HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

Survey Report

Professional Development and Working Conditions — HR Excellence in Research

Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

On 19 July 2023, the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IPS PAS) received from the European Commission the right to use the prestigious HR Excellence in Research label. This label is awarded to institutions that meet high standards in creating favorable professional development and working conditions, preventing discrimination, and applying transparent recruitment procedures, as described in the *European Charter for Researchers* and the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*.

In connection with the IPS PAS's efforts to renew its right to use the HR Excellence in Research label, a survey was conducted among the Institute's employees to assess compliance with the principles set out in the above-mentioned documents. The anonymous survey was conducted using an online questionnaire between 5 and 14 May 2025.[1] A total of 46 completed questionnaires were obtained, representing a 50% participation rate among the Institute's employees.

As of 30 April 2025, the Institute employed 92 people, including 72 in research positions. Women accounted for 38.1% of all employees (men 61.9%), with women predominating in administrative positions and men in research positions. As in other research units, at the IPS PAS the predominance of men in research positions increases hierarchically: among junior researchers (assistants and adjuncts), men accounted for 65.1% (women 34.9%), while among senior researchers (habilitated doctors and professors) the proportion was 70.6% (women 29.4%).

The distribution of respondents by position (administrative or academic, and within the latter category—junior or senior) was relatively proportional to the employment structure. At the end of April 2025, administrative staff accounted for 21.74% of all employees, and research staff for 78.26% (including 43.05% senior staff and 56.95% junior staff). Among respondents, academic staff accounted for 63% (including 37% senior and 4.8% junior), and research and administrative support staff accounted for 37%.

The survey consisted of 31 questions: 21 closed questions and 10 open-ended questions allowing free-form responses. The questions were grouped into three thematic blocks—Internal Regulations, Working and Development Conditions, and Ethics and Equal Treatment—and the responses were analyzed according to the four areas described in the HR Excellence in Research documents: Ethics and Professional Aspects, Recruitment and Selection, Working Conditions, and Training and Development.

Ethics and Professional Aspects

Freedom to Conduct Scientific Research

[1] The questionnaire was made available to employees on 5 May 2025, informing them that the survey would end on 11 May 2025. On 12 May, employees were asked to complete the questionnaire by 14 May. Employees therefore had a total of 10 calendar days to complete the questionnaire, which seems optimal given that the largest influx of surveys took place between 5 and 11 May (73.9% of completed surveys).

Freedom to conduct scientific research is crucial from the perspective of the European Charter for Researchers. The survey results showed that the Institute's employees enjoy considerable freedom in choosing the subject of their research. As many as 84.8% of respondents agreed with this statement (including 73.9% who "strongly" agreed and 10.9% who "somewhat" agreed); only 2.2% disagreed, and these were only moderately negative opinions (the option "rather disagree" rather than "strongly disagree"). This question was not applicable to 13% of respondents (administrative staff).

A smaller proportion of respondents (n=16) answered the open-ended question about the main threats to their research, with four responses merely confirming the freedom of Institute employees to choose research topics, methods, and techniques, as well as how research results are developed and disseminated. Analysis of the responses showed that, as in the 2022 survey, respondents most often identified threats to their research in external factors beyond the Institute's control. These included, above all, the influence of state policy, including attempts to ideologize research results or political pressure in the event of changes in political formations (6 responses). Slightly fewer respondents (4) cited insufficient funding for science, which, combined with the current method of evaluating researchers and the parameterization of scientific units with a neoliberal focus on obtaining results, may favor mainstream over niche research in external competitive procedures. One response concerned external factors related to the current geopolitical situation in the region (the war in Ukraine) and the associated technical and logistical difficulties in carrying out specific scientific tasks, such as access to sources. One indication also concerned threats to research freedom at the Institute related to the organizational culture of the IPS PAS decision-making bodies.

A comparison of the 2022 and 2025 survey results regarding respondents' assessment of research freedom at the Institute shows consistency. Respondents still have considerable freedom in choosing research topics and in the further stages of the research process. When they do perceive threats in this area, they associate them primarily with the external environment and its institutional conditions, both in relation to the political situation (*politics*) and to the state's science policy in particular (*policy*). Interestingly, regarding external factors posing threats to researchers' autonomy, between 2022 and 2025 the number of respondents indicating *politics* decreased (in 2022, more than half of all responses) while those indicating *policy* increased (though in 2025, there were only a few mentions). A cautious hypothesis can be advanced that the change in the political situation in the country, which took place in October 2023, may have influenced the softening of Institute employees' assessment of external factors potentially threatening research freedom at the IPS. However, given the limited number of responses in both surveys, these results should be treated with appropriate caution. On the other hand, a change compared to 2022 that warrants reflection (although it was a single mention) is the appearance among respondents' answers of an internal factor related to the organizational culture of the Institute's decision-making bodies as one that may restrict research freedom.

