



winter semester 2021/2022

# Leuphana Diversity Fact Book

Diversity among the research assistants (WiMi)

# The team

**Teaching research project**  
Leuphana Diversity Fact Book – WiMi  
winter semester 2021/2022

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## PROJECT INTRODUCTION





# 1.1 Foreword

*Dear readers,*

the following fact book was created on the basis of a research project concerning the topic of 'Diversity among the research assistants (WiMi)' at the Leuphana University Lüneburg (Leuphana).

For the Leuphana, which sees itself as a sustainable, humanistic and action-oriented university, same opportunities and gender equality are essential components of their mission statement. Consequently, it is an important concern for the development of the human resources and university to create an awareness of social and university diversity.<sup>1</sup>

There has already been an engagement with the topic of diversity at the Leuphana in form of fact books, which focused on the diversity of students and staff employed in technology and administration. Now within the fact book the experiences and voices of the WiMi are heard.

The aim of the project is to explore the diversity of WiMi based on selected dimensions and to make the different experiences, realities and life plans of this group visible.

Together with the clients, Mrs. Dr. Anja Thiem and Mrs. Dr. Brit-Maren Block, under the academic supervision of Mrs. Prof. Dr. Christiane Söffker, the following dimensions were selected: working conditions, family situation and internationality.

In order to gain an insight into the different living situations of WiMi in relation to the dimensions, interviews were conducted. Except for the dimension 'internationality', these were conducted in German and translated by the authors in this fact book. The aim of this fact book is not only to highlight positive perceptions, but also to point out possible barriers, challenges and potential for change. The overarching goals in producing the fact book are also to value and recognize diversity and to promote the broadening of individual horizons.

*We hope you enjoy reading it!*



## 1.2 Introduction of the target group – WiMi

In general, the WiMi represent the mid-level staff of a university or university of applied sciences. They can be seen superior to student assistants and subordinate to professors. Their task profile can basically be divided into the three areas of 'research, teaching and administration', while the focus varies depending on the job description. One consequence of this could be the difference in the level of teaching loads.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of WiMi, it is important to differentiate whether the position to be filled is assigned to the university or to a project, as this has an impact on the funding. WiMi with teaching duties are financed by state funds, while WiMi employed in projects are financed by the project funds.<sup>3</sup>

The daily tasks of a WiMi include preparatory activities, such as creating teaching materials, preparing events or writing project proposals. In addition, it is common for a WiMi to assist higher-ranked academics, such as professors, or to lead lectures and seminars. The lectures in particular make it possible to gain incentives for their own research.

Finally, a large number of the WiMi strive for their own doctorate or habilitation. Wherefore the resulting acquisition of an academic title can be defined as a possible goal.

In order to receive a position as an WiMi, it is first necessary to apply to the respective university for the advertised position. The requirement for this is usually a completed academic university degree (Master's or equivalent)<sup>4</sup>. In addition, there may also be job-specific prerequisites including for example familiarity with programming languages or knowledge of qualitative or quantitative research methods. Language skills also play an important role in ensuring successful cooperation in interdisciplinary and international teams.

The general situation of WiMi gained increasingly public attention through the discussion in the German Federal Parliament in 2021, with the focus on the 'Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz' (German Science Temporary Contracts Act). The resulting temporary nature of the positions of WiMi can often lead to insecurities in further career and family planning.<sup>5</sup>



## 1.3 Project approach

At the beginning of the project, a kick-off event was held. The clients, Mrs. Dr. Thiem and Mrs. Dr. Block, gave us an insight into the tasks of the Equal Opportunities Office, presented the project brief as well as their expectations and wishes for the fact book. The focus of our project should be on appreciating diversity and promoting a change of perspective.

The selection of the dimensions to be investigated should be relevant for the WiMi, so we jointly decided on the dimensions 'Working Conditions', 'Family Situation' and 'Internationality'. According to the number of dimensions, we divided into three groups wherefore in each group five people were responsible for one of the three dimensions. During the entire research work, all participants had the opportunity to take note of all the activities - be it through the kept minutes or the regular short presentations in the seminar, which showed the respective processing status of the groups.

In addition to the literature-based research on the three dimensions, the qualitative interviews form the main part of the fact book.

In order to be able to make statements about the diversity of WiMi within the dimensions and to reveal personal experiences and needs, qualitative research was conducted in form of 12 interviews. A cross-section of WiMi including the faculties in 'economics', 'education' and 'sustainability' were interviewed to make the statements as heterogeneous as possible. To ensure a better comparability in the collection of information, an interview guide was developed, which can be viewed in the appendix. It contains both cross-dimension and dimension-specific questions and serves as a guide within the interviews.

On the following pages, the respective dimension is presented with regard to the relevance of the topic and the current situation at Leuphana. This is followed by excerpts from the interviews providing a deeper insight into the individual perceptions of the interviewees. In the dimension-specific mood pictures, the wishes of the WiMi are analyzed and presented, from which possible recommendations for action are derived. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the cross-dimensional suggestions from the interviews.





