

[sustainable}diversity



Diversity Strategy BOKU University

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Preamble

BOKU University understands diversity¹ as a key principle for an equity-oriented, inclusive, and sustainable university culture. As a university of life and sustainability, it pursues an approach with **Sustainable Diversity** that systematically links diversity with global challenges such as the climate crisis, social justice, and the reduction of existing inequalities.

In line with the UN Agenda 2030, BOKU University is committed to actively implementing the guiding principle of “Leave no one behind” and to extending solidarity beyond the university context. The aim is to actively promote participation, break down structural barriers, and create a respectful university culture in which all members—students, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff—can reach their full potential.

For BOKU University, **Sustainable Diversity** means anchoring diversity in all areas of the university in the long term and in a sustainable manner – in research, studies, teaching, social responsibility and public engagement, work culture, and university management. In doing so, it contributes to fulfilling both national and international commitments to sustainability (in all its dimensions), as set out in particular in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through **Sustainable Diversity**, BOKU University promotes diversity within the university and at the same time acts as a social actor externally: it helps shape transformation, provides impetus for social innovation, and contributes to the realization of a more inclusive, resilient, and forward-looking university culture.

¹ All key terms, including diversity, are explained in the glossary at the end of the strategy to ensure a common understanding.

Vision

BOKU University sees diversity as a strength and strives to be an internationally recognized pioneer in the areas of diversity, social sustainability, and global responsibility. It aims to be a place of innovation and social engagement where all university members can participate on an equal footing and develop their potential and talent. BOKU University pursues an understanding of diversity **that takes into account the various aspects of diversity in their intersectional interrelationships and without hierarchical evaluation**. This makes it possible to recognize multidimensional discrimination and counteract it. Factors such as socioeconomic background, age and generation, educational background, cultural experiences, nationality, diverse lifestyles and family structures, gender identification and expression, sexual orientation, individual self-image and worldview, mental and physical disabilities, chronic or mental illness, and care responsibilities play an essential role in this context. This understanding forms the basis for the implementation of all strategic core objectives.

In doing so, BOKU University not only relies on an intersectional perspective that intertwines various dimensions of discrimination, but also on a **systemic approach that links individual challenges with structural conditions and global developments**. It anchors diversity in everyday university life, creates structural changes, and contributes to a **sustainable transformation** of the organizational culture. This reciprocal process makes it possible to understand diversity not only as a university issue, but as a task for society as a whole.

As an educational institution and employer, BOKU University serves as a role model. It is committed to fair study and working conditions, equal access and advancement opportunities, and the removal of structural barriers². **Diversity is seen as a dynamic process that combines historical contexts with current developments and future perspectives** in order to create a more just and sustainable society in the long term.