Cases of Ethical Violations at the Institute

The survey results showed that the ethical principles researchers should follow in their work are well known to the Institute's employees. 95.6% of respondents declared familiarity with the *Code of Ethics for Researchers* (including over two-thirds—68.2%—who rated their knowledge of this document as "good," with the rest rating it as "poor"); only 4.2% indicated unfamiliarity with these regulations.

Respondents were also asked whether they had encountered any cases of ethics violations related to research or publications during their work at the IPS PAS in the last two years. The vast majority—

89.1% of respondents—had not encountered such cases. One in ten respondents (10.9%) reported otherwise. Those who reported ethics violations related to research or publications by Institute employees were then asked to specify the form of these violations. Eight responses were given, including: two indications of plagiarism/improper authorship attribution, two about dishonest or biased reviews, and single mentions of research practices that could endanger research subjects, publishing in predatory or dubious journals, and participation in so-called paper mills. None of the respondents reported fabrication of results or falsification of data processing. The remaining indications could be classified as "other," including one report of imperfections in internal communication among employees (not institutional in nature but suggesting a need to improve employees' soft skills). Two responses from the "other" category may suggest a need for the Institute to provide training for employees on what constitutes a breach of publication and research rules and clarification of ethical rules applicable to research in specific situations, such as in areas affected by armed conflict.

It is advisable for the Institute to take action to disseminate knowledge among employees on how to prevent breaches of ethical rules, considering the widespread misidentification of the bodies or persons who, on behalf of the Institute, have the authority to deal with cases of breaches of professional rules and ethics, including research and publication ethics. When asked to whom they should report violations of professional ethics and conduct, including research and publication ethics, respondents commonly and incorrectly indicated the Ethics Committee of the Scientific Council of the IPS PAS, the Institute's management, or department supervisors or heads. Among the responses provided, there were only four correct references to the Institute's disciplinary ombudsman.

Periodic Evaluation and Bonus System for Employees at the IPS PAS

Periodic employee evaluations are conducted annually based on uniform scoring criteria, which are announced in advance in a uniform document published on the IPS website. These criteria include: publications and scientific projects carried out at the IPS PAS (parametric part) as well as participation in conferences, awards and distinctions, participation in the scientific life of the community, expert functions performed, material effects of scientific activity, teaching work, supervision, work as an editor and reviewer, popularization of science, and others (descriptive part). The assessment is based on employee reports submitted annually through the IPS PAS electronic reporting system (Panteon). Employees are assessed by the Scientific Council of the IPS PAS based on an analysis of their scientific activity carried out by the Commission for the Periodic Assessment of Employees of the IPS PAS, which consists of members of the Personnel Committee of the Scientific Council and the Deputy Director for Scientific Affairs. Employees have the right to appeal the periodic assessment to the Vice-President of the PAS supervising the work of Department I of the PAS.

The survey results showed that the vast majority (87%) of respondents are well aware of the criteria for evaluating their work (13% indicated they are not very familiar with the criteria, and 3% indicated complete unfamiliarity). Importantly, over three-quarters (76.1%) of respondents believe that periodic assessment of employees at the Institute is conducted in a transparent and impartial manner (30.4% "strongly" agree and 45.7% "somewhat" agree); 4.3% disagreed, none expressed an unambiguously critical opinion (no one selected "strongly disagree"), and less than one in five (19.6%) were not affected by this question (administrative staff or respondents unable to answer).

Institute employees are less familiar with the internal regulations on the awarding of bonuses for scientific achievements than with the criteria for evaluating their work: slightly more than half (57%)