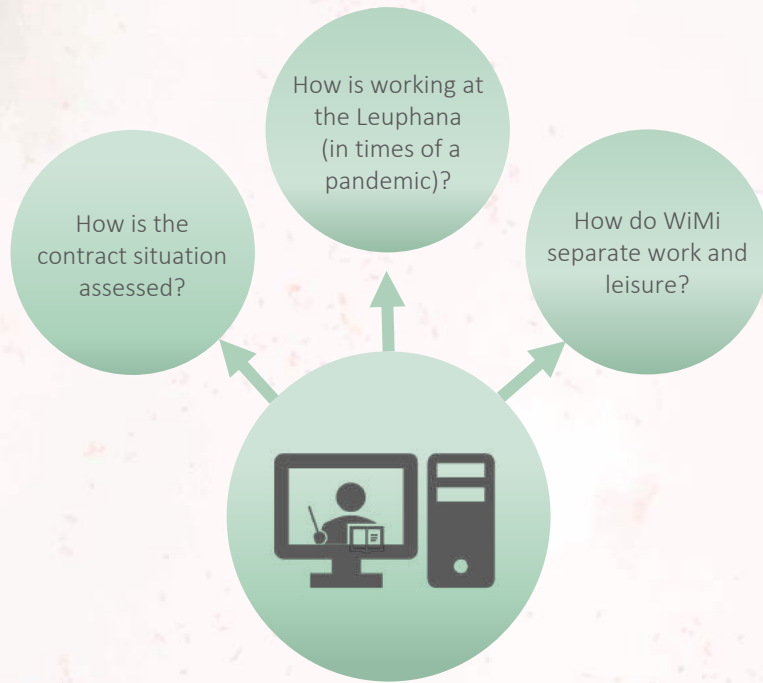
02

*chapter*  
DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

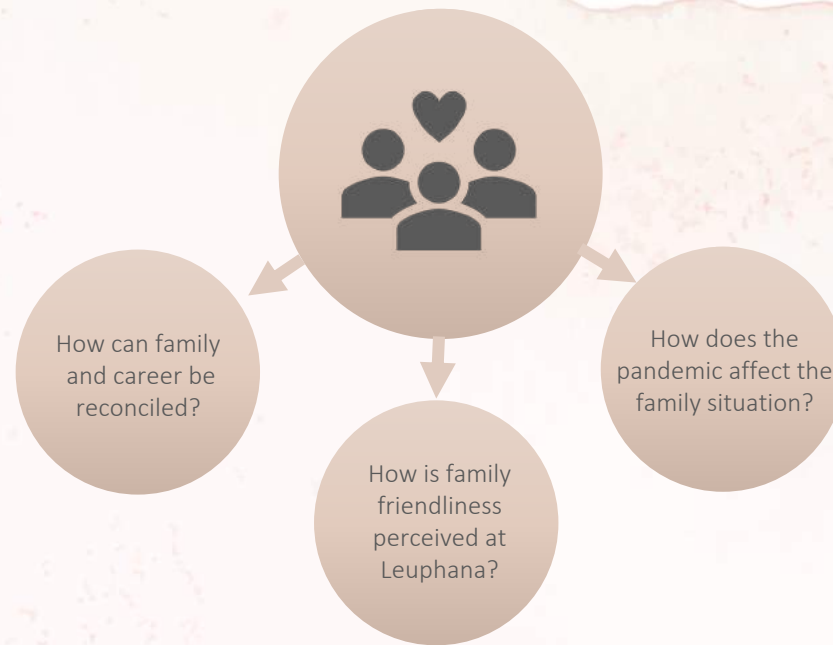




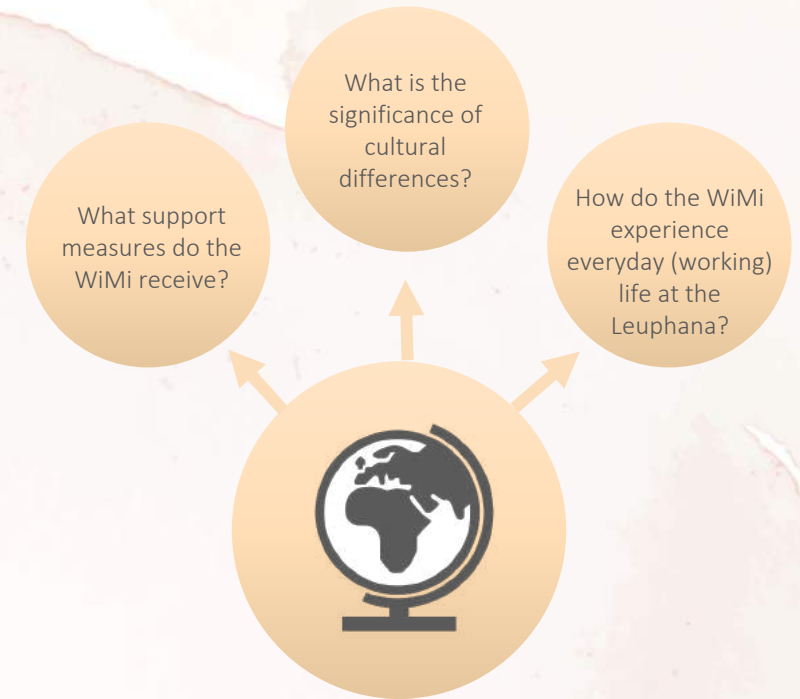
## 2 Dimensions of diversity



1 working conditions  
This dimension questions the everyday work of WiMi.



2 family situation  
This dimension examines the compatibility of family and work for WiMi.



3 internationality  
This dimension looks at the needs of international WiMi.



2.1

*dimension*

WORKING CONDITIONS





‘Germany is an innovative country, and we want to continue to be at the forefront of innovation and progress internationally. Therefore, it is also a matter of attracting good scientists to German research and to our universities and research institutions. Of course, this is only possible with attractive conditions.’<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Astrid Mannes,  
former German federal deputy, 2021



## 2.1 Working conditions – Introduction

‘This is Hanna. She is a biologist.’ are the first words of a video by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), meant to illustrate the ‘Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz’. The campaign makes clear that WiMi mainly receive fixed-term employment contracts on the basis of this law. The BMBF justifies this for instance by saying that innovation can only come about through constant fluctuation and that one generation should not ‘clog up’ all the positions. Since 2007 full-time scientific staff in Germany has grown by 50 % to 256,000 positions, whereof 82 % are with a temporary contract.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that WiMi are mainly able to obtain fixed-term employment contracts caused a lot of incomprehension. Furthermore, the precarious working conditions were criticized. Not infrequently, this results in insecurity, future fears and high work pressure. The negative attitude of many academics towards the video quickly gave rise to a movement on the social media platform Twitter along the lines of #IchBinHanna. Many users recognized themselves in the fictional person and described their own situations.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, a debate in the German Federal Parliament in June 2021 touched the topic. During the agenda item ‘Paying respect to employees in science – for secure jobs instead of permanent fixed-term contracts’,<sup>11</sup> Gohlke took up the arguments of the scientists and underlined the ‘partly miserable conditions’. In doing so, Kaczmarek identified a generation of WiMi ‘whose life consists not only of science, but also of [...] free time’<sup>12</sup>. But so far no fundamental change in the law has been made.

Through these events WiMi gained increasing public attention. This shows not only the relevance of this professional group, but also the special professional situation. Against this background, it is important to find out how the working conditions were perceived by the interviewed WiMi and whether the precarious situation described above is also perceived at Leuphana. In addition, aspects such as the work-life balance and personal reasons for working at Leuphana will be examined.

In the following, data and facts on the employment situation of WiMi are presented, before having a closer look on the individual impressions and opinions from the interviews.



## 2.1 Working conditions – Situation at Leuphana

Based on December 2020's data, Leuphana employed 406 WiMi. A total of 224 (55.2 %) of them are female. 352 out of the 406 employed WiMi have a fixed-term contract, corresponding to 86.7 %.<sup>13</sup> The proportion of fixed-term contracts at Leuphana is almost five percentage points higher than the average in Germany, quoted in the debate in the Bundestag.<sup>14</sup>

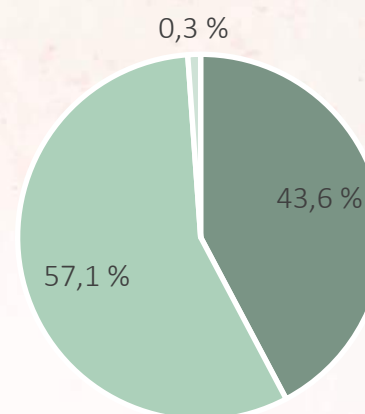
By division into fixed-term and permanent contracts, it is noticeable that in comparison to men, a significantly lower number of female employees are in permanent contracts. In the case of fixed-term contracts, a contrary picture emerges.

