



Recommendations on the Principles of Professional Communication Culture at the University of Lodz – a Practical Guide

Work-Life Balance Team, University of Lodz

Introduction

You are sitting comfortably in an armchair, with a cup of tea in one hand and a good book in the other. Suddenly, you hear a familiar sound – an e-mail notification: “Hi, I have one question...” – and the long-awaited “moment of relaxation” turns into a “moment of stress”. The tea grows cold, the book has to wait. That “one question” turns out to be an hour of work, during which you need to write three e-mails and take part in an ad hoc conversation.

Is such a situation fiction or is it reality? Do you sometimes feel that working hours have no limits?

In an era of widespread access to communication tools and remote work, the boundaries between professional and private life are becoming increasingly blurred. Although technology enables us to stay in touch almost around the clock, this does not mean that we should use it unreflectively. Communicating on work-related matters outside established working hours disrupts work–life balance and may lead to unnecessary stress.

This guide has been created to remind us that life after work does exist and should be protected. From it, you will learn:

-  why writing to someone in the evening does not make you more committed;
-  why you should respect the free time of other employees;
-  what the consequences of poorly considered after-hours communication may be;
-  how to build a healthy work culture based on mutual respect and understanding;
-  and that if an e-mail can wait until tomorrow, nothing bad will happen.

So let us begin – in a relaxed way but with a message. Work is not everything. Especially after working hours.

About the team

The guide was developed at the initiative of the **Work–Life Balance Team of the University of Lodz**. The Team was established on 3 February 2025 by the Regulation No. 99 of the Rector of the University of Lodz. The main task of the Team is “to support the University authorities and the entire academic community in implementing policies related to combining professional and caregiving roles, sustainable work practices, and maintaining work–life balance at the University of Lodz”¹.

The Team pursues its objectives, among other things, through:

-  researching, monitoring and analysing the needs and expectations related to the functioning within the academic environment of individuals performing parental and caregiving roles;
-  providing advisory, consultative and opinion-forming support concerning solutions for combining private and professional life, with the aim of creating a more family-friendly, welcoming and inclusive working environment;
-  promoting knowledge and raising awareness of challenges related to combining private and professional life and to sustainable work; and
-  proposing, consulting and promoting solutions intended to support work–life balance.

The Team consists of 18 members, representing academic, teaching and administrative staff, as well as representatives of trade unions operating at the University of Lodz, students and doctoral students. The Team cooperates with the Employee Affairs Centre of the University of Lodz, the Equality Council of the University of Lodz and the Centre for External Relations and Social Responsibility of the University.

¹ <https://www.uni.lodz.pl/en/about-the-university/councils/work-life-balance-team>

Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this document is to foster a positive work culture at the University of Lodz through:

-  promoting balance between working time and private time (the promotion of the work–life balance concept),
-  promoting respect for the time free from professional duties of employees of the University of Lodz,
-  educational activities aimed at limiting professional communication to working days and hours recommended as acceptable for the entire University of Lodz community (07:00–17:00).

The guide serves not only an informational function but also includes examples of good practices and instructional elements related to the option of delayed e-mail sending in the Employee Portal and in Outlook Office 365. In addition, it refers to a broader formal and legal context, positioning the University of Lodz as a modern institution aligned with contemporary trends resulting from the implementation into the Polish legal system of the European Union’s Work–Life Balance Directive and the increasingly widely discussed in Europe “right to disconnect”, understood as the right not to engage in work-related communication and tasks during one’s free time.

The overarching objective of the guide is care and concern for the well-being of the University of Lodz community, understood as comfort and satisfaction at work, satisfaction with the quality of communication and interpersonal relations within the organisation, accompanied by subjective satisfaction with one’s own mental and emotional health and the absence of professional burnout.