of respondents indicated familiarity with these regulations, but one-third (33%) rated their knowledge on this subject as poor, and 11% declared complete lack of knowledge. Simultaneously, according to respondents, the current employee bonus system adequately rewards their individual achievements. 84% of respondents agreed with this statement, including 73.9% who answered "rather yes" and 10.9% who answered "definitely yes". The opposite opinion was held by 15.2% of respondents, including 10.9% who considered the current employee bonus system inadequate for their individual achievements, and 4.3% who expressed a strongly negative opinion. Respondents who critically assessed the current employee bonus system, pointing to possible areas for change, most often referred to imperfections resulting from its reliance on quantitative indicators (points awarded for publications in journals and with publishers included in the ministerial list), while acknowledging the external conditions determining the introduction of such solutions at the Institute. Respondents pointed out that designing periodic employee evaluations based on quantitative criteria does not adequately value the qualitative aspects of researchers' work, which relate to the assessment of their research's impact on the scientific community, work for the scientific community and the Institute itself (organizational activity), and grant activity when applications for funding are unsuccessful. In addition, there were isolated opinions indicating the need to value intra-institutional cooperation (grant and publication-related) in periodic assessment and to improve transparency in communicating about the Institute's employee bonus system.

Evaluation of Mechanisms to Prevent Discrimination at the Institute

Over the past two years, the IPS PAS has developed and implemented a coherent framework to combat discriminatory practices in the workplace. This framework consists of institutional measures: the appointment by the Director of the Institute of an Equal Opportunity Officer, the adoption of appropriate internal regulations (*Regulations to Combat Discrimination and Mobbing at the IPS PAS* and *Regulations for Internal Reporting at the IPS PAS*), and activities to raise awareness of discrimination and mobbing issues at the Institute (workshops and training courses).

Regarding the above-mentioned internal regulations, it should be emphasized that the *Internal Reporting Regulations*, as a uniform document defining the internal regulations for reporting violations of the law and follow-up actions at the Institute, were the IPS PAS's response to national regulations on the protection of whistleblowers, adopted on 24 June 2024. In turn, the *Regulations to Combat Discrimination and Mobbing at the IPS PAS* established the Institute's policy on combating discrimination and mobbing. These regulations specifically: define the rules for reporting manifestations of discrimination and mobbing and the procedure for addressing them, define discrimination and mobbing, specify the Institute's obligations in combating discrimination and mobbing, specify the bodies authorized to act in matters of combating discrimination and mobbing (the Equal Opportunity Officer and the Commission for Reporting Discrimination and Mobbing), including the procedure and manner of their appointment and the actions they take, the form, manner, and conditions for reporting discrimination and mobbing, the actions of the Director of the Institute after the conclusion of proceedings in a case of discrimination and mobbing, and the actions of the IPS in disseminating knowledge about the anti-discrimination and anti-mobbing policy in force at the unit.

The survey results showed that employees' knowledge of these two regulations varied, with respondents clearly more familiar with the provisions of the *Regulations to Combat Discrimination and Mobbing at the IPS PAS* than with the *Regulations for Internal Reporting*. The percentage of people

declaring good knowledge of anti-mobbing regulations was 63%, and of internal reporting regulations 22%; the percentage of respondents indicating poor knowledge of anti-mobbing regulations was 33%, and of internal reporting regulations 42%. The biggest difference concerns the percentage of people declaring a lack of knowledge of the above regulations: in the case of anti-mobbing regulations, it was 5% of respondents, and in the case of internal reporting regulations, it was 37%.

To strengthen equality measures at the Institute, including the need to prevent discrimination and unfair treatment in the workplace as identified in the previous survey, on 2 November 2024 the Director of the IPS PAS appointed an Equal Opportunity Officer. The current survey showed that almost three-quarters (73.9%) of respondents assessed this fact positively, including more than half (52.2%) "definitely positively" and almost one in five (21.7%) "rather positively". Simultaneously, one in five (19.6%) respondents did not assess the appointment either positively or negatively, which may be related to the short period of time between the appointment and the survey (approximately 6 months). 4.4% of respondents assessed the appointment negatively (2.2% indicated "rather negatively" and 2.2% "definitely negatively"). The percentage of people who declared unawareness of the appointment of an Equal Opportunity Officer at the Institute is within the margin of statistical error (2.2%).

According to the survey results, employees not only demonstrate good knowledge of the fact that the Director of the IPS appointed an Equal Opportunity Officer but also correctly identify this function with its scope of activity. When asked to whom cases of mobbing, discrimination, and unequal treatment should be reported at the Institute, over 42% of respondents gave the correct answer, indicating only the Equal Opportunity Officer (18 responses). Other responses included: the Equal Opportunity Officer in conjunction with the Institute's management or the department supervisor or head (6 responses), only the Institute's management (3 responses), the Institute's management and the department supervisor or head (3 responses), the disciplinary committee of the Scientific Council (exclusively or in connection with the Institute's management—2 responses), only the head of the department (1 response), an employee representative (1 response), a legal advisor (1 response), the ombudsman (1 response), and other options, including "I don't know" (10).