The proportion of full-time employed women has decreased by 7 % in the last four years. Moreover, in each group, the share of women with part-time employment is higher than their share in the employment group as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the statistics listed here, the four interviews illustrate the perception of temporary employment and other working conditions at Leuphana.

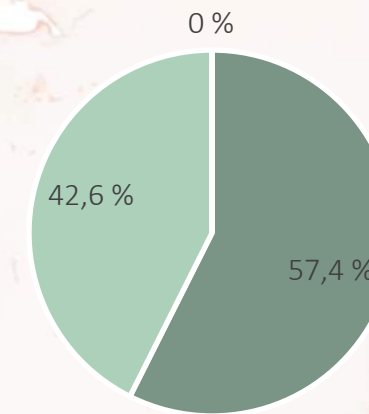
Fixed-term contract

■ male ■ female ■ divers



Permanent contract

■ male ■ female ■ diverse



	fixed-term contract	permanent contract	total
male	150	31	181
female	201	23	224
diverse	1	0	1
total	352	54	406





## 2.1 Working conditions – Interview I

‘Flexibility is one of the most important things in science.’

I like the university's portfolio, including the Leuphana semester. On one hand, I appreciate the constructive and productive interaction with colleagues. On the other hand, I appreciate that the professors are caring.

In general, I have a lot of freedom in organizing my working hours, which I really appreciate. I would not want to miss it and consider as a great privilege. My responsibilities mainly include project work on third-party funds, which I really enjoy. In addition, my position requires a lot of traveling. At the moment, teaching is not part of my contract. Therefore, this is only a part-time job. However, I also noticed that teaching should be valued more.

In the pandemic, working from home was even more established. Generally, I have worked from home a lot before or gone on business trips. It is actually not easy to strictly separate private life from everyday work. The transition becomes blurred since a doctoral project is also a leisure project.

At the moment, I have a part-time job. However, hours-wise, it is almost like a full-time job. I think it is very good that there are full- and part-time systems because this allows us to align our job with our lifestyle. In my opinion, this can also increase diversity at Leuphana. Nonetheless, it should be avoided to have a 75 % part-time-job-contract and still work 100 %. This is often a problem.

Overarching this, I would like to see adjustments to the ‘Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz’ for future WiMi. Specifically, I hope that Leuphana will allow mid-level staff to independently acquire third-party funds and lead projects. This annoys me in the current situation as it is not possible for Leuphana's WiMi, but it is expected of external people.

‘A reform of the Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz is urgently overdue.’



## 2.1 Working conditions – Interview II

I enjoy the very good working atmosphere at our institute. The relationship with my direct supervisor is great because the hierarchies are as flat as possible. When it comes to materials such as laptops or something similar, you do not have to beg for long - everything works quickly and smoothly on the part of the university.

Almost 100 % of my working day consists of teaching. With a full-time position, that is 18 hours per week per semester. In addition to teaching, I also supervise final theses.

Due to the pandemic the workload has increased greatly. Digital courses are much more time-consuming to prepare than face-to-face courses. To compensate the workload, I worked every Saturday during the heavy Corona periods.

In addition, I often read for an hour in a final paper on Sundays because I simply cannot do it otherwise. It is actually terrible what I am telling you here, but I also hear this from

‘A strict separation of work and free time at the moment is not possible because the workload is far too much to handle.’

other professions, that this separation of professional and private life is becoming increasingly blurred.

My wish would be a greater transparency of the workload, for example by looking at final papers to be corrected.

In addition, I would like to have more constructive help from Leuphana, especially in times of the pandemic, with regard to how teachers should implement the required measures. In addition to all the instructions, I would also like concrete help here.



## 2.1 Working conditions – Interview III

‘I would not say I am stressed.  
I would say I am busy.’

I appreciate the interdisciplinarity at Leuphana. My colleagues from the faculty and the staff in the dean's office are also super nice and helpful. They give tips and support at any time when problems arise. This makes me very happy.

My responsibilities include both: teaching and research. However, the focus is currently on teaching as it is time-consuming to create new teaching materials for four seminars. Nonetheless, I enjoy the exchange and working with the students immensely. That is the reason why I give my work a positive rating. In general, more appreciation of teaching should be discussed.

Concerning the pandemic and the possibility of working from home, I cannot complain. I can continue to do my work flexibly and also manage to separate my professional and private life. The only disadvantage is that, as a newcomer, it is more difficult to make contacts and build up a network.

In terms of my contract situation, I feel a bit second-rate or bottom-listed. Just a year ago, I signed a temporary contract to work full time, and since then, it is clear that it will not be renewed. Although I am happy at Leuphana, my enthusiasm and initiative for further projects or general commitment have decreased, by knowing the contract will not be extended. The only thing I would like is the option of an extension.

For future WiMi, I wish Leuphana would optimize the integration process for them. At the beginning of their employment, everyone should be introduced to their colleagues and receive a guide containing the most important information (email addresses and telephone numbers). Furthermore, there should be regular meetings at the institute to strengthen the interaction among each other.

‘I have two years and then  
something new comes along.’



## 2.1 Working conditions – Interview IV

‘Everything that I do more of, contributes to the doctoral phase, which of course – that is how it is meant to be – interferes with free time anyway.’

I like Leuphana for its orientation and values. Besides research, they influence teaching as well as everything that has to do with the university.

During the lecture period, my main tasks are teaching and administrative activities, as I am doing my doctorate and working outside of my subject area. In the non-lecture period, it changes and my focus is more on research. However, I am still very interested in administrative tasks, so I invest a lot of hours because I really enjoy it.

I entered my job during the pandemic. The resulting working from home situation, especially at the beginning of my time at Leuphana, was easy to combine with my flexible working hours. At the beginning of my job, I was relatively rarely at the university and did not have to expose myself

unnecessarily to dangers as a commuter. Since this winter semester, I have been back at the university regularly thanks to teaching in person or in hybrid, which I am very happy about because it allows me to have a personal exchange with my colleagues.

I have a part-time position and a fixed-term contract for three years with the chance of a one-time extension. When I think about my contract situation, I am relatively relaxed, because I do not expect to finish my doctorate in three years. If an extension of my contract would not be possible, I would probably look for another position at Leuphana, as I would very much like to stay at the university.

I hope Leuphana makes the start for future WiMi easier. I see a very big advantage in passing on knowledge and communicating. Instead of the WiMi acquiring the knowledge on their own at the beginning, it could be prepared better and approached in a more centralized way.



## 2.1 Working conditions – *Current perception*

The WiMi at Leuphana appreciate each other. They describe a collegial and respectful working relationship. The work and exchange with other institutions, such as the deaneries, is also described positively. During the pandemic, with mainly digital interactions, the WiMi confirmed good accessibility and networking among colleagues.

Concerning the employment contracts of WiMi, different full- and part-time models can be identified at Leuphana. These are generally viewed positively, as they offer the possibility of responding to individual life plans. This can also increase diversity at the university.

