The awareness-raising strategy on equality, diversity and inclusion addressed to the personnel participating in the Antarctic campaigns

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Summary

Antarctic activities take place in remote, isolated environments and in close coexistence with unknown people. Since 2018, the Spanish Polar Committee includes a course on equality, diversity and inclusion in its mandatory training for staff participating in the Antarctic campaign. The purpose of this course is to avoid discriminatory behaviours and address the challenges that, in these circumstances, arise to achieve an environment that facilitates equality, diversity and inclusion of all people who participate in Antarctic activities, whether they are scientific or operational. Spain recommends that the Parties incorporate this awareness objective into their training programmes.

Background

The first time that an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) paid attention to issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion was in 2019 when “The Meeting agreed to make two amendments to the [Secretariat] staff rules regarding the issue of gender, to better align the rules with international best practices” (ATCM XLII, Final Report, paragraph 152).

Subsequently, this topic was included in the Multiannual Strategic Work Plan (PTEP). At ATCM XLIII, as priority 18; and at ATCM XLIV, as priority 13 with the following formulation: Address issues of equality, diversity and inclusion by encouraging the full participation of under-represented groups in Antarctic scientific activities and operations for all Antarctic issues including science, operations, policy and law.

Spanish regulatory framework

The progressive development of legislative initiatives in favour of equal treatment and non-discrimination, which fulfils commitments assumed by Spain within the framework of the United Nations, the Council of Europe or the European Union, has recently ended up with the adoption of the Comprehensive Law for equal treatment and non-discrimination (Law 15/2022, of 12 July), have placed Spain at the forefront of the most advanced countries in equality policies.

The purpose of this law is to guarantee and promote the right to equal treatment and non-discrimination, and to respect the equal dignity of persons, as established in the Spanish Constitution. For these purposes, the law: regulates the rights and obligations of persons (physical or legal; public or private); establishes principles of action of the public authorities; and provides for measures aimed at preventing, eliminating and correcting all forms of discrimination, direct or indirect, in the public and private sectors.

Outreach to raise awareness

Antarctic activities take place in remote, isolated environments and in close coexistence with unknown people. The right to equality, diversity and inclusion9 must be effectively guaranteed. Not perceiving inequalities or inappropriate behaviours does not mean that they do not exist. For this reason, it is essential to raise awareness through specific courses that enable to prevent, detect and act against any discriminatory conduct, “the eye does not see what the mind does not know”.

Since 2018, the Spanish Polar Committee has included a session on “awareness raising on equality, diversity and inclusion” in the mandatory training received by personnel participating in the Spanish Antarctic campaign. Some of the fundamental ideas are as follows:

* Consolidate basic concepts related to equality
* Recognise and consider diversity
* Guarantee equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities
* Moving from a “legitimised” inequality to a fundamental right that must be effectively guaranteed

This action is a first step to raise awareness about a problem that is becoming increasingly visible in Antarctic activities. Alerting about what kind of behaviours are unacceptable and may even have legal consequences. It is very important to establish procedures and channels for advice and reporting that guarantee the confidentiality, speed, security and protection of people.

Conclusions and recommendation

After five years incorporating this objective of raising awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion, the following conclusions have been reached:

* Most of the personnel participating in the Antarctic campaign, particularly women, received the inclusion of this training session positively
* The outreach component is essential (“The eye does not see what the mind does not know.”)
* We recommend that the Antarctic Treaty Parties include specific sessions on equality, diversity and inclusion in their training programmes.