Communication

Internal communication at the University is key to work effectiveness and job satisfaction. However, it may also be a source of frustration and professional burnout related to the sense of pressure resulting from the need to constantly respond to information received from employers or co-workers. The remote work model has significantly disrupted the boundaries of good practice in this area. As a result, most of us experience a disturbance of the boundary between work and private life, leading to a feeling of being at work 24 hours a day. In order to prevent such situations as much as possible, we recommend the following courses of action within the academic community:

Employee-to-employee Communication

-  Adopting the principle that professional communication of the University's research and research-and-teaching employees takes place on working days between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., and that contact outside this time frame is only possible in exceptional situations;
-  Observing the working time schedules of administrative staff;
-  Refraining from communication (e.g. sending emails, making phone calls) outside the above-mentioned time frames – in such cases, the delayed e-mail sending function may be used (instructions on pp. 7–8);
-  Refraining from professional communication (regardless of the communication channel) during night-time hours and at weekends (with the exception of weekend sessions in the case of part-time studies), as this may lead to violations of labour law provisions establishing minimum uninterrupted rest periods (lack of the required daily rest);
-  Attempting to separate communication in private matters from actions undertaken in professional matters. In an organisation such as the University of Lodz, this may be difficult; however, consciously separating communication channels will, over time, help minimise situations in which “urgent” professional tasks are handled within private contacts (email, chat, instant messenger);
-  Sending professional instructions, tasks and information sufficiently in advance – this will minimise conflicts related to performing tasks “at the last minute” at the expense of private and family life. Therefore, as a matter of good practice, we recommend not assigning tasks on Friday afternoons that are to be completed by Monday;

- Activating an automatic reply (autoresponder) during periods of absence, including information about the expected return-to-work date and the person acting as a substitute (instructions on p. 9). Such an autoresponder helps limit the number of messages sent to the absent person, while senders know whom they can contact with questions or when they may expect a response;
- Information on employees' leave is available in the Employee Portal (PP) – it is possible to check there when a given person is absent and who is substituting for them. It is important that substitutions are entered into the Employee Portal, as this facilitates communication. Additionally, the EP contains information on work schedules and the preferred form of contact with employees, provided such information has been indicated;
- Sensitivity on the part of supervisors to the timing of communication with subordinates and care for their well-being in this respect (monitoring, e.g. anonymous surveys assessing internal communication within a unit, encouraging feedback, dialogue and opinions). It should be remembered that in communication with supervisors, an employee experiences significantly greater pressure related to assigned duties, even if their fulfilment were to take place at the expense of personal life.

Communication with Students

- We encourage the establishment of clear time frames for communication between students and teaching staff.

Students should receive a clear signal (e.g. in the form of an email footer, a message posted in the Employee Portal, or a notice on the TEAMS platform) that the university staff have the right not to respond to emails or TEAMS chat messages during their private time; this also applies to late afternoon hours, weekends (does not apply to part-time studies) and periods of leave. The same principles should apply reciprocally in contacts between staff and students;

- It is advisable to inform students via the Employee Portal about office hours (this can be done by clicking the “View your profile” button in the PP, then selecting “Edit profile” and the “Office hours” tab). This function is useful for all employees – both academic and administrative staff;

✚ If any of you prefer to communicate with students outside the conventionally designated working hours (i.e. 7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. during the academic year and examination sessions), this should be clearly indicated as your personal choice and not as a rule applicable to all teaching staff;

✚ We recommend not providing students with private telephone numbers;

✚ As in the case of employee-to-employee communication, we also recommend using the delayed e-mail sending function and automatic replies during periods of absence in contacts with students.

The above principles constitute a well-intentioned set of recommendations, developed on the basis of the experiences of members of the academic community. We do not intend in any way to limit your right to manage your own time. We encourage you to reflect on your work culture and consider whether it may, in any respect, disrupt the well-being of colleagues, subordinates or students.

How to Send Emails and Remain Human, or How to Use Delayed Sending for Work-Related Correspondence – a Step-by-Step Guide

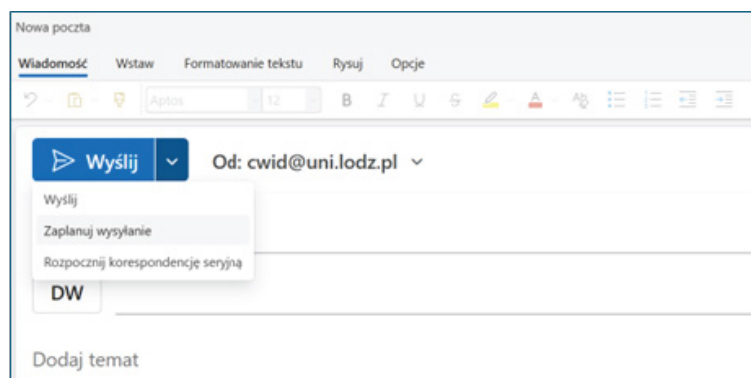
If you work best at night, that's great! Please do not give up your own rhythm. We have just one suggestion: before you send another thirty e-mails at two o'clock in the morning, we encourage you to take a moment to read this guide. It explains how to send messages at dawn without losing your colleagues along the way.