However, from the interviewees point of view, it is problematic that the actual workload usually exceeds the contractually regulated working hours, resulting in many WiMi also having to work in their free time. The pandemic

reinforces this situation. It should also be emphasized that the doctorate is characterized as a leisure project.

Having a fixed-term contract is not a rarity in academia. This is also reflected at Leuphana, where 86.7 % of the WiMi contracts are fixed-termed. A contract term of three years or less is not uncommon. The fixed-term contract also creates uncertainties and fears concerning the future and career planning.

Working at the university or from home can be decided freely on an individual basis. Normally, the academic staff would link their decision to courses or appointments with colleagues. For many, a mixture is important. Due to the pandemic, however, the time spent working from home has increased, inter alia, due to Leuphana's recommendation. Getting to know each other and exchanging ideas is often missed out these times, especially for newcomers.





## 2.1 Working conditions – *Wishes*



## 2.1 Working conditions – Wishes

In the following, five wishes of the WiMi are presented. Moreover, the potentials are shown, the interviewed WiMi addressed at Leuphana regarding the working conditions.

WiMi who are at the beginning of their career expressed the wish to ease the start at Leuphana. They claimed that they often had to research information and contact persons on their own. They see a great advantage in networking, especially in the transfer of knowledge. In addition to a clearer homepage, they would like to see a *centralized and systematic start* at Leuphana that picks up on the potential. In this context, they furthermore expressed the desire for improved accessibility to the library as well as other institutions for doctoral students before submitting the exposé.

Another concern of the WiMi the lack of *appreciation of teaching* as this is often neglected and could be valued more. According to the WiMi, to improve quality, it would be desirable to have a stronger exchange between teachers to benefit from each other.

WiMi suggest to handover protocols to simplify the start of teaching for newcomers and provide a framework. Furthermore, there is a desire to introduce a 'University Teaching Qualification' to take pedagogical aspects into account.

The WiMi also see a need for action in dealing with the demands of Leuphana due to the pandemic situation. The demands are by no means problematic, but rather the lack of *constructive assistance* in reacting to the changed framework conditions.

Another wish for making everyday work easier is the *acquisition of third-party-funds*, which, according to the interviewees, is only possible to a limited extent for Leuphana's WiMi. Consequently, there is the wish to break down existing barriers.

The fifth aspect would be the creation of more *transparency in the workload*, since the real working time usually exceeds the contractual working time. Here, the recording of working time could form a basis, whereby the work in freely distributable work areas is distributed more evenly among all WiMi. The number of degree theses to be supervised is an example of this.



2.2

*dimension*

FAMILY SITUATION



‘Family and work can learn from each other. For me, a family-friendly personnel policy is a matter of course, since the family is the nucleus and basis of our society. Flexibility is the order of the day.

We need flexible and individual solutions.’<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Hubertine Underberg-Ruder, 2008

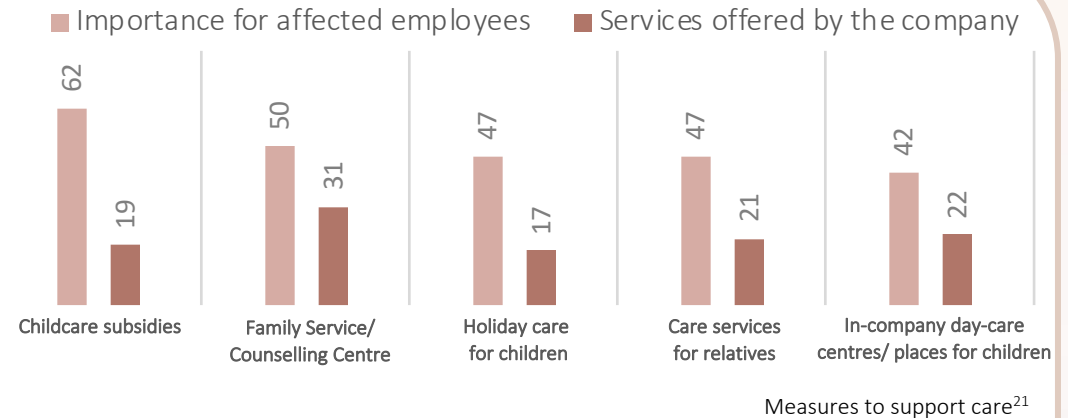


## 2.2 Family situation – Introduction

As Dr Hubertine Underberg-Ruder says, 'the family is the nucleus and basis of our society'.<sup>18</sup> The old-fashioned image of the working man with his wife and two children prevailed is questioned more frequently. Is the time gone when women stayed at home and were rarely the main breadwinners? Is the time gone when there must be a decision between 'family or career'?

Due to the increasing importance of equality among family roles, the demands on workplaces in terms of family-friendliness are rising. Are there internal childcare facilities? Can working hours be arranged by the employees themselves so that they can react flexibly to situations? Is it possible to reduce hours so that more time can be spent at home? Is it even possible to work completely from home office? These and many other questions can speak for or against starting a job in a company.

The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth presented the development of family-conscious working time offers in the publication 'Familienfreundliche Unternehmenskultur - Der entscheidende Erfolgsfaktor für die Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf' (Family-friendly corporate culture - the decisive success factor for reconciling family and work).<sup>19</sup> Flexible and family-friendly working hours are essential requirements for a successful reconciliation of family and work.



The report specifically states: 'For example, only just under a third of all companies that actually consider company childcare, holiday care, childcare subsidies or care services as important actually offer them.'<sup>20</sup>

These and many other facts make the company's change in terms of family friendliness apparent. But just because the general views are shifting, this does not allow any deductive conclusions to be drawn about individual companies. Leuphana's approach to the compatibility of family and work is presented below.





## 2.2 Family situation – *Situation at Leuphana*

With the family service of the Equal Opportunities Office, Leuphana has made it its task to incorporate and support the compatibility of family and career or studies as an important concern in the development of the university. The essential principle here is to recognize special life situations and to create a balance between study/work and private life.<sup>22</sup>

Through its active and creative support and special efforts to reconcile family and work, Leuphana was awarded the 'FaMi-Siegel' (seal for family-friendly companies) for the first time in 2019 and again for the years 2020-2022.<sup>23</sup> To this end, Leuphana has signed the charter 'Familie in der Hochschule' (Family in Higher Education) and has thus joined a nationwide network of universities working to improve family justice at universities.<sup>24</sup> But how are Leuphana's promises implemented in concrete terms?

The aforementioned Family Service organises and coordinates various programmes aimed at creating a family-friendly atmosphere.

This also includes counselling for employees and students. To ensure a smooth working day, solutions are worked out together, moreover, information and suggestions are provided, for example on childcare options.