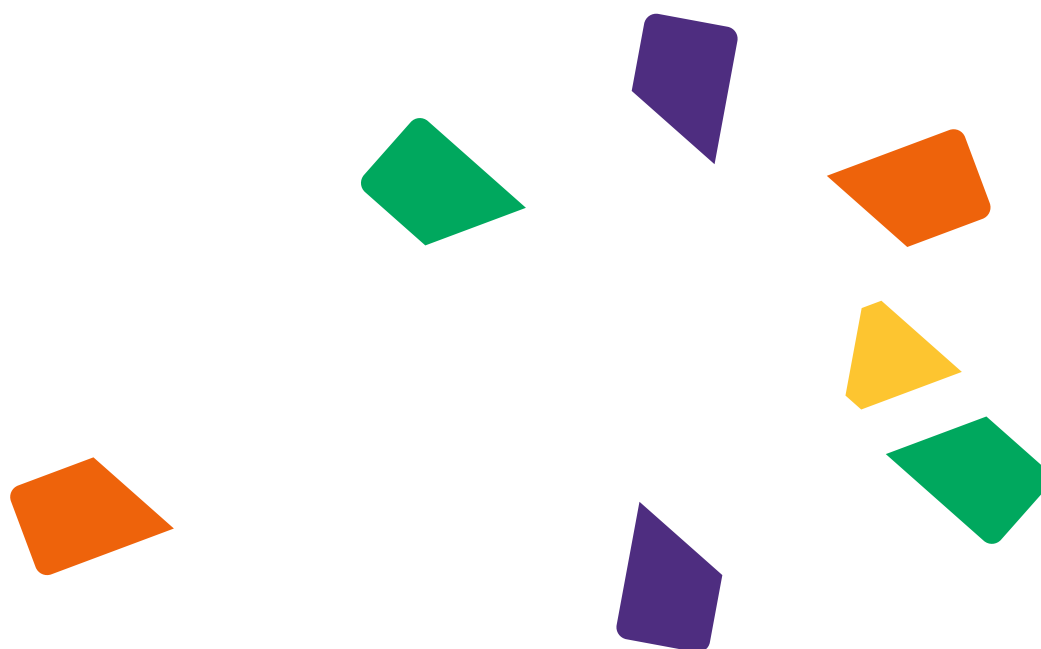


² See also the BOKU University Ethics Charter (linked in the appendix).

Initial situation

As a university of life, BOKU University sees diversity as an essential component of a sustainable university culture. In recent years, initial measures for social justice, gender equality, and inclusion have been put in place. Nevertheless, structural challenges and hurdles remain, particularly in terms of equal access to higher education, the permeability of academic careers, and the participation (or opportunity for participation) of underrepresented groups. Studies show that students from non-academic households or with disabilities continue to face increased barriers, and that women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people with migration experience are severely underrepresented in leadership positions.³

As part of society, BOKU University critically reflects on its institutional processes in order to reduce structural inequalities. This responsibility is anchored in the BOKU University Development Plan 2030⁴, which formulates the promotion of a diversity-conscious teaching, research, and organizational culture as a central concern.



³ See also the latest data from the Student Social Survey 2025 conducted by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF).

⁴ All guidelines, plans, and objectives that form the basis of the diversity strategy can be found under Sources in the appendix.

Mission

BOKU University pursues six strategic core objectives that are intersectionally intertwined:

1. Equality and anti-discrimination
2. Accessibility and inclusion
3. Social inclusion
4. Intergenerational equity and cooperation
5. Ethnic diversity and anti-racism
6. Balancing studies, work, and other areas of life

1. Equality and anti-discrimination

The core goal **equality and anti-discrimination**⁵ has the aim to eliminate **structural discrimination** in all its forms and establish diversity-oriented processes in order to promote **gender equality, social equality of opportunity, and a university culture free of discrimination**. Equity and equal opportunity should be understood not only as a legal obligation, but also as values that are put into practice.

A central task of the Coordination Office for Equality, Diversity, and Disability is to reduce inequalities and discrimination based on gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Gender is not viewed as a binary category, but is analyzed in interaction with other factors. As explained at the beginning (see point 2. Vision), discrimination can occur on the basis of a wide variety of characteristics.

BOKU University is committed to developing and implementing targeted measures to actively counteract discrimination in all these areas. Within the framework of this core objective, there is a particular focus on closing the “leaky pipeline” in academia. Through structural

changes, targeted career advancement, and the promotion of diversity in leadership positions, disadvantaged groups such as women, people with disabilities, and people with a migration background and other nationalities are to be made more visible and supported. Measures include training programs to raise awareness of forms of discrimination and intersectional perspectives, reviewing and adapting recruitment and promotion procedures, developing mentoring and support programs for disadvantaged groups, and regularly collecting and analyzing data on diversity and discrimination in order to measure progress and tailor measures accordingly.

In line with the principles of the EU AI Act, BOKU University is committed to protecting fundamental rights, particularly in the areas of anti-discrimination, equal treatment, and privacy. **Transparency, traceability, and the avoidance of algorithmic bias** are integrated as central principles in diversity-oriented processes. Particular attention is paid to the use of high-risk AI, especially in the areas of recruiting, promotion, evaluation, and

⁵ BOKU University bases its approach on its Constitution, in particular the Gender Equality Plan of BOKU University, as well as on national guidelines such as the Universities Act (UG 2002) and the Federal Equal Treatment Act. Internationally relevant principles include the SDGs (especially SDG 5 and 10), The Directives on Equal Treatment of the European Union, the European Charter for Researchers, the gender action plan of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender) and the Gender Plan of Action of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which create an overarching framework for promoting gender equality. Further sources are listed in the strategy's bibliography.

knowledge security. The aim is to minimize discrimination through technological processes and promote equality in all areas of the university, taking ethical and legal standards into account.