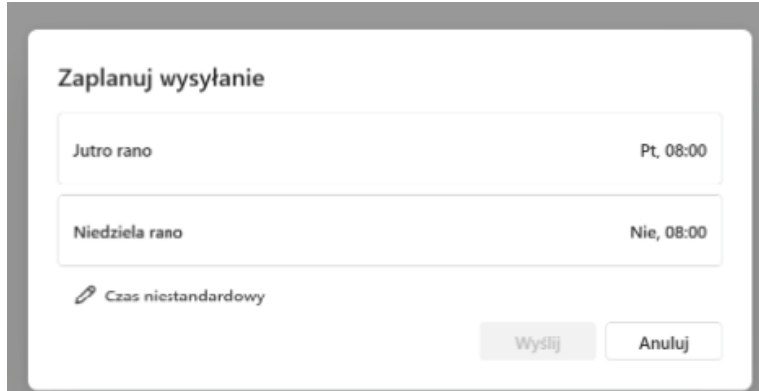
Outlook (e-mail program) on a computer and in a web browser

Step 1 – write an e-mail;

Step 2 – before sending it, click the arrow next to the **Send** button and select **Schedule sending**.



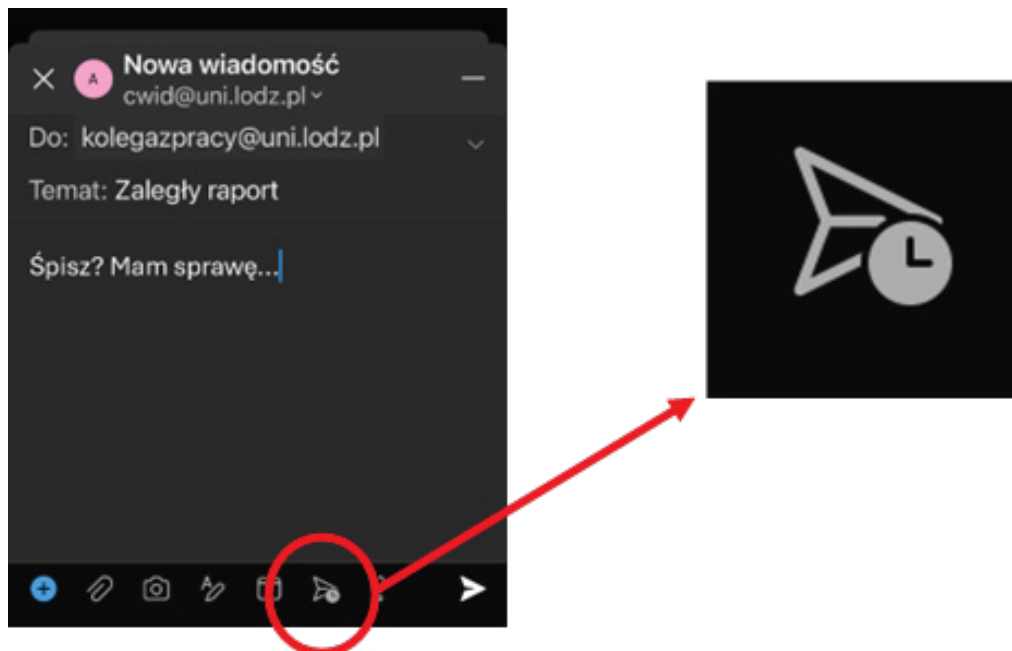
Step 3 – in the scheduling window, click Custom time and set the delivery time.
Please remember that, as a rule, e-mails are sent **from Monday to Friday between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.**