For example, the 'Villa Milchzahn' (villa milk tooth) on the Volgershall campus offers day care for 8 children from 0 to 3 years.<sup>25</sup> With 9,823 students (winter semester 20/21) and 1,095 employees (01.12.2020), the number of day care places is approximately 0.073 %.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the 'Villa Milchzahn', there is the 'Lille Hus'. Moreover, employees can offer childcare to participants of conferences or seminars in cooperation with the Family Service. Other offers range from holiday care to a child-friendly cafeteria and the parent-child workroom 'Grad Kids'. The latter can be used for learning and working together.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the family service also refers to various external contact points. These include, for example, the 'Family Office of the Lüneburg Region' and the 'Child Day Care Advisory Service of the Lutheran Day Care Association of Lüneburg'.<sup>28</sup>



## 2.2 Family situation – Interview I

‘You can not say that a female scientist is predestined to start a family.’

I have been working in research at Leuphana for several years. My contract as WiMi is temporary and involves a part-time position. This means that I always have to be rehired as soon as I start a new project. If I do not have one, I have to look for something elsewhere.

I live in a partnership. Together we have two children. My decision for Leuphana as an employer had nothing to do with my family situation, but was a happy coincidence.

I perceive Leuphana as family-friendly, which is mainly due to my direct supervisor. This person has children of its own and knows exactly how things work. In terms of content, I also see the compatibility between family and career as very feasible. Working hours can be flexibly adapted to the children's care times.

However, the financial aspect of this profession, namely that you are constantly hired on a temporary basis, is an absolute family planning killer. That is why so many female colleagues decide not to have a family or leave science.

The Corona pandemic had a strong influence on my everyday working life, as taking care of my school-age child created extra work. However, Leuphana made an effort to counteract this situation as much as possible. There was a lot of goodwill in the various decisions on the part of the presidium.

All in all, I have had positive experiences at Leuphana with regard to family friendliness. The only problem is the fixed-term contracts. If there were no time limit here, there would be more security in terms of income and the ability to plan. However, the strategy of fixed-term contracts is not a problem for Leuphana, but for the German higher education system.



## 2.2 Family situation – Interview II

I work part-time as a WiMi and have a permanent position as a teacher for special tasks. The distribution of my working hours provides for 90 % teaching and 10 % administrative work. I am married and have two children.

I did not specifically choose Leuphana as my employer. I could have ended up somewhere else entirely, as I had applications from all over Germany. However, Leuphana had the right research project for me and my place of residence at the time was Lüneburg - that was a good fit. I also liked the structure of Leuphana. Since I've had children, the connection to my place of residence has become more and more relevant and I actually want to leave here less and less. Now that the first child is also going to school, the decision has been made that I have to stay here in Lüneburg or the surrounding area.

I personally perceive Leuphana as a very family-friendly employer. That also has to do with the teams in which I have been employed and involved so far. I have always worked in

teams where there was a family-friendly culture. I perceive framework conditions such as taking parental leave, granting leave, calling in sick as well as changing working hours as very uncomplicated because the administrative apparatus is very well organised.

Due to the flexibility, the possibilities to react to changes with children during the Corona pandemic were very good. Information from the presidium about compulsory presence or home office is relatively rigid; I would like to see more flexibility from the university management. Above all, I am bothered by the university's last-minute announcements about the pandemic, such as the changeover to hybrid teaching from one week to the next.

‘I am doing very well, as I said, I have these creative spaces and freedoms, especially time freedoms. I always find that really totally important as a family.’



## 2.2 Family situation – Interview III

‘The flexibility of my working hours and conditions are one reason why I trust myself to start a family during my qualification phase, during my temporary employment, and why I definitely see it as advantageous, because I believe that this can be easily reconciled at Leuphana.’

I have been a WiMi at Leuphana since 2019. I work full time, as my two-thirds position could always be increased to 100 % until now. Since this is a qualification position, it is limited to three years. My family situation influences the decision why I want to stay at Leuphana: my family lives in Lüneburg. So the family has kept me in Lüneburg a bit, although I would have gone somewhere else. I worked abroad for a while and now also have an international research stay, but I never felt I had to look for a job somewhere else.

Leuphana gives the impression of being a family-friendly employer. This is the impression I got from my colleagues and from the university's communication.

There are quite a few initiatives. If you are looking for help, you will get it. Children, offspring and the family situation are not perceived negatively or as an obstacle to employment. Taking parental leave, especially as a father, is something that is taken for granted and I do not think it is made difficult.

During Corona, we worked in home office all the time. This made me see even more how flexible my job can be.

For me personally, it could be problematic if I say that my parental leave should last until shortly before the semester starts. If I then still have to do the full teaching load during the semester, that would mean that I have to prepare four courses at once, for example, two weeks before the semester starts. I do not know to what extent I could then get a reduction in my hours or whether I would actually be expected to prepare everything during parental leave, because it would not work any other way. I am a bit worried about that, that's something I have to ask about.



## 2.2 Family situation – Interview IV

I have been employed part-time at Leuphana for a few years and have a temporary position as a WiMi. At the moment, my working hours are divided into 45 % for teaching, 45 % for research and 10 % for the administrative area. I live in a partnership and have children.

I chose Leuphana as my employer primarily because I personally and my ideas about research were a good match for my doctoral supervisor. My family situation had no influence on my decision. It is difficult for me to judge how family-friendly Leuphana is as an employer, as I personally always had a lot of freedom - both in terms of content and other aspects. In addition, I was able to arrange my working hours completely freely. Leuphana itself and also the department did not provide me with any concrete support in this regard.

In my particular case, I can say that the working day of a WiMi is compatible with family life because I was given complete freedom by my direct supervisor. The general

problem with having a part-time position, however, is that you are expected to do your doctorate after three years and have so many publications after another two years that you can then apply for a professorship. That is really only possible with a 120 % position.

The Corona pandemic had little impact on my everyday working life, because I was able to work very freely and in my home office beforehand. However, during the daycare and school closures, you had to organise times well when you could work concentrated without having to look after the children at the same time.

‘My impression is that Leuphana places a lot of emphasis on gaining a lot of reputation very quickly. That is very difficult when you have a family. However, I don't think this is a specific Leuphana problem, but a general problem in academia.’





## 2.2 Family situation – *Current perception*

Through the interviews, it became clear that balancing career and family is a major challenge for many WiMi. The development of an international network, the upcoming publications and the lack of security about being able to stay at one location often push the desire for a family into the background. This makes the family-friendliness of universities all the more important for WiMi.

The WiMi interviewed who combine a family with an academic career emphasised the organisation of the administrative apparatus. The general conditions basically allow for a family life alongside work. This is mainly due to the fact that Leuphana is very willing to cooperate. When actively seeking help, there is a wide range of initiatives and support measures on offer. However, some of the WiMi interviewed criticised the low level of awareness of these offers and the low capacity of the childcare places in the 'Villa Milchzahn' and 'Lille Hus'.