This core goal actively contributes to the implementation of SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) by **reducing structural discrimination, strengthening equality processes, and promoting fair participation.**



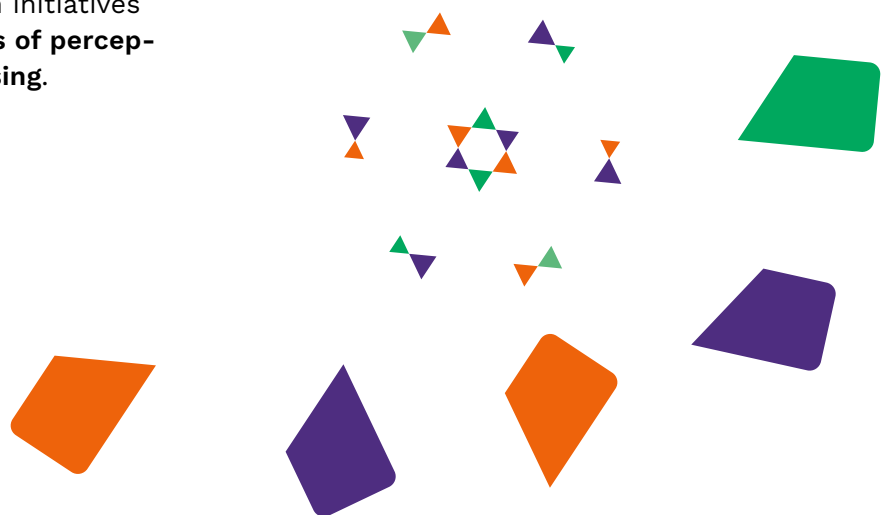
2. Accessibility and inclusion

The core goal of **accessibility and inclusion**⁶ aims to ensure a **barrier-free and inclusive university environment** that **provides unrestricted access** to all university members through **structural, architectural, digital, communicative, and didactic interventions**.

BOKU University pursues a holistic approach in this regard: all university buildings and facilities are to be designed and adapted in such a way that they are easily accessible to people with various mobility and sensory disabilities. Online resources, including websites, learning platforms, and digital communication tools, should be made accessible in accordance with international standards so that they can be used by all users without assistance. Information and communication channels should be made accessible and expanded in an understandable form, taking into account different needs. The counseling and support services for students **and employees with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or mental health conditions** will be expanded to promote successful academic and career paths. **Neurodivergent individuals** will be explicitly included in this process, for example through initiatives that address **different modes of perception and information processing**.

Particular attention will be paid to increasing the representation and visibility of employees with disabilities. Through targeted actions, such as the creation of inclusive recruitment processes and the expansion of expertise within the university community, BOKU University aims to gradually increase the number of employees with disabilities or chronic illnesses in all areas and at all career levels in the coming years.

This goal contributes to the implementation of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by **improving access to education, health services, and university spaces** for all and creating inclusive structures—through comprehensive accessibility in physical, digital, social, and communicative areas.



⁶ The goal is based, among other things, on national and international legal foundations and guidelines, including the Federal Disability Equality Act, the Universities Act (UG 2002), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1), the National Strategy on the Social Dimension in Higher Education, and internal guidelines such as the Constitution and the Gender Equality Plan of BOKU University.

3. Social inclusion

The core goal **social inclusion** aims to promote equal access to education and targeted support programs for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, in particular **students, researchers, and teachers from non-academic households, as well as students and employees with a migration background and different nationalities**.⁷

BOKU University wants to implement the National Strategy for the Social Dimension in Higher Education by placing greater emphasis on social aspects in its strategic considerations. This applies in particular to groups that have been underrepresented at BOKU University to date or that face increased socioeconomic hurdles or challenges (e.g., in accessing higher education and in their academic careers). The core objective of social inclusion is closely linked to the other core objectives (in particular *accessibility and inclusion, intergenerational justice, cooperation among all BOKU members, and the compatibility of studies, work, and other areas of life*). An integrative approach aims to increase equal opportunities and systematically break down structural barriers in order to promote a more diverse university community. This includes anchoring social inclusion in existing higher education governance structures and measures, integrating the social dimension into strategic planning, adapting funding, and evaluating diversity-related activities in relation to social justice.

Social inclusion is also a prerequisite for sustainable social transformation, as ecological and social crises can only be overcome if all social groups participate and benefit from the solutions. Strengthening social participation thus also increases social resilience to multiple challenges. To achieve this, targeted support measures should **facilitate study and career decisions and increase study and career success**. These include improving study and working conditions, promoting learning skills, and providing low-threshold, transparent information and counseling services that offer guidance and break down barriers. With this goal in mind, BOKU University particularly supports SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), as social disadvantage is systematically addressed and equitable participation in education and working life is enabled.



