

Equal Opportunities Plan

Center for Advanced Internet Studies (CAIS)

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Contents and goals of the Equal Opportunities Plan	5
The equal opportunities office	6
Role and tasks	6
Exercise of participatory rights	6
Appointment of the Equal Opportunities Officer	6
Equal opportunities at CAIS – an inventory	7
Employment structure	7
Salaries	7
Fields of action and measures	7
Communicating equal opportunities	7
Regular presentation of the concept and of the annual report	7
Discussions between equal opportunities officers and department heads	7
Anti-discrimination	8
General Act on Equal Treatment (AGG)	8
Preventing discrimination	9
Non-discriminatory language	9
Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf	10
Parental leave and care period	10

Care period	11
Working hours and place of work	11
Business trips	11
Advice and support	11
Personnel selection and development	11
Job advertisements	11
Appointments	12
Promotion, qualification, further training	12
Appointments to committees and selection criteria for fellowships	12
Evaluation	12
References	13

Equal Opportunities Plan

Center for Advanced Internet Studies (CAIS)

Introduction

Equal opportunity issues are now an integral part of public discourse and political measures. Every year, discussions about gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men culminate, at least in the media, at the latest when the International Women's Day takes place on 8 March or when there is the so-called "Equal Pay Day". According to the OECD (n.d.), while the employment rate for women has grown faster than for men over the last ten years or so, there are still far fewer women than men in paid employment, women are more likely to work part-time and earn less, and men are more likely to be in management positions (OECD, n.d.).

However, there are also discussions about equal opportunities and equality, as well as the (political, legislative, etc.) measures to achieve them, beyond the (biological) property of gender. Since 2006, for example, the General Act on Equal Treatment (AGG) has also been intended to prevent or eliminate discrimination on the basis of origin, ideology/religion, age, sexual identity, and disability. Same-sex couples have been allowed to marry since October 2017 (Federal Law Gazette I, p. 2787), and German law has included the possibility of a third gender category since the end of 2018 (Federal Law Gazette I, p. 2635).

These are just a few of many examples that illustrate the efforts made to achieve equal opportunities. They are important and necessary. Nevertheless, discrimination in many shades is still part of everyday life for many people. And, in the words of Swedish political scientist Liv Strömquist (2019):

"Simple 'equality' without a social vision is a really poor idea".

Equal opportunities and equality therefore require much more than categories and quotas that can be counted. What they also require is an attitude, a social climate, a vision marked by openness, acceptance, sensitivity, and consideration for other people.

A research institution such as ours can of course not change the equal opportunity policy of society as a whole. However, we can make a small but no less relevant contribution within the framework of our organization, our structure, our internal and external presence, and our dealings with one another.

We want to do so by actively promoting the equality at work of all people – regardless of gender, skin color, origin, religion, age, disability. Besides an appropriate working atmosphere, we want to achieve equal opportunities through a range of different measures, which we formulate in this Equal Opportunities Plan. We are guided here by the Equality Opportunities Act (LGG) of North Rhine-Westphalia, which states:

“This Act serves to realize the fundamental right of equality between women and men. In accordance with this law and other regulations promoting the equal opportunities of women and men, women shall be supported in order to reduce existing disadvantages. The aim of the law is also to improve the compatibility of work and family life for women and men”.

This Equal Opportunities Plan expands the legal framework to include further differentiations – particularly with regard to the equal opportunities of persons regardless of other potentially discriminatory criteria such as skin color, origin, religion, age, and disability. Conceptually, we are aware that, in order to work on overcoming the differentiations, this Equal Opportunities Plan is obliged to name them – and therefore to reproduce them in a certain way.

The Equal Opportunities Plan addresses all CAIS employees, regardless of which department or pay group they belong to. All employees are responsible for achieving the objectives of gender equality and for the public image of CAIS as a non-discriminatory employer that promotes the compatibility of work and family life.

Contents and goals of the Equal Opportunities Plan

According to the Equality Opportunities Act (LGG) of North Rhine-Westphalia, an equal opportunities plan serves to steer personnel planning and recruitment with the aim of realizing the fundamental right to “equality for women and men”. The CAIS plan goes beyond this, however, since its guiding principle is equal opportunities at work for all people. It therefore comprises the following contents and goals:

1. The Equal Opportunities Plan focuses on measures to promote equal opportunities and the compatibility of work and family life, and to increase the proportion of people from underrepresented groups.
2. The Equal Opportunities Plan is based on an inventory and analysis of the employment structure, a forecast of posts to be filled, as well as possible promotions and upgradings for its period of validity up to 15 July 2022.
3. The Equal Opportunities Plan contains specific targets with regard to appointing, promoting and upgrading persons from underrepresented groups for the period of its validity. It is to specify the personnel, organizational, social, and training measures to be taken in order to achieve the goals set out in (1). In the event that posts are likely to be shed, the Equal Opportunities Plan shall identify measures that can prevent the proportion of underrepresented groups from declining..