However, slightly less than two-thirds of incorrect responses regarding the person or body to whom cases of discrimination at the Institute should be reported, or declarations of lack of knowledge in this area, clearly indicate the need to take measures to increase employees' knowledge of how to properly refer specific cases to the appropriate authorities. This is important because the previous survey in 2022 already pointed to problems with identifying the persons or bodies to whom cases of discrimination should be reported.[2]

The survey showed that respondents perceive the Institute as a workplace that provides equal opportunity for employees in the four areas highlighted in the survey:

- During the recruitment of employees: 84.8% of respondents who answered questions in this area felt that the Institute provided equal opportunities during the recruitment process (including 47.9% who felt this as "rather true" and 36.9% who felt this as "definitely true"); 1.5% expressed the opposite

[2] However, in the 2022 survey, cases of discrimination were identified mainly in the context of gender equality, while in the current survey, the issue of equal opportunity violations was treated more broadly. Above all, however, the 2022 survey was conducted before the Director of the Institute appointed an Equal Opportunity Officer.

opinion (these were strongly negative responses, not moderately negative—the option "definitely not" rather than "rather not"); 2% were not concerned by this question.

- In professional promotions: The total percentage of respondents convinced that the Institute provides equal opportunity to its employees is the same (84.8%) as in the recruitment process, but in the promotion procedure, respondents more often chose the "definitely true" option (47.9%) rather than "rather true" (36.9%); 1.5% of all respondents were of the opposite opinion, but unlike in recruitment processes, negative responses were moderate rather than decisive (answers "rather not" instead of "definitely not"); as before, 2% were not concerned by this question.

- In access to research funding: Here, the distribution of responses was similar to the results obtained in the previous two areas: 84.8% of respondents felt that the Institute provided equal opportunity in access to research funding (with 52.2% of respondents feeling moderately so [answer "rather true"] and 32.6% feeling definitely so); 1.5% were of the opposite opinion (indicating only a moderate, rather than a definite, lack of a sense of equal opportunity); as in the previous areas, 2% of all respondents were not concerned by this question.

- Representation in decision-making bodies: This was the area in which, compared to the other three areas, the smallest percentage of respondents (76.1%) declared that they felt the Institute provided equal opportunity to its employees. Simultaneously, in this area, respondents were more likely to say they "rather" felt this way (54.3%) than that they "definitely" felt this way (21.8%). This area also had the largest number of respondents (15.2%) who declared a lack of a sense of equality, with 10.9% choosing the option "rather not" and the rest "definitely not"; 2% of all respondents were not concerned by this question.

To summarize, the share of respondents who declared that they feel the Institute provides equal opportunity to its employees is similar in the four areas highlighted, although the area related to employee representation in the Institute's decision-making bodies scored slightly lower: in this case, not only did the fewest respondents feel that the Institute provides equal opportunity for employees, but this feeling was also significantly weaker than in the case of recruitment processes, professional promotions, and access to research funding.

In addition, an analysis of the area of equal opportunity in terms of formal employee representation, broken down by gender, shows that women expect the situation to improve. More than three-quarters (78.6%) answered affirmatively when asked whether their formal representation at the IPS needed to be strengthened (in comparison: 17.6% of male respondents answered affirmatively, and 45.6% of respondents overall gave such an answer)—see also: Gender Equality Plan for the Institute of Political Studies of the PAS for 2025-2027.

Furthermore, when asked in an open-ended question to identify possible areas or groups that should be strengthened at the Institute in terms of equal opportunity, respondents most often indicated two groups of employees. The first group was identified by respondents explicitly as junior researchers (4 out of 10 responses). The second group was people with care responsibilities for dependents. Numerous scientific studies indicate that in Poland, care and educational responsibilities remain primarily women's domain, which indirectly points to this group as one for which respondents expect action to promote equal opportunity at the Institute (2 out of 10 responses to this question).[3]

[3] The remaining responses to the question about possible areas in which the Institute's equal opportunities policy should be strengthened fell into the category of "there are no such areas" or "I have no opinion on this

In light of the survey results, it can therefore be concluded that the need to strengthen formal representation at the Institute is articulated particularly in relation to two groups: women and junior researchers. Moreover, a comparison of the 2025 and 2022 survey results shows that this need has still not been met. In 2025, 45.6% of all respondents favored additional formal representation of women, compared to 41% in 2022. The demand for additional representation of junior researchers was articulated by 56.5% of all respondents in 2025 and 48% in 2022.