⁷ Data on this can be found at UniData, BOKU Online, and UHStat1 (sources listed in the appendix).

4. Intergenerational equity and cooperation

The core goal of **intergenerational equity and cooperation among all BOKU members** aims to build an inclusive university community in which all university members—from students to staff—are equally valued regardless of age or career stage and are promoted and supported in a targeted manner according to their individual needs.

The focus is on strengthening **understanding of different life situations and promoting a culture of intergenerational cooperation and justice**. This also includes specifically expanding cooperation between academic and general staff. Students should be actively involved in decision-making processes. At the same time, the aim is to develop a diversity- and generation-conscious human resources policy for employees.

To achieve these goals, BOKU University is committed to **eliminating age discrimination** and consciously addressing age stereotypes. This creates a respectful and cooperative atmosphere that strengthens everyone's sense of belonging. Visibility and long-term retention — especially of students and young scientists, taking into account their academic age — are specifically promoted.

In addition, BOKU University attaches great importance to close **cooperation between academic and general staff** as well as **third space employees** in order to exploit **synergies** in research, teaching, and administration. **Transdisciplinary**

teams and joint projects bring together different skills, enabling innovative and sustainable solutions and a dynamic university culture.

The goal thus strengthens the implementation of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) through social resilience, intergenerational cooperation, and **responsibility for future generations**.



5. Ethnic diversity and anti-racism

The core goal of **ethnic diversity and anti-racism** aims to actively and critically address ethnocentrism, racism, and transculturalism. The goal is to reflect on historical and traditional inequalities, counteract **institutional racism**, and structurally integrate people with a migration background and different nationalities more strongly.

BOKU University sees itself as a reflective academic institution that critically examines its role in the **development and dissemination of racist knowledge and derives from this** an ethical and moral responsibility for the present. In the past, racist theories were also taught, legitimized, and institutionalized at universities — with far-reaching consequences for global power relations and social exclusion. Against this background, BOKU University is committed to continuous self-reflection and active engagement against institutional racism, ethnocentrism, and other forms of discrimination, as well as to clear measures in cases of discrimination.

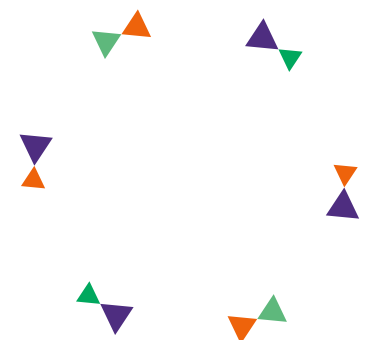
In connection with the core goal of *social inclusion*, students and employees with a migration background and different nationalities are specifically addressed and empowered, as they continue to be underrepresented and affected by multiple forms of discrimination. BOKU University therefore develops and implements measures to **raise awareness of racist and discriminatory structures**, to break down barriers, and to provide targeted support to those affected.

At the same time, BOKU University recognizes that universities have historically and currently contributed to the reproduction of social exclusion — including with regard to **religious affiliation or ideological beliefs** — and must therefore take responsibility.

The central requirement here is **ongoing historical reappraisal**: BOKU University takes responsibility through institutional mechanisms to not only to abstain from participating in the problem, but to **actively change the shape of it**.

In addition, BOKU University is committed to giving greater consideration to **decolonial perspectives**⁸ in research, teaching, and university management. **Global power relations and their historical continuities** should be critically reflected upon, hegemonic knowledge production questioned, and diverse, interdisciplinary, and context-related approaches promoted.

This goal contributes to the implementation of SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), as it promotes anti-racist educational approaches, highlights plural perspectives and thus contributes to institutional justice and a **more democratic, inclusive society**.



⁸ See also the guide: Decolonial Approaches in Academia, Possibilities for Reflection and Actions (link in the appendix).

6. Balancing studies, work, and other areas of life

The core goal **balancing studies, work, and other areas of life** aims in particular to promote the compatibility of studies, career, and care responsibilities—through flexible models, targeted support services, and raising awareness of care responsibilities and volunteer work. In this way, social justice is to be strengthened and an inclusive university culture promoted that recognizes and takes into account different realities of life.