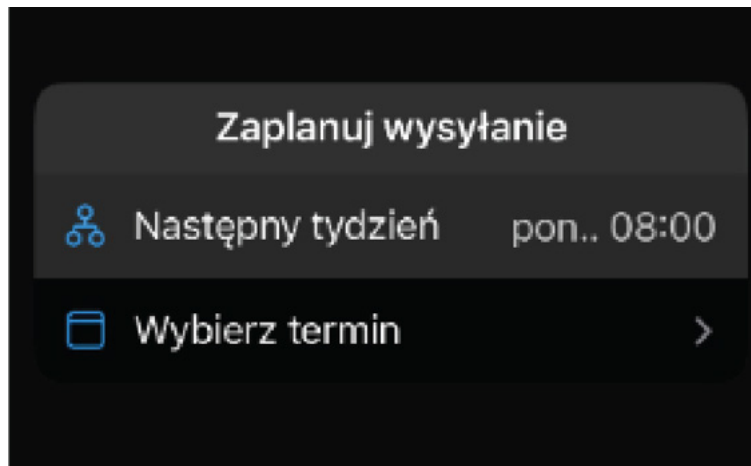

Outlook on a mobile phone

Step 1 – write an e-mail;

Step 2 – before sending it, click the arrow-with-a-clock icon (you will find it at the bottom of the screen; if it is not visible, click the plus sign and add the arrow-with-a-clock icon);



Step 3 – set the delivery time. Please note that e-mails sent from a mobile phone should also be sent **from Monday to Friday between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.**



Autoresponder, or How to Use Technology to Set Boundaries

An autoresponder informs others about your absence from work. If you see an out-of-office message from your recipient, consider refraining from sending your message or postponing its delivery. This practice helps to avoid having two thousand unread messages waiting in our e-mail inboxes after returning from leave.



Autoresponder in the Employee Portal (PP)

An automatic reply is configured by default in the Employee Portal when completing a leave application. It is important that the checkbox next to **Add autoresponder** remains selected. Using the automatic reply in the Employee Portal overrides the autoresponder settings in the Outlook application, so there is no need to configure it additionally in the e-mail client.

Automatyczne odpowiedzi (Poczta)

☒ Dodaj autoresponder (automatyczną odpowiedź) na czas urlopu do swojej skrzynki pocztowej

Podgląd

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Szanowni Państwo,

dziękuję za przesłaną wiadomość: _data_r_. Jestem nieobecny, na wszystkie wiadomości odpowiem po powrocie.

Osoby zastępujące:

zastepstwo

! O czym należy pamiętać?

- Autoresponder wygenerowany w Portalu Pracowniczym jest w pełni edytowalny - w razie potrzeby można do niego dodać niezbędne treści
- Autoresponder zastępuje odpowiedzi automatyczne ustawiane w programie pocztowym
- Wszelkie zmiany autorespondera są możliwe na stronie "Urlopy i nieobecności" w zakładce "Komunikaty o nieobecnościach"



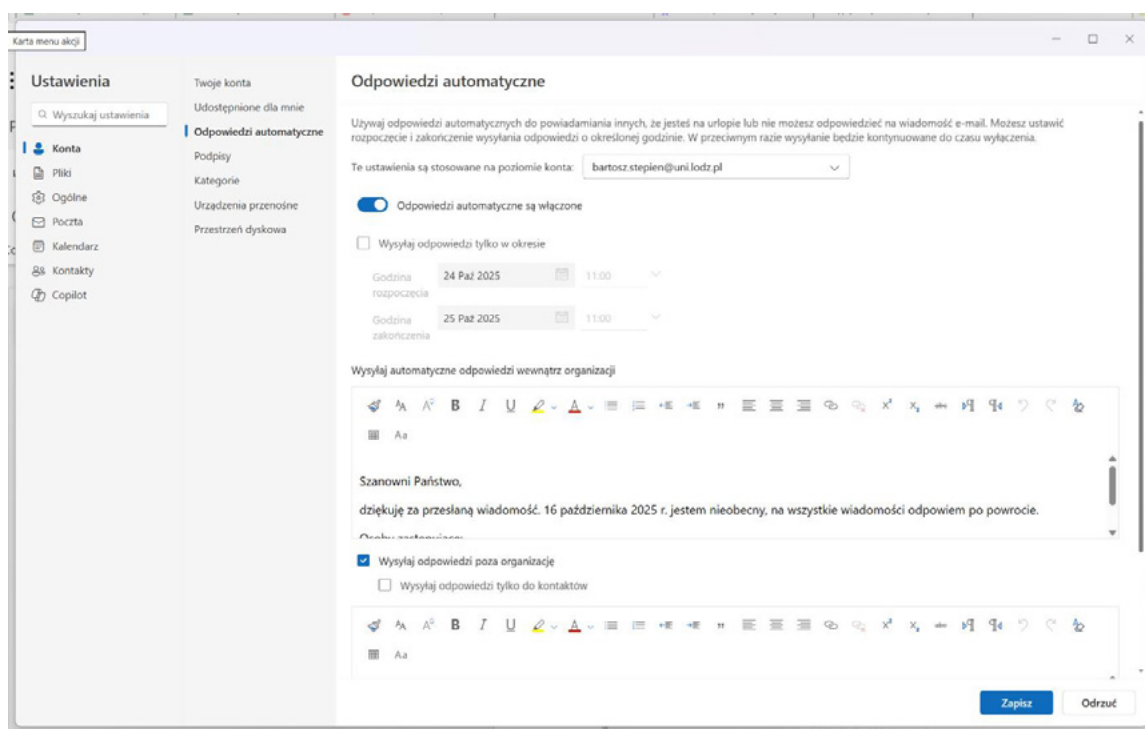
Autoresponder in Outlook (e-mail application) on a computer and in a web browser

