

Accessibility Strategy of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics

Introduction

The European Union Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027 assumes introducing the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, made in New York on 13 December 2006 (Journal of Laws of 2012, item 1169, and Journal of Laws of 2018, item 1217), hereinafter referred to as the “Convention”.

According to the Convention’s provisions, persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others¹.

One of the key areas of the Convention is education, which includes higher education. States Parties to the Convention undertook to ensure an inclusive education system allowing integration at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:

- 1) the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
- 2) the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
- 3) enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society².

In implementing these ideas, States Parties aim to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, they guarantee to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities³. Fulfilling these undertakings requires introducing principles of accessibility which is understood as a property of

¹ Article 1 of the Convention.

² Article 24(1) of the Convention.

³ Article 24(5) of the Convention.

environment (physical space, digital infrastructure, products and services) that allows people with functional difficulties (physical and cognitive) to use it on an equal basis with others.

For many people, accessibility is the condition of leading an independent existence and participating in the social and economic life of the state, local community, school or workplace. While accessibility must be ensured to everyone, in everyday life its lack is felt mainly by persons with special needs, that is – as per the definition found in Article 2, item 3 of the Act of 19 July 2019 on ensuring accessibility to persons with special needs (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 2240), hereinafter referred to as the “Ensuring Accessibility Act” – persons who due to their external or internal characteristics or the circumstances they are placed in must undertake additional actions or employ additional measures in order to overcome barriers and participate in various spheres of life on equal basis with others. The most numerous group of persons with special needs consists of persons with disabilities.

Polish universities, including the SGH Warsaw School of Economics, hereinafter referred to as the “SGH”, implement principles of accessibility meant to create architectural and communication conditions, as well as to overcome barriers of a mental nature in the academic community.

To maintain a positive trend and ensure truly equal opportunities for the members of the community with special needs, including those with disabilities, it is necessary to adopt and implement an accessibility strategy whose purpose is to enhance the physical, technical and administrative accessibility of the School’s structures, raise the awareness, knowledge and skills of the SGH academic world as regards developing academic content, teaching and providing services to persons with varied needs, and influence the sensitivity and openness of the academic community to problems faced by such persons in accessing the teaching and research process.

The accessibility strategy of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics, hereinafter referred to as the “Accessibility Strategy”, has been drafted according to the principles stated in the Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 which forms an annex to Resolution no. 27 of the Council of Ministers of 16 February 2021 on adopting the Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 document (Journal of Laws, item 218), which is a national plan for implementing the Convention.

The Accessibility Strategy is a tool for implementing the provisions of the SGH Social Responsibility Declaration and the Diversity Charter. As a signatory to both

documents, SGH thereby undertook to, among others, promote the ideas of equality, diversity, tolerance and respect for and protection of human rights in reference to the entire academic community and its environment. This means conducting an open dialogue with persons with special needs and striving to ensure accessibility to everyone regardless of functional difficulties, including the degree and kind of disability.

The Accessibility Strategy expands the assumptions of the SGH Warsaw School of Economics Development Strategy for 2022-2030 which forms an annex to Resolution no. 87 of the SGH Senate of 28 April 2021 on the SGH Warsaw School of Economics Development Strategy for the years 2022-2030. The latter strategy enumerates certain key values, emphasising respect (understood as kind, dignified and equal treatment) and cooperation (understood as building good relationships based on trust and mutual support to form a community).

The Accessibility Strategy has been drafted based on the provisions of the Ensuring Accessibility Act, the Act of 4 April 2019 on digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities (Journal of Laws, item 848, and Journal of Laws of 2022, item 1002), the Act of 27 August 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities (Journal of Laws of 2021, items 573 and 1981, and Journal of Laws of 2022, items 558, 1700 and 1812), as well as the Accessibility Plus 2018-2025 government programme and the main objectives defined in a project entitled “Drafting a bill implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, bearing the proposed name ‘Act on equalising the opportunities of persons with disabilities’ together with a Regulatory Impact Assessment and justification, as well a proposal of legislative changes to follow the new act” and carried out as part of Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014-2020 (Action 2.6: High-quality policies for the social and professional inclusion of people with disabilities; Priority Axis II: Effective public policies for the labour market, economy and education).

Strategic areas

The Accessibility Strategy relates to six strategic areas:

- 1) architectural infrastructure;
- 2) digital infrastructure;
- 3) educational process;

- 4) academic research, teaching and upskilling;
- 5) purchasing policy;
- 6) shaping the attitudes and expanding the knowledge of the academic community as regards accessibility.

1. Operational objectives in the “architectural infrastructure” area

Achieving operational objectives in the “architectural infrastructure” area will ensure the accessibility of the School through universal design or rational improvement.

Operational objective 1.1: Planning, designing and drafting new infrastructural investments based on the principles of universal design, which means ensuring that they are accessible to everyone, to the widest extent possible, without adaptation or special adjustment.

Operational objective 1.2: Removing existing architectural barriers and preventing the appearance of new ones.

Operational objective 1.3: Ensuring accessibility of existing SGH infrastructure so that it meets at least the minimum requirements used to ensure accessibility to persons with special needs.