Recruitment and Selection

At the Institute, the recruitment process is conducted according to clear and transparent rules, based on substantive criteria, in accordance with the provisions of the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*.

To strengthen the principle of equal opportunities in the recruitment process and taking into account the results of a survey conducted among employees in 2022, between 2022 and 2025 the Institute implemented measures to increase the importance of open recruitment channels. Currently, all job advertisements are published simultaneously in two language versions (Polish and English) in several places: on the website of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, on the IPS PAS website, in the Public Information Bulletin (BIP) of the IPS PAS, on social media (Facebook IPS PAS), and on EURAXESS. This approach has also been adopted by the Institute when recruiting for positions offered under NCN grants (additionally, such offers are published in the Tender database for NCN projects).

All competitions are conducted by competition committees consisting of five members. The Director of the Institute appoints the deputy director for scientific affairs, the head of the department or team for which the recruitment is taking place, and three other members to the Committee. Members of the competition committees are required to avoid conflicts of interest. Substantive criteria are decisive in the selection of candidates; gender balance in the employment structure is sought as far as possible, while maintaining the priority of substantive criteria. Minutes are taken of the work of the competition committees. Candidates always receive appropriate feedback from the Institute: first (ex ante) after submitting their application, and second (ex post) on the results of the competition.

Because the Institute recruits new employees exclusively through competitions and employees may serve as members of competition committees, the survey asked respondents about their knowledge of the *Regulations for Conducting Competitions for Scientific Positions at the IPS PAS*. The survey showed that a significant majority—89.1% of respondents—are familiar with the provisions of the Regulations, with 65.2% being "very familiar" with these regulations. Slightly more than one in ten (10.9%) respondents declared unfamiliarity with these regulations.

Working Conditions

Knowledge of Internal Regulations

Because numerous changes affecting employees' situation were introduced at the Institute between 2022 and 2025, the survey aimed to examine respondents' knowledge of these regulations. Analysis of the survey results showed that this knowledge varies depending on the topic. Respondents were

topic," etc. (3 responses out of 10) and the category "other" (indicating the need to limit political criteria in the evaluation of scientific research—1 response).

most familiar with the regulations relating to their position as Institute employees, contained in the description of their duties under their contract with their employer. Here, almost all respondents (97.8%) declared good knowledge of the regulations (only 1 respondent declared poor knowledge). In turn, 93.5% of respondents indicated familiarity with the *Work Regulations*, with 63% being very familiar with them, 30.5% being somewhat familiar with them, and 6.5% of all respondents being completely unfamiliar with them.

Respondents also demonstrated good knowledge of the *Rules for Periodic Employee Evaluation*, but slightly poorer knowledge of internal regulations concerning the awarding of bonuses for scientific achievements (see the employee evaluation and bonus system at the IPS PAS). Respondents demonstrated a similar level of knowledge (although slightly worse than in the case of internal regulations concerning the awarding of bonuses for scientific achievements) with regard to the *Remuneration Regulations*. Here, 82.6% of respondents declared knowledge of the regulations (including 54.3% of all respondents who described this knowledge as good), and 6.5% of all respondents indicated unfamiliarity with these regulations.

The *Statute of the IPS PAS* was also among the regulations best known to the Institute's employees. As many as 95.6% of respondents indicated familiarity with them (including almost three-quarters—73.9%—who declared good knowledge of the Statute's provisions, with the rest knowing them poorly); 4.3% of all respondents were completely unfamiliar with the provisions of the Statute of the IPS PAS.

Among the regulations well known to Institute employees (although slightly less so than the *Rules for Periodic Employee Evaluation*, the scope of their duties contained in their contract with the employer, and the *Statute of the IPS PAS*) were the regulations on equal opportunity contained in the *Regulations to Combat Discrimination and Mobbing at the IPS PAS* (for detailed results, see Ethics and Equal Opportunity). On the other hand, regulations concerning procedures in cases of abuse and violation of general law, contained in the *Internal Reporting Regulations* (so-called whistleblowers), were among the regulations least known to Institute employees—it should be noted that not only did a relatively small percentage of respondents declare knowledge of the regulations, but this knowledge was more often described as "poor" than "good," and the percentage of people declaring a lack of knowledge in this area was the second highest result among all areas covered by the survey—immediately after the regulations concerning the doctoral school (for details, see Ethics and Equal Treatment). Poor knowledge of internal regulations concerning whistleblowers was confirmed in respondents' answers when they were asked to independently indicate (in an open question) the person or body competent to deal with cases of serious abuse and violations of general law. Among the responses, there were only 5 correct indications of the internal reporting coordinator (or the legal advisor performing this function at the Institute), and the majority of indications (89%) concerned other persons or bodies (mainly the Institute's management). It is therefore clear that in the case of internal reporting regulations, as in the case of regulations on ethics and discrimination or mobbing, the Institute needs to take action to increase employee knowledge, including in the area of correctly identifying specific cases with the bodies or persons who have the authority to proceed with and examine them.