If setting the autoresponder in the Employee Portal is not possible, you can configure it directly in Outlook.

Step 1 – open Settings – click the cogwheel icon in the upper-right corner of the application;



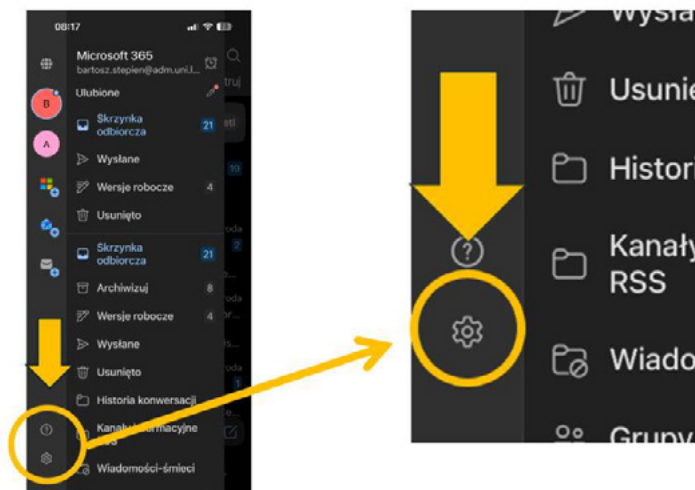
Step 2 – from the menu, select “Automatic replies”, set the time period and the content of the message. Finally, click “Save”;



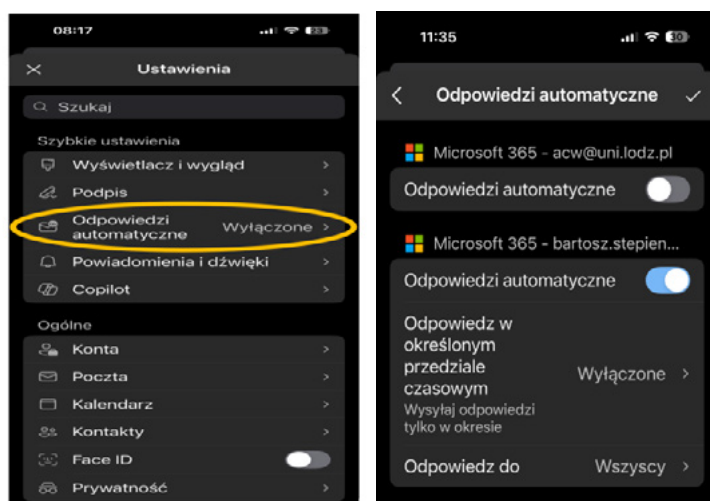


Autoresponder in Outlook on a mobile phone

Step 1 – open Settings – the cogwheel icon (usually available on the application’s main screen);