The fundamental fixed-term nature of the employment contracts posed a great challenge to the WiMi in terms of planning for the future. The resulting fears for the future were manifested in the

form of financial worries or multiple changes of residence in the course of their careers. Longer stays abroad also play a role here, but these are not always easy to reconcile with family life.

The flexibility of the work processes at Leuphana as a whole and especially during the pandemic was highlighted by the interviewees as particularly positive. It was no problem to work in a home office and thus be able to organise the working day autonomously and individually. This was perceived as very family-friendly and was evaluated positively throughout the interviews. Nevertheless, the announcements about the obligation to work from home and to be present were communicated at too short notice and made planning very difficult for young families.

Three years of doctoral studies and after about five years, finding a way into a junior professorship: This is already a real challenge as a student without a family and is even more difficult with a family. These points show both the strengths and the potential of Leuphana.



## 2.2 Family situation – *Wishes*



## 2.2 Family situation – *Wishes*

What are the wishes and identified potentials of the interviewed WiMi with regard to family-friendliness in their workplace at Leuphana?

Through the interviews it became clear that structural difficulties in relation to the diversity of family situations are a current topic. A high frequency of positions is not only desired, but also wanted in order to support WiMi in their nationwide and international networking. As for other nationwide universities too, there are only the options of *qualification and third-party funded positions* for WiMi at Leuphana. Both are positions that almost exclusively allow temporary contracts. One wish includes the creation of 'senior lecturer positions' or the de-funding of some WiMi positions.

An important component of any academic career seems to be international networking. This includes, among other things, longer stays abroad, which are more difficult to

reconcile in terms of time and finances with a family. For postdocs, there are many *funding opportunities* that specifically support families *during stays abroad*. WiMi with children can apply for money from the Leuphana equality fund. For doctoral students there especially is the Leuphana qualification fund. This fund supports research stays during the qualification phase with a maximum of 1,000 euros, whereby these funds are only intended for the journey. In this respect, according to the WiMi interviewed, separate child allowances could also be set up for doctoral students, for example, in order to further support the academic middle class at Leuphana.

In the area of *childcare services*, there is also a desire to expand the existing offer. In particular, 'ad-hoc care' for children of staff and students is desirable. At the same time, in the opinion of the WiMi, offers for older children should be created in order to increase the attractiveness of an academic career.



2.3

*dimension*

INTERNATIONALITY



‘To answer the increasingly complex questions of our time, the best researchers in a field must work together, regardless of where they have their roots and where they work. Anything that hinders exchange across borders is detrimental to science.’<sup>29</sup>

Prof. Otmar D. Wiestler, 2017





## 2.3 Internationality – Introduction

Crossing national borders is part of the everyday life of universities.<sup>30</sup> People of different nationalities engage in research exchanges and act as drivers of progress. For universities, internationality is a central building block for institutional profile development and at the same time an instrument of quality development drive of higher education reform. It promotes scientific cooperation as well as the dialogue of cultures.<sup>31</sup>

To ensure better global networking and standing, it is necessary to create a basis for individual integration for people from other nations before and during their stay. For people from other countries who want to take up an academic position at Leuphana, there are a variety of challenges that extend beyond the workplace and the language barrier. Often it is cultural obstacles that internationals come into contact with in everyday life.

The feel-good factor is determined in no small part by the extent to which idiosyncrasies and traditions can be lived out

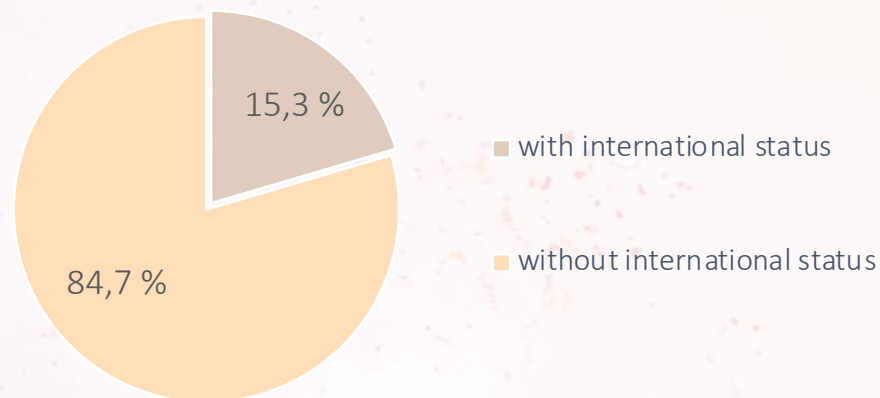
and perpetuated, and by the openness to diversity of the actors involved. Cultural differences begin with a visit to a government office or a doctor and extend to divergent management styles in the workplace. Consequently, it is not only about welcoming people to Leuphana, but also about arriving in society. Cultural diversity should not be seen as an obstacle, but rather as an opportunity of potential, which opens up new possibilities for Leuphana.

At this point it must be emphasised that not all needs are equal. Some WiMi are already more socialised, have already been to Germany, have acquaintances or relatives here. The diversity and thus the needs within this group of people are manifold and different. When dealing with them, care should be taken that there is no stereotypical status of 'international WiMi'. Not everyone wants to be forced into a prefabricated corset of offers and assistance. A balance must be created, offers must be made available and accessible, but without any social or institutional coercion.

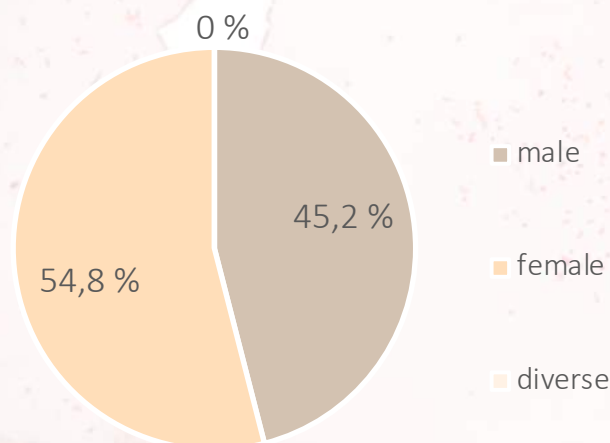


## 2.3 Internationality – *Situation at Leuphana*

WiMi at Leuphana



Gender identity of international WiMi



International WiMi at Leuphana <sup>35</sup>

The 'Welcome Centre' has been in place at Leuphana for three years as a contact point for international WiMi. This service centre aims to promote networking between international professionals, academics and students, as well as host institutes and regional companies. It is funded by the 'Fachkräfteallianz Nordostniedersachsen' within the framework of the European Social Fund at Leuphana.<sup>32</sup>

It is a service point that offers advice for WiMi with the status 'international'. It is responsible for questions concerning the social and professional integration of employees and their families. There are, for example, support measures regarding the search for accommodation or the application for visas and the offer of participation in a language course.

