bodies, promoting equality. Gender equality involves treating women and men fairly, recognizing the distinct paths stemming from childcare duties, often carried by women. Survey data from 2016 and 2019 reflect positive opinions on working conditions, facilitating the harmony of family and professional life and subsequently enhancing research output. Respondents indicated preferences for flexible hours, remote work options, and part-time positions, with most evaluating career development opportunities positively.

In the survey conducted in 2023, the Institute's approach to flexible working conditions was evaluated by the respondents. The results revealed that a significant proportion of employees, constituting 71.8%, view the Institute's efforts to align with national legislation for enhancing research efficiency in a positive light. However, a fraction of employees, totaling 28.2%, expressed reservations about the Institute's endeavors in this domain.

Among this group, 20.5% (8 individuals) responded with "rather not," implying a certain degree of uncertainty or dissatisfaction. A smaller subset, comprising 5.1% (2 individuals), outright stated that the Institute's efforts fell short, responding with a resounding "no."

In a related aspect, the survey inquired about the compatibility of the Institute's working conditions with the needs of both men and women to harmonize their family and work commitments. The findings indicate a higher level of satisfaction in this regard, with 84.6% of respondents acknowledging the Institute's efforts to foster an environment conducive to achieving this balance. The employees confirmed that the working conditions indeed facilitate the integration of family and work responsibilities, reflecting a favourable perspective. Nevertheless, a minority of respondents, constituting 12.8% (5 individuals), expressed a sense of ambivalence or uncertainty, responding with "rather not." This implies that a portion of employees remains cautious or non-committal about the Institute's effectiveness in this area.

The survey results offer valuable insights into the perception of the Institute's initiatives related to flexible working conditions and the compatibility of work and family responsibilities, which is important for a development of women's scientific careers at the institute. While a substantial portion of respondents positively views the Institute's efforts in both realms, there is room for further enhancement to address concerns and meet the diverse needs of the workforce effectively. The findings underline the significance of continuous evaluation and improvement in these areas to cultivate a work environment that values work-life balance and supports the research community's productivity and well-being.