The equal opportunities office

Role and tasks

The general task of the equal opportunities office is to support the organization in fulfilling its mission of equal opportunities at work for all people, and especially for people from underrepresented groups. The equal opportunities office plays both a conceptual and a consultative role in all matters relevant to equal opportunities within the organization (areas of participation, see §17 LGG NRW).

Its conceptual roles include:

1. Developing concepts for equal opportunity measures, and cooperating in evaluation and monitoring,
2. Designing, steering and supporting processes for the development and updating of equal opportunity strategies within the organization,
3. Initiating participatory processes related to equal opportunities.

Its consultative roles include:

1. Providing the management and department heads with position statements and recommendations on equal opportunity measures, plans and processes,
2. Relaying information and arranging (internal/external) training courses on equal opportunity issues.

Exercise of participatory rights

The management as well as department heads shall ensure appropriate working conditions for the equal opportunities office, and shall provide it with all information in a timely manner that it requires to fulfill its roles.

Appointment of the Equal Opportunities Officer

In accordance with § 15 (1) LGG NRW, the appointment is made following a call for applications or a procedure allowing for expressions of interest among CAIS employees. Suggestions may also be submitted. Based on the expressions of interest and suggestions submitted, a secret ballot is held among all institute employees. In deviation from § 15 (2) LGG NRW, the person appointed to fulfill the equal opportunity mandate does not necessarily have to be a woman. The person's qualifications should meet the requirements of her/his area of responsibility. The appointment is made for a term of four years.

Equal opportunities at CAIS – an inventory

Employment structure

Currently (as of 29 July 2021, 25 August 2020, 24 August 2020), CAIS employs 21 people, including a seconded professor and student assistants, of whom 11 (52.38%) are female. Of the four management positions, one is currently held by a woman (25%); no other management position is held by a person from an underrepresented group, the same being the case for the rest of the employment structure.

Salaries

As a rule, the salaries of CAIS employees are paid in accordance with the most recent version of the collective agreement for the public sector of the federal states (TV-L) of 12 October 2006. CAIS applies the collective agreement in full. This also applies to all provisions such as a special annual payment (Christmas bonus), special leave, parental leave, and relocation costs. The collective agreement is applied in a fundamentally gender-neutral manner.

Fields of action and measures

The Equal Opportunities Plan not only serves as an element to steer personnel planning and recruitment. It is also intended to contribute to equal opportunities of the sexes, people of different origins, and people with disabilities at all levels of CAIS. Below are listed different areas and measures designed to promote equal opportunities at CAIS.

Communicating equal opportunities

Regular presentation of the concept and of the annual report

Communicating the issue of “equal opportunities” to all CAIS departments requires that the issue be systematically integrated into all committees and departments. The equal opportunities office provides quarterly information on current measures and developments in equal opportunity work, and presents an annual report documenting for all departments the range of equal opportunity measures taken in the previous year. The report is then made available online for all employees.

Providing regular information on equal opportunities is intended to raise awareness of the issue among all employees, and demonstrates where action is needed and support is available. Dialog promotes mutual understanding.

Discussions between equal opportunities officers and department heads

In order to advance and strengthen equal opportunity measures within the individual departments of CAIS, the equal opportunities office will hold face-to-face discussions with department heads on equal opportunity work that may be necessary or desired prior to producing its report.

Anti-discrimination

General Act on Equal Treatment (AGG)

CAIS deems discrimination in the workplace to be a very significant problem. The General Act on Equal Treatment (AGG) underlies its anti-discrimination concept, which prohibits all discrimination against individuals on the basis of personal characteristics, including:

1. Ethnic and social origin
2. Gender
3. Religion or worldview
4. Disability
5. Age
6. Sexual identity
7. Other personal characteristics not covered by this list but that may be the basis of discrimination (to be justified on a case-by-case basis).

For CAIS as an employer, possible discrimination mainly affects the actual areas of employment and people's access to these areas, as well as working conditions, systems of pay, and the (further) qualification of employees.

In practice, the AGG distinguishes five forms of individual or group-related unequal treatment:

1. Direct discrimination: situation-dependent unequal treatment when people start from the same position.
2. Indirect discrimination: structural discrimination as a result of neutral provisions, measures, criteria, or procedures with a discriminatory effect.
3. Harassment: violation of human dignity (§ 1 (1) of the Basic Law) through intimidation, hostility, humiliation, degradation, or insult.
4. Sexual harassment: in the sense of the criminal offense in general, and in the work context "any intentional, sexually determined behavior that degrades the dignity of employees in the workplace" (employment protection legislation (BeschSchG)).
5. Instructing others to behave in any of the above ways.

