

Austria's national broadcaster adopts gender equality plan

The logo for the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) consists of the letters 'ORF' in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font, centered on a solid red rectangular background.

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Gender Equality Plan, ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk – Austrian Broadcasting Corporation)

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In brief

In 2011 Austria's national broadcaster, Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF), investigated the position of women in its organisation and found a widespread gender imbalance. While women make up 42% of its workforce, they are concentrated in programme-making rather than in technical positions. In higher management they are extremely thin on the ground, with only 11% of regional studio directors and 22% of central heads of department. There are no women at all on the executive board. Conversely, they make up two-thirds of part-time employees.

To address this situation, in 2012 the ORF introduced a six-year gender equality plan. It aims to promote gender equality and women's careers, to abolish existing discriminations, to enable reconciliation of family and work for women and men, to achieve a share of 45% of women in those areas where women are underrepresented, and to increase women's share in technical professions.

The plan's implementation is monitored every year and discussed by the Gender Equality Commission, Central Works Council and all employees. Initial results are encouraging, with an increase in the number of women in higher-paid posts from 26.2% to 27.7% between 2011 and 2012.

Internal monitoring reveals gender gap

In Austria, gender imbalances in access to expression and decision-making in and through the media are in line with gender imbalances found in other key institutions of the public sphere. As for the news media, 42% of journalists are women and 58% are men, 68% of women are full-time employees (vs. 82% of men), and only 9% of women occupy top-level positions (vs. 18.5% of men). There is also a gender pay gap: 58% of men earn more than €3,000 a month, whereas only 32% of women do.

Internal monitoring carried out by the national broadcaster Österreichischer Rundfunk in July 2011 showed significant gender imbalances within the organisation, which also affected women's access to expression. In total 1,455 women and 2,030 men work at ORF, which gives women a 41.8% share of the workforce. In programming 53% of employees are women, and in the regional studios 44%. Administration has a low proportion of women (27%) and technical services only 12.5%. Gender imbalances are even more striking within decision-making bodies: there are no women on the executive board (Geschäftsführung), and women only account for 11% of regional studio directors and 22% of the central heads of department. Conversely, women account for the majority of part-time employees (68%). An analysis of pay shows a lower proportion of women in higher remuneration groups. The better-paid groups get flat rates for overtime, so the percentage of women with an overtime flat rate is 25%.

A six-year Gender Equality Plan

After carefully assessing its gender equality needs, ORF devised a Gender Equality Plan to redress this situation. The plan was developed by the Gender Equality Team, agreed with the Central Works Council and the Directorate General and issued as a compulsory regulation by the Directorate General in September 2012. It is consistent with European and Austrian legislation on equal treatment of women and men in the workplace (BGBl I Nr. 66/2004) and the ORF law (BGBl I Nr. 126/2011 §§ 30a ff.).

Its outcomes are expected to be:

- the active equalisation of women and men: promotion of women, abolishing existing discriminations, enabling reconciliation of family and work for women and men. In those areas where women are underrepresented the share of women should rise to 45%;
- functioning gender equality standards for communication internally and externally and the regulation of occupational access, promotion and training;
- career promotion for women: activities for women's promotion are integrated in human resource planning and development with the objective of reaching the targeted share of women within six years. Activities should lead to a higher share of women in leadership positions, higher qualification and enhanced career possibilities for part-timers;
- increased women's participation in technical jobs by improving the occupational development of women in these areas and ORF's participation in initiatives in this area;
- reconciliation of work and family life: men are encouraged to take family leave;
- managerial expertise in gender equality: the sensitisation and development of gender equality expertise among executives, and the banning of all forms of harassment.

In terms of sustainability, the Gender Equality Plan is a stable and long-lasting self-regulation tool: it runs for six years, and is updated every two years. The plan's funding is guaranteed and it seems to have great potential for continuity.

Encouraging initial results

Though the plan underwent its first evaluation in September 2013, it is too early in the implementation process to identify all its achievements and to assess its effectiveness. However, the first results are that in 2011 women held 26.2% of the higher-paid posts, while in 2012 this had risen to 27.7%. The financial plan for 2013 includes an additional million euro to improve women's positions and salaries. In the period to spring 2013, 80% of managers took part in the company's new and obligatory gender competence workshops. The top-down communication process about the new plan reached all leaders by May 2013. By July 2013 almost all departments had held information talks for employees about the new plan. A new curriculum to support women's careers has been started with 13 female employees. An evaluation process to improve career prospects for part-timers was started in 2013.

ORF believes that the implementation of the plan has been efficient in terms of the financial and human resources involved and the organisational processes that went into its design.

The plan has some unique aspects: very few European media organisations have adopted self-regulation tools to promote gender equality, and for the most part such tools focus on women's expression through the media, while access to expression in the media (i.e. participation in media production) and decision-making are less frequently covered. ORF's gender equality plan, however, will have an impact in all areas.

The plan is grounded in a clear, appropriate, comprehensive definition of women's access to decision-making within media organisations: it is expected to increase the share of women in top-level managerial and editorial positions, giving them responsibility and agency in media policy-making and production.

Annual equality check

The plan was based on an assessment of ORF's gender equality needs, which included identifying the areas and departments with the lowest share of women. A quota of 45% of women across the organisation has been set, with no deadline but with biennial steps towards that quota. Training has been introduced for women, so that they can access technical professions.

To monitor the progress of the plan, an annual equality check is conducted every year in September and October, from 2013 onwards. This process involves the Directorate General and the Regional Studio Directors checking the plan's implementation by reference to concrete objectives. The results are disseminated for discussion by the Gender Equality Commission, Central Works Council and all employees. The full-time equal employment officer, who is in charge of the implementation of the plan for the next six years, is already a permanent part of the organisation.

The factors that account for the plan's success are that it was preceded by an assessment of the state of gender equality in every area of the company, and it was adopted voluntarily following the principle of self-regulation, rather than imposed by law. It involves compulsory measures for the whole company, benefits all employees (not only women), has the Directorate General's authority and is backed by sufficient resources.

The main obstacles it may face are opposition from male employees who fear their career prospects are threatened, and internal as well as external influence by male-dominated interest groups. Its implementation may suffer from the absence of sanctions if quotas are not met.

Such a plan could be replicated by other organisations, but it should be borne in mind that ORF, as a national broadcaster, has more resources at its disposal than smaller private companies.

Source:Kaltenbrunner, A., Karmasin, M., Kraus, D. & Zimmermann, A. (2007): Der Journalisten-Report. Österreichs Medien und ihre Macher. Eine empirische Erhebung. Vienna

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