

Equality in organisational activities

Goals of the training:

- To learn more about concepts and legislation related to discrimination
- To better understand discrimination as a phenomenon as well as its causes
- To acquire tools to help you create and maintain a safe, open, respectful and encouraging student culture



Structure of the training:

What is discrimination in organisational activities?

- Defining equality-related concepts and legislation
- Higher education bullying + the special characteristics of organisational activities

How to prevent and take action against harassment:

- Harassment as a phenomenon
- Principles of safe space + equality plan
- Student humour
- Persons in charge of equality and harassment contact persons

Supporting someone who has encountered harassment:

- Harassment case
- Harassment is a problem for the entire community

Discrimination in organisational activities

Guiding legislation:

- In accordance with the **Non-Discrimination Act** (1325/2014), equality means that all people are equal and that no one may be discriminated against on the grounds of personal characteristics.
*Grounds of discrimination mentioned in the Non-Discrimination Act:
Age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, disability, state of health, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics.*
- The **Equality Act** prohibits gender-based discrimination (Act on Equality between Women and Men, 609/1986). Equal opportunities and equal treatment must be ensured to everyone regardless of their assumed gender, gender identity or gender expression.

Discrimination

- Treating a person or a group of people differently than other people in the same position without an acceptable reason, on the grounds of personal characteristics.
- Indirect discrimination refers to situations where ostensibly neutral rules or operating methods cause certain individuals to be in an unfavourable position compared to others.

Harassment

- Behaviour that violates human dignity.
- Is based on the grounds of discrimination defined in legislation.
- Harassment creates a disparaging, humiliating or threatening atmosphere towards another person.
- **It is possible to experience harassment even if you do not belong to a group covered by the grounds of discrimination yourself.**
- Gender-based and sexual harassment

Higher education bullying

- According to the Finnish Student Health Survey (2016), 7.5% of students reported having been bullied during their studies.
- The bully was usually another student.
- Bullying in general:
 - Baseless criticism related to studies
 - Disparagement or humiliation
 - Verbal attacks
 - Mocking related to personal characteristics
 - Criticism and damaging another person's social relationships

There are continuities linked to bullying and being bullied:
Around half of those who have bullied others in higher education institutions stated that they had also bullied previously during their school years.

What is special about organisational activities?

- Peer culture, volunteering, part-time nature, leisure time (no official obligations)
- Action can focus on individual events or campaigns (no fixed communities or groups)
- Social media and digital communities
- Partying
- Aspects related to the nature of hobby activities (games, camps, politics)
- Employees, people in positions of trust, volunteers and target groups all mixed up

What kinds of harassment situations are identified in organisations?

- Touching and commenting veiled in familiarity: 'culture of intimacy'
- Party cultures, different codes for different situations, intoxicants, groping at parties
- The people who grope others are known, but no one knows how to take action against their behaviour
- Slander and rumours that spread effectively in social media
- Sexually charged stalking, harassment and pressuring
- Insensitive ways of talking, sexual suggestions, racy jokes

How to prevent and take action against harassment?

Taking action against discrimination and harassment first requires identifying them.

Norms and power structures underlying harassment:

- The structures are ways of behaviour, speaking and thought that are often maintained unconsciously and are a part of culture.
- They determine what is considered as acceptable behaviour in different situations as well as who has the power to determine it.
- The consequences of the division of power include the more frequent and systematic disparagement of certain kinds of experiences (e.g. those of women and minorities). This leads to harassment not being taken seriously.
- The rules of behaviour change when these structures are questioned and made visible.
- The change often leads to conflict when privileges become visible and are questioned.

Principles of safe space

Basic guidelines designed to ensure a nice, safe and relaxed atmosphere for all participants. It is a good idea to make the participants commit to these rules. In possible problem situations, you can appeal to their binding nature when resolving the situation.

What increases safety and creates a sense of belonging?

- Safe atmosphere: trust, the right to be vulnerable and to express oneself without fear
- Assuming diversity
- Awareness of norms: being aware of the effects of exclusionary norms and dismantling them in both speech and practices
- Right to self-determination: we can choose the aspects of ourselves that are meaningful in any given situation
- Respecting privacy: I get to choose what I reveal of myself
- Accessibility

Principles of safe space

What increases safety and creates a sense of belonging?

- Every one of us is an individual, and our personal boundaries, for instance, may differ quite dramatically. Do not make generalisations based on your own preferences.
- Do not make assumptions on another person's identity, gender, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. You cannot know another person's experiences, thoughts or situation in life. However, as we still constantly make assumptions about other people, try to at least be aware of yours.
- Do not define another person's experience or identity for them.
- Be open and listen. Respect other people as human beings and do not question or judge them for being different.

Equality plan

A plan made by an organisation on how it promotes equality and both prevents and takes action against discrimination in its own operations.

- It is crucial to take the opinions and experiences of members into account when creating the plan. They can be charted through wellbeing surveys or polls, for instance.
 - Divided into sections
 - Responsibility for the objectives assigned to specific parties
 - Lists the measures to be taken to try and reach the objectives
 - Measuring the realisation of the objectives
- Taking various groups that possibly experience unequal treatment into account.
- Listening to minorities when advocating their issues.

Equality plan

Some examples of themes that the equality plan should cover:

- Transparency of the operations
 - Good administration: transparency, knowing what is being decided and how, the opportunity to participate in meetings and read the minutes. No wheeling and dealing, pressuring, withholding information or corruption.
- Pricing
 - Participation fees to events, such as anniversaries, remain reasonable. Free events are organised.
- Communication
 - Comprehensive, anticipatory and transparent. Ambiguities are avoided and information is provided early enough. Relevant languages are used for the communication, and the opportunity to get in contact is always provided.
- Gender and sexuality
 - Getting rid of gendered practices. Gender or sexual orientation is not assumed or asked unnecessarily.

