

Krakowianki – Women of Krakow



 Krakow, Poland

Integrated approach

Governance

Introduction

Kraków is Poland's second-largest city and a major cultural and economic hub which has emerged as a pioneer in gender equality policy implementation among Polish municipalities. The city's comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming began taking shape in 2016 and crystallised with the establishment of the Equality Council in 2019 and the creation of the Plenipotentiary for Equality Policy position in 2021.

Introduced in 2021, the Krakowianki project - literally meaning "Women of Krakow" - represents an interdisciplinary approach addressing gender equality challenges across different sectors. The initiative is led by the Mayor's office through a dedicated equality department, working in close collaboration with the Equality Council, a consultative body that includes representatives from various city departments, NGOs, universities, and community stakeholders. The program operates across multiple municipal departments including sports, culture, tourism, social issues, and health, ensuring gender perspectives are integrated throughout city governance. As an umbrella program, it encompasses numerous initiatives targeting workplace equality, sports participation, violence prevention, health improvement, and historical recognition of women's contributions to the city's development.

[Problem Statement]

In Krakow, the city administration lacked a cohesive framework for existing equality initiatives, and there was no dedicated expertise in gender mainstreaming within the municipal structure. Rising tensions around LGBTQI+ issues, reproductive rights, and gender equality in national-level political discourse created both challenges and opportunities for cities intervening on equality matters. In this context, Krakow began its gender equality journey by relying on European and transnational cooperation frameworks. For example, Vienna represented an inspirational example of a city pursuing gender mainstreaming.

Additionally, the absence of systematic gender analysis in municipal policies became evident through research conducted in 2022, which revealed significant gender disparities within the city administration itself, where despite women comprising 60% of City Hall staff and 70% of department directors, men were advancing faster in leadership roles.

[Implementation and Actions]

Kraków's approach focuses on embedding gender mainstreaming throughout municipal governance rather than treating equality as a standalone issue. The comprehensive strategy operates through multiple interconnected programs under the "**Krakowianki**" umbrella, each targeting specific sectors and barriers to gender equality.

6 themes:

- The **workplace and business** support component includes:

- Research studies on female workforce situations,
- Empowering training programs and webinars,
- Networking groups, and high-level events with CEOs of major Kraków-based companies.
- **Sports initiatives** address the significant gender gap in participation, with only 18% of marathon runners being women before intervention, through:
 - Support for women's sports teams,
 - Research on young women in sport,
 - Teacher training programs,
 - Empowering campaigns,
 - Celebrating women's sports history.
- **Anti-violence initiatives** provide comprehensive support through:
 - A dedicated municipal website,
 - A 24-hour helpline,
 - Outdoor city campaigns,
 - Intervention centres and safehouses,
 - Participation in the international "16 Days against Gender-Based Violence" campaign.
- The "**Herstory**" component celebrates women's contributions through:
 - The Women's Trail allowing visitors to discover the city by retracing steps of historical women,
 - The "Girl Power Books" collection in city libraries,
 - Herstory programming in schools, and the expanded Krakowianki's Month in March featuring several events.
- **Health improvement initiatives** address specific gender-related health needs through:
 - HPV vaccine funding for girls,
 - IVF financing,
 - Breast cancer awareness projects,
 - "Pink boxes" program providing free hygiene products in every school.
- The prestigious **Kazimiera Bujwidowa Award**, established in 2021, recognizes four outstanding women annually whose achievements significantly impact the city's development.

The implementation strategy leveraged Kraków's unique administrative structure, where the Mayor, deputy mayors, and department directors each manage separate budgets. Rather than creating entirely new funding streams, the equality initiatives were integrated across existing departmental budgets based on thematic alignment. The Women's Marathon received funding through the sports department, historical campaigns through tourism or culture departments, and NGO grants through the social issues budget. The cross-departmental approach required strong mayoral support to facilitate fund transfers and ensure cooperation. Nina Gabrys, Rep. of the Mayor of the city of Krakow for the equality policy, said that: "*The cooperation was smoother because I was working within the Mayor's office, which gave me leverage to drive change.*" This positioning proved crucial for overcoming initial resistance from departments who claimed equality was not their concern.

Funding mechanisms include municipal budget allocations for departmental initiatives, dedicated grants for NGOs focusing on anti-discrimination and gender equality projects supported by national legislation promoting democracy and human rights, and strategic partnerships with universities for research collaboration to minimise costs. The monthly Equality Council meetings foster ongoing collaboration and idea exchange, while the Human Rights Cities network provides international inspiration and best practice sharing.

The program's growth demonstrates successful scaling, with Kraków Women's Month expanding from 100 events in its early years to 2,000 events across the city in recent editions, covering business, health,

finance, and culture sectors. This expansion reflects both increased municipal capacity and growing community engagement with equality initiatives.

Project-based outcome tracking reveals significant participation growth across initiatives. The Women's Run saw substantial increases in female participation. Business workshops attracted 500 women participants, while teacher training programs on equality demonstrated high engagement levels and positive feedback scores. The monthly Equality Council meetings maintain consistent stakeholder participation, while NGO grant programs continue to support numerous anti-discrimination and gender equality projects annually.

[Lessons Learned]

As Nina Gabrys advised: *"Never assume someone won't support your cause. I had tough conversations with departments like sports or tourism, who initially said, 'This isn't our issue.' But many became allies after seeing examples of inequality."*

The strategy of beginning with visible, engaging projects to build momentum proved effective, though Nina later reflected: *"With the knowledge I have now, I'd focus more on systemic policy changes from the start, like revising regulations earlier. Initially, I prioritised visible projects to build momentum, but I learned that uniting initiatives under a single policy framework is more effective."* This evolution led to the 2022 publication of Kraków's first official gender equality document, embedding mainstreaming principles into city governance. The success of integrating gender perspectives into existing programs rather than creating separate "women's initiatives" proved crucial. Collaboration with universities for research proved essential for keeping costs manageable while maintaining evidence-based approaches. The use of existing municipal resources like libraries and local media for promotion maximised impact without requiring substantial additional budgets.

[Key Takeaways]

- The Kraków model offers strong transferability potential for other European cities, particularly those with similar administrative structures and political contexts. The key replicable elements include the cross-departmental integration approach rather than siloed equality programming, the consultative Equality Council model bringing together diverse stakeholders, and the evidence-based policy development process beginning with comprehensive gender analysis.
- The [Human Rights Cities network](#) membership provided crucial international context and best practice sharing, suggesting that other cities could benefit from similar network participation. Critical success factors for replication include securing strong mayoral support and positioning equality coordination within the mayor's office for institutional leverage, establishing monthly stakeholder consultation mechanisms to maintain engagement and collaboration, and developing patient relationship-building strategies to overcome initial departmental resistance.
- The program's evolution from project-based to policy-integrated approaches provides a roadmap for other cities, suggesting that beginning with visible, engaging initiatives can build momentum for more systematic policy changes. The emphasis on leveraging existing municipal resources and partnerships rather than requiring entirely new funding streams makes the model particularly attractive for cities with constrained budgets.

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Nina Gabrys

Rep. of the Mayor of the city of Krakow for
the equality policy

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Krakow Open City Portal, [Krakowianki Project Summary](#)

Krakow Open City Portal, [Towards a Human Rights City](#)

Municipality of Krakow: [Krakow Women's Run](#); [HerStory initiatives](#)

Krakowianki: [Entrepreneurial Women mentoring program](#)