According to § 12 AGG, the employer must take precautions to prevent or eliminate unequal treatment. CAIS reserves the right to intervene in the aforementioned points by involving the equal opportunities office or the works council, and by eliciting any necessary assistance from the HR department. As part of the anti-discrimination efforts of CAIS, the Equal Opportunities Plan also serves to intervene in advance in the event of indirect discrimination (see (2)), and to ensure non-discriminatory alternatives. In the case of points (3) and (4), CAIS reserves the right to support a criminal complaint in consultation with the aggrieved person. In doing so, all precautions must be taken to protect the privacy of the employees concerned, insofar as this does not conflict with the requirements of the investigating authorities involved.

Depending on the severity of any misconduct, the following sanctions are possible:

- employee interview involving the equal opportunities office
- warning
- relocation
- in case of repetition: entry in the employee's service record,
- in the case of serious violations that make further cooperation impossible: termination of contract with or without notice

Persons involved are entitled to clarification of the facts with the involvement of management, works council, equal opportunities office, ombudsperson, and HR department.

CAIS as a whole has a consistent zero-tolerance anti-discrimination policy as a matter of principle.

Preventing discrimination

CAIS provides new appointments with a mandatory briefing on its anti-discrimination policy, thereby ensuring that all employees have the same level of information on how to deal with discrimination.

Non-discriminatory language

CAIS supports anti-discrimination by using language that is as non-discriminatory as possible.

“The making of distinctions, however, is both a core function and a basic structural principle of language. Every word (and also every grammatical structure) already distinguishes the world at first sight into two categories: one that contains everything that is denoted by the word, and one that contains everything that is not denoted by the word” (Stefanowitsch, 2012).

Stefanowitsch therefore goes on to argue that discriminatory language can never be entirely avoided, making it all the more important to deal with it consciously.

Adhering to the following rules can minimize discriminatory and inappropriate written and oral communication (University of Applied Sciences Constance, n.d.):

1. Avoiding sweeping judgments and statements based on certain characteristics of a group or person.
2. Examining how far it is necessary to emphasize a characteristic of a person that appears to be or is interpreted as being “different”. This is especially the case if this feature is not chosen by the person her/himself (e.g. red sweater or green hair vs. skin color or disability).
3. Rejecting as a matter of principle the use of gendered terms to refer to people in general.
4. CAIS takes gender equality into account in both its internal and external communication (see also § 4 LGG NRW), its printed forms following § 4 LGG NRW, which states that “gender-neutral pronouns are to be used. If these cannot be found, then use is to be made of the feminine and masculine form of language”. Use of the generic masculine form is as a rule not permitted.

In addition, especially in written communication, possibilities should be combined that ensure reader-friendliness, are accessible, and represent the respective target group. On the one hand, this can mean “neutralizing” gender in formulations, e.g. by refraining from using pronouns and instead using passive formulations (the application is ... to be filled out) or participles (those doing their doctorates, those participating). On the other, sex or gender can be made explicitly visible, for which purpose CAIS uses the so-called gender asterisk (der*die Lehrer*in). These regulations apply in particular to academic publications.

Exceptions may be made for job advertisements. Texts with a gender asterisk are not accessible since they cannot be read aloud (see also German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted, n.d.). Advertisements for posts should be formulated in as gender-neutral a way as possible in order to address persons of any gender and any gender identity. If necessary, it should be pointed out in the job advertisement that the gender asterisk is not used for reasons of accessibility.

Compatibility of family and career

CAIS supports an organizational culture that promotes flexibility and personal responsibility, and one where the willingness of all employees to perform can develop. The concept of mobile working is an integral part of the CAIS work philosophy: employees who use these work options are on an equal footing with employees who work on site. Whenever possible, relevant discussions and meetings are held between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., so that both part-time employees and employees with children can be fully integrated into the work and development processes at CAIS.

CAIS explicitly opposes a 24/7 work culture and respects the non-availability of its employees outside working hours, unless this is essential in exceptional cases.

Parental leave and care period

CAIS actively supports extended paternity leave as a still underrepresented portion of shared parental leave. The loss of labour power of those taking parental leave is accommodated by appropriate substitutions within the department. At management level, mandatory decision-making processes must be compensated as far as possible by other managers at the same or higher level.