Among other things, the 'Welcome Centre' is informed by the respective institutes that international university members have successfully applied. The service centre has taken on the task of contacting them and offering support for a pleasant and problem-free arrival. Currently, 24 international WiMi are taking advantage of this offer. This figure is not a definitive indication of the number of international WiMi actually employed at Leuphana University. The reason for this is voluntary registration with the service office.<sup>33</sup>

Based on the data from 2020, 62 of the 406 WiMi employed at Leuphana have the status 'international'. These are divided into 34 female and 28 male employees.<sup>34</sup>



## 2.3 Internationality – Interview I

‘Making friends, it was not easy.’

I think the multidisciplinary approach at Leuphana is the way forward. It is a big plus that I can work with experts from a wide range of fields. And for me, my position is really interesting because it involves three things: working as a WiMi, doing a PhD and giving lectures. If I would have the opportunity, I would extend my contract.

Before I could start working, I had to apply for the visa, which was not a trifle considering that this sometimes takes some time at the embassy.

I needed a lot of paperwork from Leuphana beforehand. So in that the HR department of Leuphana really provided me with

all the paperwork I needed. Everything was great and I got the visa on time. The process was super-fast.

Besides the important support provided by my future boss, my only contact was with that person who worked in HR, and we just talked about administrative matters. I believe that when you first arrive, it is lacking a little bit on giving you some institutional support besides on this administrative side. When it comes to integrating, you have to search everything on your own. Then you start diving into it and trying. You know, there is no booklet or instruction starter kit. There is so much bureaucracy inside when you are working here that's a little bit too much at the beginning. There are some very interesting programs, but they are not notified. You have to actively search the rabbit hole of the web page.



## 2.3 Internationality – Interview II

‘Many people asked me to speak German only. But when I need to have a deeper discussion with them I prefer to speak English.’

I have a multi-disciplinary educational and study background. When I was in my home country, I had a good discussion with my supervisor and that is the reason I started in my field in Germany and working at Leuphana.

At the time of starting my job I received a lot of help from the university. The university and also the international office gave me some information about language learning. But when I started to prepare for coming to Germany, I did not know what kind of difficulties I would face. An even more stressful situation was at the time when I waited for my contract. It took three months and I did not receive it on time.

I also had problems with a matter in the foreigners' office in Germany. The personnel office of Leuphana and the office for

foreigners could not agree on my contract. They were not talking directly so I had to negotiate between them. It was tiring because the foreigners' office asked me to speak German only.

But in most situations people talk in German to me. When I go to the supermarket and have difficulties in German, they also try to speak to me in English. So, I am treated like a Foreigner, but I think it is not too bad to be treated like this. Of course, my life is different from that of the locals, the residents here, but I think it is acceptable and I could learn from that. I like the diversity of languages and like to hear them. I sat in the canteen with different colleagues, on the left side they spoke German and on the right side they spoke Spanish. I like that thing.

‘I did not know that the institute or faculty could be such a small size.’



## 2.3 Internationality – Interview III

‘If you are in a country  
you need to learn the culture.’

I think it is very prestigious to have worked at Leuphana, especially in my field. I love working with students who have just started their own careers and helping them to see the world in a few ways. So yes, I would love to get another contract at Leuphana.

I decided to be a research associate at Leuphana because of its reputation. I found out about the employment opportunities on the website. There has been a lot of teething problems in the beginning. Communication was difficult. For example, I have often been sent German forms as pdfs that you can not just copy and translate. Definitely one of the biggest things I could say is that the university should also help people with accommodation and moving. I mean my German is okay, but especially for people whose German is not that great, navigating ‘wg-gesucht’ or whatever and figuring out the meaning of ‘Kaltmiete’, that is a lot. I was not assigned to anyone to help me with lots of things I needed to do. For example, I still can not print. There needs to be a specific welcoming package.

In general, I think the German obsession with bureaucracy is always very difficult for any international person. It needs more of a human touch. To me it seems as if they live by the mentality of: ‘use them and then throw them to the next university’. That definitely might need a political change. I think it is embarrassing for Germany to treat its research associates this way.

I think the Human Resources Department currently has a huge deficit in intercultural competence and basic empathy - I felt mauled, belittled and angry from my encounters with my contact in HR - it was a terrible start to my time with the university and I am still getting over how badly treated I felt by this person. Intercultural competences are about understanding and being able to engage and work with various cultures, being up to critique your own and to understand that there is no right culture. There are simply people who see the world in different ways. And it is about figuring out how best to work together.





## 2.3 Internationality – Interview IV

‘It was like coming from one home  
to another home.’

The reason I moved to Germany is that Leuphana has a good reputation in the area of my specialization. I wanted to have a combination in an area where I can still continue the work I am doing – yet I also do my PhD in the same field.

But unfortunately, my current position was advertised very locally. If I had not been in personal contact with a professor I would not have known about the job. Afterwards, I wanted to find out more on the Leuphana website but even that was not very informative either. It is not a language problem; it is the way the content is structured. But in the end it worked out and I came to Germany.

After arriving, a colleague gave me the email-address of the international office that has organized a special German course for international staff members.

They also helped me to open my bank account and one person came with me to the citizens' office. I am gradually getting to know more of Leuphanas' offerings and programs, and I am surprised at what is available. I think it is important to be informed about them like for example the equal opportunity office or the international office.

I also had to experience negative things like racism in different ways. Sometimes I feel like they are not taking me seriously enough because I do not know the language. I am expected to immediately adapt to the German style of dining, the style of behavior, to the style of basic manners. These things should have been told me beforehand because I am not from the local culture. Nevertheless, I do not want to lose the person who I am just because I have to fit myself into this culture. I had to prove myself and I think I did a good job.

‘There should be an international voice  
in the political system at Leuphana.’



## 2.3 Internationality – *Current perception*

All of the students who were interviewed with regard to the dimension of 'Internationality' stated that they took the job because of Leuphana University's reputation in their field. However, they only became aware of the specific job advertisement in a roundabout way.

It was positively emphasised that the entire campus as well as the university's website had no language barriers. Nevertheless, the structure of the website was criticised because it was not very intuitive and information was difficult to find without prior knowledge.

Perceptions of Leuphana's support prior to arrival in Germany varied widely, with all interviewees feeling that support was provided more personally by direct contacts than by the university as an institution. Communication with the Human Resources Department was described as difficult by three of the four interviewees. There were many bureaucratic hurdles and many forms, which were often sent in German and in a file format that could not be copied. There were several reports of a delayed start of the activity due to missing documents, whereby

the interviewees repeatedly referred to the consideration of the current situation due to the Corona pandemic.

The international WiMi reported good networking and cooperation among themselves. However, the international students were often part of the communication groups, so that there were few opportunities for separate exchange.

In addition, the many different offers and support measures, such as the 'International Office', the 'Welcome Centre' or the Equal Opportunities Office were perceived positively. At the same time, however, attention was also drawn to the low level of information. Many of the international WiMi had only become aware of them through certain incidents or concerns.