Equality plan

- Accessibility
 - Event communications mention whether there is an accessible entrance to the venue. Not simply 'unfortunately not accessible' but a clarification on how (e.g. steps, thresholds). Sign-up forms ask whether the participant requires special arrangements. A contact person for accessibility issues is named.
- Taking students who started in different years into account
 - All students are encouraged to join the activities – a culture in which everyone feels welcome is fostered. Different kinds of events are organised.
- Being alcohol-free
 - No activity can obligate anyone to drink alcohol, and there should never be any pressure to drink. A sufficient number of alcohol-free events are organised, and some effort is put into the available non-alcoholic options (something else than just water).

Equal treatment and participation in events

- Go through the ground rules before the event.
- Theme selection: does the theme include any risks, should the participants be instructed about their outfits?
- Avoid inside jokes.
- Have a separate quiet space and some water available.
- It is always ok to call the emergency number (112) or remove a person whose behaviour causes a disturbance.
- The participants' safety is the most important consideration – events can always be suspended.
- It is not your fault if something happens. Doing your best is enough.

Student humour

- A crucial part of student culture, at times colourful and derisive.
- Humour is a difficult art form – defining clear lines for good taste is difficult if not impossible.
- Much depends on the reception and interpretation.
- The starting point must be that everyone has fun, is comfortable and feels safe.
- Humour is unsuccessful if it offends someone, makes someone feel unsafe or makes it difficult or uncomfortable for someone to participate because of it.
- **Negative stereotypes and racist jokes reproduce discriminatory power structures.**
- Should aim to be light-hearted, insightful and fun – for everyone. For this reason, it is best to avoid difficult, sensitive, polemical, heavy or otherwise emotive topics.
- People must be able to come for some light-hearted fun without the risk of being forced to encounter heavy topics unexpectedly.
- It is a question of atmosphere: tasteless jokes negatively affect everyone's mood.

Person in charge of equality

All organisations should have a person in charge of equality issues, who is also prepared to act in case of disturbances.

- Critically assesses the organisation's activities, identifies practices and structures that produce inequality and informs the board of any problems related to equality.
- Solutions to the problems are discussed and implemented in cooperation with other parties, under the direction of the person in charge of equality.
- Maintains opportunities to give feedback and makes the equality surveys.
- Coordinates the creation of an equality plan and the principles of safe space.
- Promoting equality and questioning traditions often meets with opposition. Updating traditions and making them more equal may be a sensitive issue for the community, which means that the person should be prepared to encounter emotionally charged criticism from others.

Harassment contact person

- Maintains contact channels such as a problem situation form and a form for continuous feedback.
- Processes the contacts: offers help and support but does not resolve the situations or act as a judge.
- If the person making the contact wishes to resolve the situation, the contact person helps them with arranging a meeting and moving forward.
- Is objective and does not make comments that include a value judgement.
- The primary task is to listen to and support the person who has experienced harassment.
- All contacts are confidential.
- Problem situations are always the subjective experiences of specific people, and the situations differ. There is no universal model solution that suits all cases.
- Let the person describe and define their own experience.
- The person accused of harassment always has the right to defend themselves.

The wellbeing of the person who has experienced harassment can be improved without 'resolving' the case or hearing the accused person.

Supporting someone who has experienced harassment

- It is difficult to identify harassment – especially immediately. It is possible to realise that an experience was unjust a long time after it happened.
- It is very difficult to take action against harassment without support.
- It is possible that the person who has experienced harassment does not want to make it clear to the harasser that they have felt the harasser's behaviour was inappropriate.
- The person who has experienced harassment might also not have the resources to resolve the situation but still wishes to receive support.
- Harassment situations are about the misuse of a power relationship and about the harasser having the upper hand in the situation. It is nearly impossible for the person experiencing harassment to speak up about the matter to the harasser. This requires extraordinary courage, and the responsibility to do so should not be placed on the individual.
- **Instructions that demand action from the victim of harassment thrust the responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim and reinforce an unequal operating culture in the premises in question.**

*Harassment is **a problem for the entire community** and can best be weeded out by creating a culture, practices and operating methods that condemn harassment and emphasise collective responsibility in the realisation of equality.*

Case: Contact

In groups, discuss:

- How you would act in the situation
- What should be taken into account

Case You are a member of the board in a subject organisation and receive the following email:

A certain person has approached me in an unpleasant manner at several parties. The person is otherwise fairly nice in everyday life and clearly a popular figure in their circle of friends, but I do not associate with them much personally. I did not think much of it at first but they have become more and more aggressive each time and approach me with increasing frequency. At one party, I think they tried to kiss me. At least they suddenly came very close to me after talking on the dance floor but then went somewhere else after being pulled away by their friend.

At our subject organisation's recent Christmas party, they approached me at the smoking area and tried to talk to me through all the noise but I tried to give them no attention. After a moment, they grabbed me behind the neck and pressed themselves against me. However, I managed to pull away and immediately left the party, as well. My friend saw at least a part of this and urged me to tell someone about it. I always feel weird and icky after these cases. Now I would not want to be at the same party with this person anymore or even see them at the university. The idea of participating in our subject organisation's upcoming parties makes me anxious.

Regards, Notora Cism

To conclude

Promoting equality requires constant, goal-oriented action, but even small acts can lead to big changes!

- Harassment is always a group phenomenon and **a problem for the entire community**, affecting all its members. It does not only concern the target of bullying, but also the bully, onlookers and the entire student community and staff.
- Only by listening to the members can you chart their needs.
- Tradition is not grounds for discrimination.

Thank you!