The classic breadwinner model is also being increasingly questioned in Germany and replaced by alternative models. In addition, caring for children up to the age of three in combination with professional demands is a particular challenge for parents. Although parents are entitled to a childcare place, long waiting lists often make it difficult to plan appropriately.

CAIS responds flexibly to potential day-to-day difficulties that young children present for working professionals. For example, by providing

- spontaneous childcare in the event of kindergarten closure
- special leave in the event of child illness
- on-site childcare services

Care period

Unforeseeable events such as illness and accidents, as well as the associated rehabilitation of family members, are a challenge for the work context. Since the introduction of the Caregiver Leave Act, employees have been entitled to take time off work for a limited period (six months) without pay to care for a relative in need of care, or to work part-time (15 hours per week for two years).

CAIS is aware of the physical and psychological burden involved in caring for seriously ill relatives, and supports its employees in finding a way to deal with this situation that is acceptable to all involved.

Serious strokes of fate may make it necessary to provide permanent care for relatives beyond the statutory timeframe. In such a case, CAIS will work with the employees affected to find an individual solution that makes it possible to combine the demands of work and care, for example by increasing mobile working.

Working hours and place of work

CAIS supports its employees with family-friendly working hours and mobile working at suitable workstations, and ensures participation in important meetings via digital channels (e.g. Skype, Zoom). Wherever possible, CAIS also takes into account the concerns of employees regarding the number of hours that they are obliged to work, and how these hours are distributed.

Business trips

If possible, business trips should finish before 8:00 p.m. and not take place on weekends. If childcare or care for a person in need of care cannot be provided in any other way, CAIS will reimburse the costs of care or nursing incurred as a result of a business trip and the longer working hours associated with it.

Advice and support

As a family-friendly employer, CAIS also supports its employees in reconciling work and care by:

- providing information on counseling and support services
- organizing working hours and location in as family-friendly a way as possible
- ensuring that personnel development matches life phases

Personnel selection and development

Job advertisements

CAIS points out in job advertisements that it particularly supports the careers of women, and that applications from women are therefore especially welcome. This also applies to applications from severely disabled persons and persons with equal status.

In order to avoid discrimination (see also § 7 (1) AGG), posts must be advertised with the following addition: "We actively promote professional equality for all people! Applications are welcome from all people, regardless of age, gender (f, m, d), and cultural and social background. Applications from people from underrepresented groups are particularly welcome. In the case of equal suitability and qualification, applications from severely disabled persons or persons of equal status will be given preferential consideration".

The procedure for job applications is governed by CAIS personnel guidelines.

Appointments

A selection committee is formed to fill an advertised post. As a rule, this committee consists of three members of CAIS and is chaired by a member of the CAIS management or a person delegated by the management. The selection committee also includes a member from the department to which the advertised post belongs and a representative from the equal opportunities office. The works council is informed about job advertisements and the selection process.

In line with the regulations for public employers set out in § 165 SGB IX, CAIS invites severely disabled applicants to an interview without exception.

Promotion, qualification, further training

CAIS supports measures that serve to promote the equal opportunities of people, regardless of age, gender (f, m, d), and cultural and social background.

1. This is done by promoting further training measures that can contribute to a career within and outside the organization. Support is provided, for example, for active participation in (academic) conferences, further training courses, and workshops, as well as proofreading for planned publications.

2. Measures are also supported that serve to raise the awareness of CAIS employees with regard to issues of diversity, including enabling them to participate in external training courses (e.g. intercultural competence, gender-specific aspects in training).
3. The equal opportunities office provides employees with a continuously updated overview of external training courses and coaching related to equal opportunities.
4. The equal opportunities office provides employees access to selected literature for individual training on issues to do with equal opportunities.

Appointments to committees and selection criteria for fellowships

When appointing members to committees (e.g. advisory board, program commission), attention should be paid to gender balance and, where possible, to other aspects relevant to diversity (e.g. origin, disability). The selection criteria for fellowships should include gender sensitivity and gender equality. Projects and calls for proposals should be designed in such a way that the consideration of gender mainstreaming is implicit..

Evaluation

There is a regular survey, review and presentation (institute jour fixe, management, annual report) with regard to developments and measures in equal opportunity policy in the individual areas, especially with regard to personnel planning and development in the various groups of employees.

In accordance with the recommendations of the LGG NRW, this Equal Opportunities Plan is drawn up for a period of two years. During this time, it will be continuously updated and continued on the basis of regular surveys of needs and the planning of measures in the individual areas of CAIS. Achievement of the Plan's objectives will be reviewed in the fourth quarter of 2021, with the evaluation being published within the institute. The results of the evaluation will determine whether this Plan will be continued or whether a new plan will be created.

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