Further analysis of the survey responses may indicate a need to take measures to increase the knowledge of Institute employees regarding regulations relating to staff training, academic promotion, and working with young researchers. The provisions of the *Regulations for Promotion Procedures* and the *Regulations of the Doctoral School* were among the regulations least familiar to respondents.

Although more than three-quarters (78.3%) of all respondents declared familiarity with the *Regulations for Promotion Procedures*, more than half (52.8%) of this group described their knowledge of these rules as "poor"; over one-fifth of all respondents (21.8%) were completely unfamiliar with these regulations. Awareness of the regulations concerning the doctoral school was even lower among respondents. Although 60.8% of respondents declared familiarity with the *Regulations of the Doctoral School*, over two-thirds of this group (67.8%) described their knowledge in this area as "poor"; in turn, 39.1% of all respondents declared unawareness of these regulations, which was the highest indication of a lack of knowledge in a specific area among all the regulations surveyed. One possible explanation for the poor knowledge of the rules concerning the doctoral school among the Institute's employees should be the fact that the Institute does not run a doctoral school on its own, and relatively few employees are involved in the activities of the School of Social Sciences (run jointly with the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the PAS and the Institute of Psychology of the PAS). Therefore, only a specific group of Institute employees can claim more in-depth (or any) knowledge of the regulations concerning doctoral schools.

Use and Evaluation of the Departmental Fund for Guaranteed Social Benefits

It is worth noting that almost all respondents (84.8%) take advantage of the benefits offered by the Departmental Fund for Guaranteed Social Benefits (DFGSB), such as holiday subsidies ("holidays under the pear tree"), cash benefits at Easter and Christmas, subsidies for sports and cultural activities, non-repayable allowances and loans, subsidies for prescription glasses, and subsidies for rail travel discount cards. Importantly, respondents generally (93.4%) considered this support to be sufficient (including 13% who rated the DFGSB offer as definitely sufficient and 80.4% as rather sufficient); 6.5% of respondents rated the DFGSB offer as rather insufficient, but no strongly critical opinions were recorded.

Opinions on Infrastructure and Equipment

The opinions of IPS PAS employees on infrastructure and equipment are the most critical compared to opinions on other aspects of working conditions. More than half of respondents (58.7%) considered the infrastructure and equipment at the Institute insufficient in the context of their work (including 30.4% who considered it definitely insufficient). The opposite opinion was held by 41.3% of respondents, with only 4.3% giving the highest rating to the infrastructure and equipment, considering it definitely sufficient for their duties.

Those who rated the Institute's infrastructure as insufficient were asked to indicate possible changes they would like to see in this area. The most frequent responses to this question were proposals to equip the Institute with a larger number of modern workstations (computers with high-speed Internet access and a package of programs for qualitative and quantitative data analysis) and to organize professional conference facilities that would meet researchers' needs in terms of space and aesthetics. Some respondents felt that there was no need to make changes to the infrastructure and equipment, provided that it remained possible to perform some of their duties remotely; others, referring to the popularization of this work model at the Institute, pointed to the need to introduce institutional support for employees in this area (such as subsidies for electricity bills, equipping employees with laptops). Among the possible proposals for changes in the Institute's infrastructure and equipment, respondents also pointed to the need to expand current access to online and physical library resources, and individual proposals concerned the creation of a common or integration space for employees and the improvement of IT service quality at the Institute.

The rather critical opinions of the Institute's employees on the available infrastructure and equipment can probably be linked to the closure at the end of 2024 of the second premises previously at the disposal of the IPS PAS (on Dworkowa Street), which provided larger conference facilities, and the related narrowing of the Institute's activities to its headquarters (on Polna Street). It should be emphasized that while employees' responses seem to indicate an understanding of the situation and the difficulties in quickly resolving the infrastructure barrier, improving access to modern computer equipment appears to be a priority for respondents.