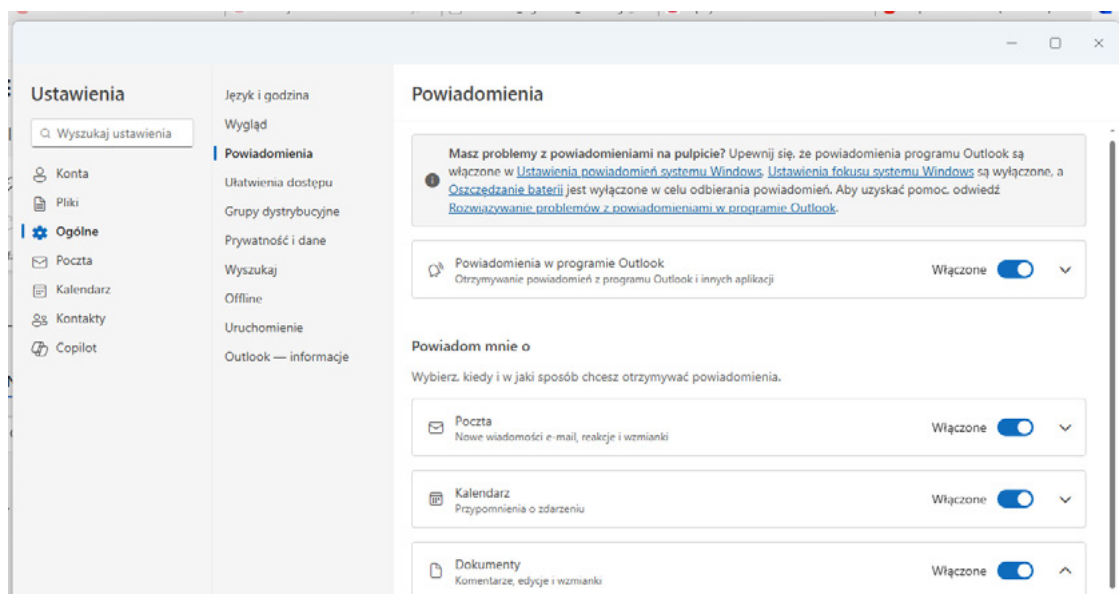
Step 2 – select “Automatic replies” and set the sending time, message content and recipients;



Digital Hygiene – Additional Techniques

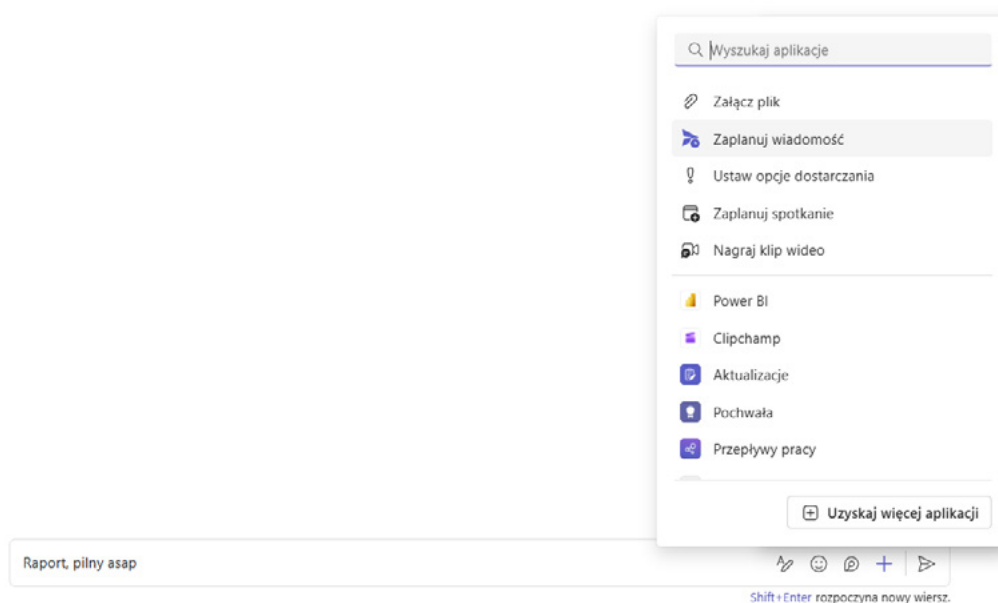
Notifications in Outlook

The email application allows you to configure notifications for new messages, calendar events and changes to shared documents. You can decide which events should trigger notifications and how they are displayed in the system. You can also disable all notifications (Settings / cogwheel – General – Notifications).