BOKU University recognizes that **care work is a fundamental part of human coexistence and that everyone may need care at some point in their lives or may have to take on care responsibilities for others**. Based on the principles of fair distribution and social recognition of care work, BOKU University is committed to promoting the compatibility of studies, career, and care responsibilities and to creating the appropriate framework conditions. This goal is closely linked to the other core goals (in particular the goal of *equality and anti-discrimination*, the goal of *integration and accessibility*, and also the goal of *social integration*).

Students and employees with caregiving responsibilities should receive targeted support — for example, through flexible working time models, study-friendly conditions, and support services that relieve the burden on people with employment obligations or caregiving responsibilities in particular. Even though there is no formal part-time option for studying provided for by law, BOKU University is looking for pragmatic solutions to enable **greater flexibility**.

Particular attention is paid to supporting people who are returning to their studies or careers after a break, for example due to parental leave, care leave, or prolonged illness. In addition, awareness-raising measures and skills development are being implemented to strengthen awareness of care work and highlight the **diversity of life realities** within the university community. Volunteering is also explicitly recognized at BOKU University – through supportive framework conditions that take **social engagement** into account and promote it.⁹ This is linked to a commitment to a **culture of solidarity and mutual respect**, in which care work is understood not as a private matter but as a task for society as a whole.

By structurally strengthening care work and social participation, the university contributes to social resilience, because **caring and supportive communities are not only essential for dealing with the consequences of the climate crisis** in a socially just manner, but also for overcoming other social challenges. With this goal, BOKU University therefore recognizes the substantial importance of **care both for our environment and for each other**.

The goal thus contributes to the implementation of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by making care work visible, providing structural support, and promoting social resilience in dealing with multiple crises—including disaster management.

⁹ In accordance with the BOKU collective agreement on voluntary work.

Linking core goals with international and national strategies and BOKU guidelines

The core strategic objectives of BOKU University's diversity strategy are inter-linked and reinforce each other by bringing about changes at the process, structural, and cultural levels. The strategy pursues a holistic approach that anchors diversity in the university in a sustainable manner while contributing to the achievement of international sustainability goals. BOKU University is guided by national and international agreements on the promotion of diversity, in particular the UN Sustainable Development Goals. BOKU's diversity strategy is closely linked to the National Strategy for the Social Dimension in Higher Education and key internal guidelines such as the BOKU Gender Equality and Women's Promotion Plan, the Ethics Charter, the BOKU University Internationalisation Strategy 2025, and the Sustainability Strategy. It also takes into account the **EU AI Act**, which also **aims to protect fundamental rights and prevent discrimination**.

BOKU University combines diversity with all dimensions of sustainability and positions its strategy specifically in the context of the SDGs in order to highlight the contribution of universities to achieving global sustainability goals.

The six core strategic goals of the diversity strategy can be assigned to specific SDGs:

- *Equality & anti-discrimination*: SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions)
- *Accessibility & inclusion*: SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)
- *Social inclusion*: SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)
- *Intergenerational Justice*: SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 13 (Climate action)
- *Ethnic diversity & anti-racism*: SDG 4 (Quality education), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals)
- *Work-life balance & care*: SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 8 (Decent work), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 13 (Climate action) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

This strategic link shows that sustainable diversity not only aims at institutional transformation, but also actively contributes to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda.

Participatory implementation

BOKU University's diversity strategy focuses on sustainable and participatory implementation in order to promote equal opportunities and participation for all students and employees. It comprises seven key areas of action: **University management, Study, Education, Research, Human Resources, International Diversity and Communication.** By focusing on areas of action, the strategy deliberately addresses all (potential) university members – without implicitly excluding certain groups through categorizing attributions. In all seven areas of action, short-, medium-, and long-term measures are being developed and implemented to create an equal opportunity study and work environment and to break down existing barriers.

All relevant actors and stakeholders are to be actively involved in the design and implementation of the strategy. Transparent decision-making structures, continuous exchange, and an open feedback system ensure that measures are needs-based and effective. At the same time, this involvement contributes to identification with the goals of the strategy and their long-term anchoring in the university culture. BOKU University thus also takes into account the socio-ecological impact of its decisions and bears responsibility for the environment and future generations.¹⁰



¹⁰ See also the section on responsibility and precaution in the BOKU Ethics Charter.