Mechanisms to Harmonize Professional and Family Responsibilities (Work-Life Balance)

The survey results indicated that the Institute's employees perceive it as a family-friendly place. This is due to the fact that the Institute has introduced a number of mechanisms to promote work-life balance, which have been used by employees. These mechanisms included: changing the start or end time of work due to family and care responsibilities (used by 30.4% of respondents), using library resources from home computers (58.7% of respondents), and, most significantly, the widespread use by employees of the possibility of dealing with certain employee matters via email and performing professional duties remotely (91.3% of responses for both solutions). Among the mechanisms promoting work-life balance available at the Institute, the least frequently used was the possibility of a proportional reduction in the required number of points in the periodic assessment of employees who, during the reporting period, took advantage of the statutory breaks related to the birth and upbringing of a child (6.5% of respondents). The relatively low percentage of those using this mechanism compared to other mechanisms can be explained by the employment structure at the Institute, mainly related to the age and gender of employees.[4]

It should be emphasized that the possibility of a proportional reduction in the number of points required for employees returning from parental leave was introduced at the Institute in response to their requests, as reported in a survey conducted in 2022. Despite the relatively short period of time this mechanism has been in force, it has been noticed and appreciated by employees in the current survey. In their free-form comments, employees expressed the opinion that this is a mechanism that genuinely supports the academic career development of women returning to work after having a child, alleviating the stress associated with their new family and professional situation.

It is noteworthy that all respondents expressed the opinion that the current system of mechanisms promoting work-life balance meets their needs (exactly half of the respondents chose the highest answer on the scale, "definitely true," and this answer was chosen twice as often by women as by men). The unequivocally positive assessment of the current mechanisms therefore explains the lack of specific additional mechanisms that respondents would expect in terms of improving the work-life balance policy at the Institute (apart from one indication of the need to promote online departmental meetings and one indication of the need to increase wages).

Training and Development

Professional Development Conditions at the IPS

The vast majority of respondents (91.3%) considered that the Institute provides good conditions for professional development, with over a quarter (28.3%) strongly agreeing with this opinion; 8.7% of

[4] Staff data confirm that 5.4% of the Institute's employees took parental leave between 2023 and 2025.

respondents disagreed, but these were moderate opinions ("rather disagree") rather than strong disagreements ("strongly disagree").

Activities Aimed at Improving Employee Competencies (Training and Courses)

Employees were asked (in free-form response) to indicate their expectations regarding courses and training aimed at further improving their skills. Sixteen responses were given (with more than 16 indications due to the possibility of selecting more than one form). The most frequently mentioned responses (in descending order) were:

- Methodological courses and training (statistical analysis, use of quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques)—7 responses

- Use of modern technologies, including ICT and AI tools—5 responses

- Acquisition and implementation of external grants (including NCN, ERC, and European funds)—3 responses

- Language courses (English)—2 mentions

- Forms and methods of communication with foreign publishers, selection of foreign publishers, and selection and technical preparation of foreign journals—2 responses

- Individual responses concerned: public speaking (including in English), ethics in research and scientific work, equality issues, team building, and working in an international environment; there were also individual requests to expand access to databases offered by the IPS library and to individualize opportunities for improving competencies in the form of funding by the Institute for forms of education chosen independently by employees (postgraduate studies, courses, training).

Current Rules for Financing Scientific Tasks

In connection with the change in March 2025 of the rules for financing scientific tasks carried out at the Institute—specifically the restoration, after a long break, of funds at the disposal of department heads, which, in consultation with employees, may be allocated to scientific trips, conferences, research, language correction of employees' publications, etc.—respondents were asked in the survey for their opinions on these changes.

More than half (58.1%) of respondents assessed these changes positively (including 21.7% "rather positively" and 37% "definitely positively"), almost one in five (19.6%) selected the answer "neither positively nor negatively," and more than one-fifth (21.7%) of respondents were unable to assess these changes or were not affected by this question (answer "I don't know/not applicable").

The above results indicate that although the changes introduced are well received by the majority of respondents, there is a large group of people who either could not assess these changes or did not have an opinion on them. This is probably due to the short time that has passed since the introduction of the change in question and the completion of the survey (approximately one month).

Applying for and Implementing External Grants Through the Institute

The successful application for funding and implementation of research projects is one of the basic tasks of researchers that contributes to their professional development. For a research unit, this is one of

the indicators of its effectiveness, taken into account in its parametric evaluation. Therefore, given the importance of external grants for both employees and the Institute itself, the survey asked employees for their opinions on the acquisition and implementation of these grants.