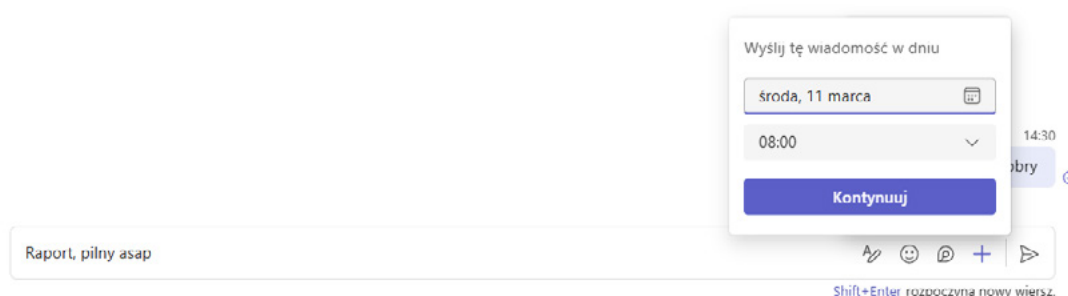


Scheduling Messages in Teams

Teams also allows you to delay sending messages. Before sending a message, click the plus icon + next to the **Send button**. From the menu, select **Schedule message**.



Next, schedule the message.



Due to the concise nature of this guide, we do not describe the mechanism for muting chat conversations in Teams, which is available under the three-dots icon next to a person's first and last name in the Teams contact list.

Broader Formal and Legal Context of the Recommended Practices

The EU **Work–Life Balance Directive**² is intended to ensure that employees are able to maintain a balance between their private and professional lives. It was adopted on 20 June 2019. The main objectives of the Directive include, among other things, enabling parents and carers to reconcile work with childcare or the care of other persons who remain under their care, as well as ensuring the implementation of the principle of equality between women and men in the context of opportunities on the labour market and treatment in the workplace. The Directive is based on the assumption that policies concerning work–life balance should contribute to achieving gender equality by supporting women’s participation in the labour market, promoting an equal division of care responsibilities between women and men, and reducing gender pay gaps. In addition, these policies should take account of demographic changes, including the effects of population ageing.

The Directive therefore provides for solutions aimed at enabling a more effective reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities. These include paid leaves that emphasise the participation of men, as well as other types of leave from work, and flexible arrangements concerning the organisation and working time applicable to employees of both sexes who are parents of a child up to the age of 8 or who care for a relative or another person living in the same household.

The Directive emphasises that fathers’ use of work–life balance arrangements, such as leave or flexible work organisation, has a positive impact on reducing the relative amount of unpaid work performed by women within the family, thereby leaving them more time for paid employment. The implementation of the Directive into the Polish legal order took place in 2023. Amendments were introduced into the Labour Code with regard to existing entitlements and new entitlements were added.

The right to disconnect is the possibility for an employee to refrain from undertaking work-related activities through digital tools outside working hours. This applies to activities such as reading or responding to e-mails, participating in online meetings, reacting to work-related messages in online communicators or answering phone

² Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU

calls from supervisors or co-workers. It also includes the right not to be disturbed by work-related contact, except in extraordinary circumstances, as well as the obligation to respect other people's time off³.

In Polish law, this right has not yet been regulated. However, in some European countries, regulations prohibiting employers from contacting employees outside working hours are already in force. The first country to introduce the right to disconnect was France, which adopted statutory regulations in this area in 2017. Similar solutions were later implemented in countries such as Spain, Italy and Belgium.

Within the European Union, on 21 January 2021, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution containing recommendations to the Commission on the right to be offline (2019/2181(INL)). The Resolution drew attention, among other things, to the fact that employees' right to be offline is of fundamental importance for protecting their physical and mental health and well-being, as well as for protection against psychological risks. This right should enable employees to refrain from engaging in work-related tasks and from participating in work-related activities and electronic communication, such as telephone calls, e-mails and other messages, outside working time, including during rest periods, statutory days off, annual leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave and other types of leave, without suffering negative consequences. On the other hand, employers should not require employees to be directly or indirectly available or accessible outside working hours, while co-workers should refrain from contacting one another outside agreed working hours for work-related purposes.

It was also emphasised that a certain degree of autonomy, flexibility and independent time management should be respected, according to which employees must be able to organise their working time in relation to their personal responsibilities, with particular attention paid to childcare or the care of ill family members. At present, work is under way in the European Union on a directive that would include, among other things, the right to be offline.

³ See I. Miernicka: Regulating the right to disconnect at the EU level: Considerations on the Future legislation scope, *Studia Iuridica* 105/2024, s.50-51 <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31338/2544-3135.si.2025105.3>, European Parliament Resolution of 21 January 2021, containing recommendations to the Commission on the right to be offline (2019/2181(INL)), Recital 10, Article 2 of the Annex, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52021IP0021>

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