In all of the interviews, the focus was on cultural similarities and differences as an important element of integration. It was mainly the German customs such as a clear daily structure, excessive punctuality and adherence to routines that should be addressed before arrival.



## 2.3 Internationality – *Wishes*



## 2.3 Internationality – Wishes

The mood of the international WiMi at Leuphana gained from the interviews can be described as good overall.

Even before starting work in Germany, there are numerous individual questions on the part of the future employees. On the one hand, in order to counteract this uncertainty, contacts could be established between international employees who take up the position at the same time. On the other hand, from the WiMi point of view, it would make sense to provide each newcomer with a *mentor* so that personal concerns can also be addressed.

Enabling participation in a *language course* before arrival in Germany, for example in an online format, was also described as advantageous in order to relieve the time burden. Furthermore, the wish was expressed several times that each international WiMi should receive a *welcome package* with the most important information and contact points for the university and private context. Overall, it was requested that *bureaucratic procedures* be made more flexible and

that communication with administrative areas at Leuphana be made easier. In this regard, it was stated that it would be helpful to revise the forms from the perspective of an international person or to provide a translator or mentor for joint processing.

According to two of the interviewees, international festivals with specific, changing focal points would be a way to include all participants at Leuphana and create openness for different nationalities and cultures. In addition, the desire for *intercultural competence training* – mandatory for the most important contact persons in everyday university life and optional for all university members – was expressed.

In order to further promote the internationalisation of Leuphana, it would be advisable to publish *proactive job advertisements* on a global level or to link them separately and explicitly on the website. The structure of the website should also be revised with regard to intuitive navigation.



03

# chapter

CONCLUSION





### 3 Conclusion

Diversity and social justice are essential components of Leuphana's mission statement. By signing the Diversity Charta and formulating 'Diversity as an Opportunity' code specifically adapted to the university context, the aim is to advance the recognition, appreciation, and inclusion of diversity. In addition to formulating theoretical guidelines, the Equal Opportunities Office, among others, is tackling the issue of examining the real-life conditions of university members.

The 'Leuphana Diversity Fact Book – WiMi', which emerged from the Equal Opportunities Office's project mandate, represents a current stocktaking and attempts to provide an answer to how diversity can be further promoted.

To make the individual realities of the WiMi' lives visible, qualitative research was conducted through interviews. Due to the scope, thematic focal points were set by 'working conditions', 'family situation' and 'internationality'. In addition to the presentation of diverse lifestyles, it was important for us to find out how people experience working together at Leuphana.

We highlighted positively perceived aspects for this purpose, potential challenges, and the potential for improvement. Additionally, we developed ideas that could contribute to the promotion of diversity at Leuphana. Other goals in the creation of the Fact Book were to create awareness for the appreciation and recognition of diversity through personal biographies and to stimulate an individual broadening of horizons.

Through the conducted interviews, we generated insights regarding the current situation of WiMi at Leuphana. At this point, however, it has to be emphasized that the qualitative survey does not claim to be representative. Out of 406 employed WiMi in 2020, only 12, and thus less than 3 %, were interviewed. Since similar aspects were discussed in many interviews and personal experiences of other colleagues were also reported, it can nevertheless be concluded that these are not exclusively individual views. The 'wishes' include dimension-specific positive factors as well as challenges and potentials that have already been pointed out. In the following, we will therefore examine aspects that are crucial across dimensions.



### 3 Conclusion

The WiMi perceived the collegiality positively. The direct colleagues were cooperative and contributed to a good working atmosphere. Especially at the beginning of the job, the question of contact persons seems to be central. Furthermore, they frequently mentioned the structure of the website. Despite being informative, it represents a challenge, especially for newcomers. Hence, WiMi sponsorships could offer a solution to make an easier start at Leuphana. In addition, WiMi appreciate the variety of offers and support measures as well as contact points for specific concerns, such as the Welcome Centre or the Family Service.

Nevertheless, these support options are equally a potential of Leuphana. Many of the interviewed WiMi had only become aware of these opportunities by chance and through their research. Leuphana could therefore consider providing more information about these opportunities. An isolated expansion of support options, such as ad hoc childcare, was also suggested.

An overarching idea that would link the aspects mentioned could be, to create a uniform onboarding process for the WiMi.

On one hand, this could strengthen the development of a network of contacts, and on the other hand, it offers Leuphana an opportunity to communicate the support opportunities more actively. In addition, a revision of the website should be discussed.

Particular emphasis was placed on flexibility concerning the independent scheduling of work processes. However, it also became clear that there are different levels of interest in research and teaching. One suggestion that came up was job advertisements with focal points. This would enable WiMi to already take their preferences into account when applying.

In conclusion, it can be said that some of the challenges cited are not specific to Leuphana. For example, the desire to make employment contracts permanent is in reality determined by the political system and thus not feasible for Leuphana. Nonetheless, other aspects, such as a central onboarding process with patrons and the receipt of an information package, could be realized.



04

chapter

NOTE OF THANKS



# note of thanks

## NOTE OF THANKS

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who have supported us in various ways in carrying out our teaching research project.

We would like to thank our clients, Mrs. Dr. Anja Thiem and Mrs. Dr. Brit-Maren Block, who provided us with answers and suggestions at all times and actively supported us in our search for interview partners. We would like to thank our seminar leader, Mrs. Prof. Dr. Christiane Söffker, for organising the sessions and for sharing her expertise and advice on how to conduct an interview-based research project, as well as all the Leuphana staff who helped us with research on the employment relationships of WiMi and provided us with information on topics such as copyright and data protection.

Without our interview partners, however, this project would not have been possible. That is why we would like to thank them for their time, for their trust and for the exciting insights into their lives.

*Many Thanks!*



05

# chapter

SOURCES





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06

chapter

APPENDIX





# Interview guide

## 1 Start

- Welcome
- Introduction of the project
- Explanation of the interview procedure

## 2 Demographic questions

- What is your professional background so far?
- At which faculty are you employed?
- Do you work full or part time? What percentage?
- Is your employment contract limited or unlimited?
- How are your working hours distributed in terms of research, teaching and administrative tasks?
- How old are you?

## 3 Dimensions

### 3.1 Working conditions

- How do you organise your private life and your working day? Is there a strict separation?
- What is the relationship between work at the university and in the home office?
- How flexible are you or how flexible do you need to be?

### 3.2 Family situation

- How family-friendly is Leuphana as an employer?
- Do you perceive Leuphana's support options as sufficient?
- To what extent has the pandemic affected your family situation and your everyday working life?

### 3.3 Internationality

- Why did you decide to work in Germany and specifically at Leuphana?
- To what extent did Leuphana support you before you started working?
- What language skills do you have and in which language do you communicate in the university context?

## 4 Current situation

- How do you feel about your everyday working life?
- What do you feel is positive, what would be improved when you think about Leuphana's handling of DIMENSION?
- What wishes do you have for Leuphana?

## 5 Conclusion

- Are there any other aspects you would like to address?
- Farewell