Implementation and monitoring

In order to achieve the core strategic objectives of the diversity strategy, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART) sub-goals and corresponding measures are defined for each area of action. These are aimed at bringing about both individual and structural change. Progress toward achieving the goals is regularly reviewed using defined indicators. This monitoring makes it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of individual measures of the diversity strategy, identify any necessary changes, and develop follow-up measures. The diversity strategy is implemented through concrete action plans with clear responsibilities and time frames. Particular attention is paid to **sustainable processes and structures** in order to achieve long-term change. Transparency promotes knowledge transfer by openly

communicating successes and challenges, thus enabling **collective learning** within the university community.

BOKU University is committed to transparency and **publishes progress reports on the implementation of its diversity goals** to ensure continuous reflection and further development. The results are published in a manner appropriate to the target audience. This **open and participatory approach** ensures that measures to implement the diversity strategy remain dynamic and that BOKU University can respond to new challenges.



The diversity strategy was developed in a participatory process based on a draft by the Diversity Steering Group and with the involvement of key stakeholders (such as the Working Group for Equal Treatment Issues, works council members of general and scientific staff, the Ethics Platform, the BOKU University Student Union, the Senate, and the University Council) and was approved by the Rectorate on November 4, 2025.

Appendix

Glossary of terms relating to BOKU University's diversity strategy

Accessibility

Accessibility of physical, digital, and social spaces for all people, regardless of physical, sensory, or cognitive limitations. This includes structural, technological, and communicative measures.

Anti-discrimination

Measures to prevent and combat discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin, social status, age, disability, sexual orientation, or other diversity factors.

Anti-racism

Reflexive approach to analyzing and actively combating individual, institutional, and structural forms of racism as well as their historical and social conditions.

Equal opportunities

The goal of enabling all people to participate equally in education, career advancement, and social life, regardless of individual or structural barriers.

Decolonial perspectives

An approach that critically questions historical, traditional, and (neo)colonial structures as well as global power relations and incorporates alternative, plural, and context-specific forms of knowledge in research, teaching, as well as social responsibility and public engagement.

Diversity

The variety of human experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds, including but not limited to gender, age, ethnic and cultural origin, religion, social background, disability, and sexual orientation.

Ethnocentrism

A worldview in which one's own ethnic or cultural group is considered superior, which can lead to the devaluation and exclusion of other groups.

Hegemonic knowledge production

Term for the dominance of certain forms of knowledge and interpretations, mostly shaped by privileged groups, which devalue or exclude alternative bodies of knowledge and thus reproduce existing power and inequality relations.

High-risk AI

AI systems with a high risk according to Article 6 of the EU AI Act, which may have a potentially adverse effect on human safety or fundamental rights, but are not prohibited in principle.

Inclusion

Process that aims to enable all people—especially disadvantaged or underrepresented groups—to participate equally in education, work, and society.

Intergenerational equity

An approach that aims to create fair conditions for all age groups, reduce age discrimination, and promote intergenerational dialogue.

Intergenerational justice

Principle of taking responsibility for future generations by making decisions today in a way that does not limit the life and development opportunities of future generations.

Intersectionality

Analytical approach that focuses on the interactions between different dimensions of discrimination—such as gender, ethnicity, or social class—in order to reveal forms of multiple discrimination and their structural inequality.

Leaky pipeline

Gradual loss of qualified individuals—especially women and other disadvantaged groups—along educational and career paths due to structural barriers and discrimination.

Resilience

Ability of individuals, organizations, or communities to overcome various challenges and adversities, respond flexibly, and recover from them without lasting impairment.

Sustainable development

Development that combines environmental, social, and economic aspects to create long-term solutions to global challenges.

Social sustainability

An approach that places social justice, human rights, and the equitable distribution of resources at the center of sustainable development.

Sustainable diversity

A strategic approach by BOKU University that links diversity with sustainability, social justice, and global transformation goals in the long term in order to promote structural change within and outside the university.

Systemic approach

Holistic view of the interrelationships between individual, structural, and global factors.

Third space

Tasks and functions in universities that bridge the traditional divide between academic and general staff, such as curriculum design, learning technology, or research support.

Transculturality (cultural interdependence).

Concept that explains the intertwining and mutual permeation of cultural elements in an increasingly interconnected world, as opposed to clearly delineated cultures.

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BVG Sustainability

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Publication commissioned by the BMBWF, with a contribution from BOKU University on Awareness Days as good practice.

Available from the BMBWF or as a PDF on request.



This link takes you to the Diversity Strategy page.
There you will find further information on the strategy.

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Diversity Strategy BOKU University