

Information on gender diversity – Why WCs for all at the university of Göttingen?

At present, not all members, relatives and guests of the University of Göttingen can find toilets (facilities) in the buildings of the University that they can use easily and safely. This leads to difficult, even discriminatory situations for various groups (including trans* and inter* people).

Right to access safe sanitations

In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution enshrining the right to water and the right to sanitation. The right to sanitation guarantees every person access to sanitation in all spheres of life.¹ Access should be safe, hygienic and socially and culturally acceptable, and should ensure privacy and dignity.² The right to water and sanitation is a universal right. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF have defined the goal of "WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene)" as follows: By 2030, adequate and equitable sanitation should be achieved for all, especially those in vulnerable situations.³

In Germany, there is a call for further improvement beyond the sanitary equipment already specified for workplaces.⁴ For example, the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (ADS) recommends in its FAQs on the topic of "Man - Woman - Divers: The 'Third Option' and the General Equal Treatment Act" that additional gender-neutral toilets be installed. Equal Treatment Act", the ADS recommends the installation of additional gender-neutral toilets as a recommendable and legally secure solution.⁵

Protection against discrimination also in building infrastructures

With its Diversity Strategy, the University of Göttingen has set itself the goal of offering all members of the University equal opportunities and protection against discrimination. In order to achieve this goal and to improve the situation described below, the necessary framework conditions must be created, including in the building infrastructure: It should be ensured that all members, relatives and guests of the University can use toilet facilities of their choice in all buildings without any problems and safely.

Current situation at the University of Göttingen

Up to now, the University has mainly provided toilets for men and women, as well as barrier-free⁶ toilets in some buildings. However, the provision of almost exclusively binary signposted toilets ("male" and "female") does not do justice to the realities of life for all members, relatives and guests of the University.

Those who do not conform to the two-gender norm, are always faced with a problem due to the current signage in toilets. Experiences of discrimination in toilets are part of everyday life for these and range from unpleasant looks and discriminatory remarks to physical attacks. Many of those affected feel uncomfortable in binary signposted toilets because they have already had or observed transgressive to violent experiences themselves. Several such discriminations have been reported in the University's pilot project "Support for trans* students" (2018 - 2019). It also became apparent that such experiences and / or the fear of social confrontations lead to avoidance among students.

It was also evident that such experiences and / or the fear of social confrontation leads to avoidance behaviors among students. In order not to have to use toilet facilities during their daily study routine, or to use them as seldom as possible, they drink very little or nothing. This can lead to concentration difficulties, but also to further health impairments. The installation of WCs for all can specifically counteract or prevent the discrimination described and the associated restrictions.

Good practice at the university of Göttingen

So far, only a few buildings at the University have been equipped with WCs for all or gender-neutral toilets. These toilets for all, which have been installed in recent years, especially on the central campus, clearly show that rededication processes can be easily implemented in many buildings at the University.

For example, corresponding toilets (facilities) can be found in the Alte Mensa conference and event centre (Wilhelmsplatz), in the Oeconomicum (Platz der Göttinger Sieben), in the Social Sciences Method Centre (Goßlerstraße), in the Institute of Ethnology (Theaterstraße), in the Department of English Philology (Käte-Hamburger Weg) and in the Department of Art History (Nikolausberger Weg). In addition, toilets in some administrative buildings were also rededicated by means of new lettering, for example in the Herzberger Landstraße 2 building and in the Equal Opportunities and Diversity Office (Goßlerstraße).

The feedback on this has been positive so far, as the rededication has made the toilet rooms accessible to a larger number of people. When the gender-specific toilets are highly frequented, all people can use these toilets without any problems.

In order to contribute to a comprehensive, inclusive offer of toilets and to support the installation of WCs for all, the Equal Opportunities and Diversity Unit, together with the Estates and Facilities Management Department, has prepared the "Recommendations for the inclusive design of sanitary facilities: installation of WCs for all".

¹ German Federal Foreign Office, "WASH: Human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation", accessed 02.09.2020.

² "The right to sanitation entitles everyone to have physical and affordable access to sanitation, in all spheres of life, that is safe, hygienic, secure, and socially and culturally acceptable and that provides privacy and ensures dignity.", UNWater, "Human Rights to Water and Sanitation", accessed 02.09.2020.

³ World Health Organization, "WASH in the 2030 Agenda", retrieved 02.09.2020.

⁴ In the "Ordinance on Workplaces" of 2004, it is stipulated in the annex under "4.1 Sanitary rooms" that women's and men's toilets must be available and that separate use must be possible.

⁵ Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, "How do employers have to deal with sanitary rooms?", retrieved 02.09.2020.

⁶ University of Göttingen, "Agreement on the Employment and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at the University Medical Center Göttingen (UMG)", retrieved 02.09.2020.

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Further information on gender diversity can be found at www.uni-goettingen.de/gender-diversity