Indicator: share of space that meets architectural accessibility requirements in the SGH infrastructure.

2. Operational objectives in the “digital infrastructure” area

Achieving operational objectives in the “digital infrastructure” area will contribute to ensuring that all users are able to use SGH websites and their contents to the widest extent and on an equal basis, regardless of disability or the presence of other special needs. Digital accessibility of the website and mobile application means ensuring that they are functional, compatible, perceptible and understandable.

Operational objective 2.1: Planning, designing and drafting new investments in the “digital infrastructure” area based on the principles of universal design, i.e. taking care to ensure digital accessibility when creating and commissioning new content, websites, web applications or mobile applications.

Operational objective 2.2: Improving the accessibility of existing websites and published contents based on applicable digital accessibility guidelines in the WCAG 2.1 standard and its updated versions.

Operational objective 2.3: Improving the accessibility of information and communication technologies (ICT) used in the teaching process, including in particular those comprising the e-sgh platform.

Operational objective 2.4: Drafting and implementing a digital accessibility standard for documents published on SGH websites.

Indicator: number of SGH systems, websites and applications compliant with the WCAG 2.1 standard and its updated versions.

3. Operational objectives in the “educational process” area

Achieving operational objectives in the “educational process” area will contribute to increased accessibility for persons with special needs and to creating conditions for their full participation in the study programme and SGH Doctoral School enrolment process and subsequent education in the study programme and SGH Doctoral School, in particular allowing them to fulfil their academic duties and exercise their rights on an equal basis with all participants of the educational process, regardless of their health condition or the specifics of education.

Operational objective 3.1: Increasing accessibility of the enrolment process by ensuring equal opportunities for enrolment to SGH to all prospective students.

Operational objective 3.2: Increasing accessibility of the educational process according to the requirements of students, doctoral students and postgraduate study participants that result from special needs and are related to eliminating encountered barriers and functional difficulties.

Operational objective 3.3: Streamlining of the educational process from the viewpoint of effectively ensuring equal opportunities of all participants in the process, including persons with special needs, to guarantee that the highest academic standards are upheld.

Operational objective 3.4: Promoting professional activation of, among others, students, doctoral students and graduates with special needs.

Indicator: level of satisfaction of participants of the education process as regards its accessibility, determined by means of an annual survey.

4. Operational objectives in the “academic research, teaching and upskilling” area
Achieving operational objectives in the “academic research, teaching and upskilling” area will contribute to greater opportunities for conducting academic and teaching activities by SGH staff dealing with research, teaching or both and to professional development of all SGH employees.

Operational objective 4.1: Improving access to flexible forms of work, especially for employees with special needs.

Operational objective 4.2: Increasing technological and methodological support to ensure inclusion and greater engagement of employees with special needs in the research and teaching processes.

Operational objective 4.3: Building a culture of accessible academic research whose cornerstone is taking into account the needs of employees with special needs at each stage of the research process.

Operational objective 4.4: Developing an offer of upskilling opportunities that allows SGH employees to improve and self-develop.

Indicator: number of persons with special needs who teach classes, participate in academic projects carried out at SGH and take part in upskilling opportunities offered and/or co-financed by SGH.

5. Operational objectives in the “purchasing policy” area

Achieving the operational objective in the “purchasing policy” area will contribute to taking accessibility into account in current and planned SGH activities, in particular when entering into agreements financed or co-financed from public means.

Operational objective 5.1: Taking into account conditions conducive to ensuring accessibility in public procurement proceedings carried out at SGH.

Indicator: share of purchasing proceedings taking accessibility criteria into account in the total number of purchasing proceedings carried out at SGH.

6. Operational objectives in the “shaping the attitudes and expanding the knowledge of the academic community as regards accessibility” area

Achieving operational objectives in the “shaping the attitudes and expanding the knowledge of the academic community as regards accessibility” area will contribute to building and enhancing a culture of openness to inclusivity, diversity and disability in the academic community.

Operational objective 6.1: Conducting regular or occasional campaigns to promote awareness of and sensitivity to the peculiarities of disability, with particular emphasis on needs and proper forms of support.

Operational objective 6.2: Developing good practices for communication and cooperation with persons with special needs.

Operational objective 6.3: Implementing a system of training courses for the SGH academic community to increase sensitivity and prepare for working with persons with special needs.

Operational objective 6.4: Appointing a Social Council consisting of representatives of persons with disabilities in the SGH academic community. The work of the Council will be focused on consulting and initiating activities to improve accessibility at SGH.

Indicator: degree of awareness of the SGH academic community as regards the problems and needs of persons with special needs and the methods to support them, determined by means of an annual survey.

An implementation and monitoring system

Monitoring the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy will make it possible to reliably assess the implementation status and to manage the activities planned in the Strategy.

The implementation status of objectives included in the Accessibility Strategy will be regularly assessed by the Office for Accessibility and Support for People with Disabilities.

The monitoring will be conducted via reporting, regular review of achieving objectives and consultations with representatives of persons with special needs who are part of the School's community.