Almost three-quarters (73.9%) of respondents rated the Institute's support at the stage of applying for external grants positively (including more than half of the respondents—56.5%—"rather good" and 17.4% "very good"). Noteworthy are the additional descriptive comments from respondents on the Institute's grant application and implementation support system, which point to the significant assistance provided by administrative staff (mainly from the Research and Scientific Information Service Office) in grant procedures. A critical opinion on the IPS's support in the process of applying for and implementing grants was expressed by 8.7% of respondents, while the question did not apply to one in six respondents (17.6%)—these were administrative staff.

The survey also inquired about the prevalence of the process of applying for external grants through the Institute. It turned out that about one-third (32.6%) of respondents applied for this type of grant, of which almost one-fifth (19.6%) successfully (their applications received funding from the grant institution), while the applications of 13% of applicants were rejected by the grant institution; almost a quarter (23.9%) of respondents were not concerned by this question—these were administrative staff.

In the analysis of the answers to the question about applying for external grants, it is noteworthy that over a quarter (28.3%) of respondents did not apply for external grants through the IPS PAS; 14.9% of respondents chose the answer "other," most often specifying their grant activity in the context of previously obtained or implemented grants, awaiting a decision from the grant institution, or implementing grants in places other than the Institute.

Respondents who did not implement grants during the period covered by the survey most often cited institutional barriers outside the Institute as the reasons for this situation:

- Lack of time to fulfill grant obligations due to other scientific tasks (academic promotion, work on publications)

- Low success rate in competitions in which respondents would be interested or in which they could apply at the current stage of their scientific career

The responses also included opinions about the lack of need to implement external grants due to the implementation of previously obtained grants in connection with a specific stage of scientific career, and the possibility of financing research without grants; there were also individual responses suggesting that work on grant applications through the Institute would be undertaken in the near future.

Employees were also asked to freely suggest possible mechanisms that could encourage them to apply for external grants in the future. The responses indicate a clear need to deepen respondents' knowledge of how to effectively obtain and implement projects (especially those of a strategic nature, such as ERC and Horizon) and the need for more individualized technical and substantive support at the application and implementation stages of grants, including matters relating to the structure of the application, accounting or reporting on tasks performed, and language support (financing the translation of the application into a foreign language). It is important to note that respondents requested that this type of support be available both as part of services offered by individuals and companies outside the Institute and as part of certain mechanisms within the Institute itself, which

would make the rules for applying for grants through the Institute more transparent in situations where it has the possibility to send a limited number of applications imposed by external institutions, such as the PAS or the Ministry of Science.

Furthermore, according to respondents, the process of applying for external grants is not only technically complicated but also, above all, highly time-consuming, which makes it competitive with the need to carry out other scientific tasks. In addition, like any competitive procedure, applying for external grants also carries the risk of failure.[5] Therefore, respondents pointed to the need for the Institute to recognize the efforts made to obtain grants by introducing specific incentives or financial bonuses, which would be paid not only in the event of obtaining funding but also, due to the low success rates in financial institutions (such as the National Science Centre), already at the stage of submitting the application. Otherwise, in respondents' opinion, the grant activity of employees will remain less profitable compared to other tasks, including those undertaken to improve their financial situation (such as parallel employment).

In the context of the need to reduce the competitiveness of grant activity compared to other activities of the Institute's employees, it seems important to positively evaluate the mechanisms (one indication in the descriptive question) that have been introduced at the IPS over the last two years in this regard. This mainly concerns a significant increase in the number of points awarded to an employee who has received an external grant in their periodic assessment.[6]

[5] For example, the most recent data (as of 27 May 2025) showing the success rates in NCN projects from the autumn 2024 competition round indicate 12.8% in the OPUS 28 competition and 17.6% in the SONATA 20 competition. For more information, see https://www.ncn.gov.pl/aktualnosci/2025-05-27-wyniki-jesiennej-rundy-konkursow. Success rates in NCN competitions in previous years were even lower due to the underfunding of this institution. For example, in 2023, the success rate for the OPUS 25 competition was 8%, and for the PRELUDIUM 22 competition it was 10.7% (https://www.ncn.gov.pl/aktualnosci/2023-11-23-wyniki-opus22-preludium25).

[6] The Regulations for the Periodic Evaluation of Research Staff at the Institute of Political Studies of the PAS of 23 June 2023; the scoring criteria for periodic evaluation applicable from the year of entry into force of the Regulations are specified in Appendix 2.