

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Austria

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

The Federal Law for Equal Treatment in Federal Bodies prescribes affirmative action in areas in which women are underrepresented. This Law applies to the 22 Austrian public universities. Non-university research organisations are covered by the general Equal Treatment Act, which prescribes gender equality but does not specifically prescribe affirmative action.

The Austrian University Act contains a number of laws pertaining to gender equality in universities. This law covers all public universities in Austria. The University Act defines gender equality as a guiding principle (§2) and as a task (§3) of universities. The triennial performance agreements between the universities and the Ministry for Higher Education (§13) have to include measures to increase the number of women in leadership positions, as well as targeted support to female junior academics (in the section on societal goals). Every university has to develop a Plan for the Advancement of Women as part of its statutes (§19), and create administrative units for coordinating activities towards gender equality, women's advancement and gender research (§19). Additionally, every university has to create a Working Group for Equal Treatment (§42), which is independent from the rectorate, and tasked with combating discrimination based on gender, as well as on ethnicity, religion, age or sexual orientation. In 2009, a 40% women quota was introduced for collegial bodies, which was raised to 50% in 2015 (§20a).

Policy framework

The government agenda 2013-2018 includes two goals related specifically to gender and academia: promoting women's advancement and work-life balance in higher education (sub-chapter 'science'); and increasing the number of women in leadership positions in academia and research (sub-chapter 'women').

In the course of implementing federal budget reforms, the Ministry for Science, Research and Economy chose to define “gender balance in leadership positions and among junior academics” as the gender-related goal, and since 2014 annually progress reports are submitted to the Austrian parliament. For the current performance agreement period (2013-2015) between the Ministry for Higher Education and the universities, the ministry defined two gender-related strategic goals to be implemented by the universities: improving numeric gender balance, and closing the gender pay gap. For the coming period (2016-2018), the goal is that universities develop a comprehensive understanding of gender equality.

The Ministry for Science, Research and Economy is also running the project “[w-fForte](#)”, which aims at improving career perspectives for highly qualified women in research and technology. In addition, under the umbrella of “[youngscience](#)”, the ministry put forward a number of measures to bring women into the fields of Mathematics, Information Sciences, Natural Sciences and Technology. In 2014, the ministry commissioned a study on how to achieve cultural and structural change towards gender equality in higher education and research. In order to support the implementation of the gender quota in collegial bodies, the ministry organises leadership trainings for women in universities (since 2009) and polytechnics (since 2014). Finally, the ministry analyses data provided by the universities with a specific focus on gender monitoring. Data and analyses are publicly available ([Datawarehouse](#)).

The Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology runs the project “[FEMtech](#)”, which aims at improving the working conditions and career opportunities for women in research and technology, as well as at enhancing gender equality in industrial and non-university research. More specifically, this project is:

- Increasing the visibility of women in research, technology, innovation and training. Within the framework of this project, a comprehensive database of female experts in Austria has been developed.
- Offering support to small and medium enterprises in natural and technical sciences in their efforts to tackle equality-related issues, as well as to research intensive companies in implementing gender equality initiatives.
- Providing attractive internship opportunities for female students in innovation companies and non-university research institutes.
- Financing research projects that aim at improving gender justice in product and technology development (administered through the Austrian Research Promotion Agency).

Other stimulatory initiatives

The Ministry for Science, Research and Economy grants awards for gender research (Gabriele Possanner Award).

Since 2007, L'ORÉAL and the Ministry of Science are funding grants for female doc- and postdoc-academics.

The Austrian Science Fund organises [gender mainstreaming activities](#) along three dimensions: “fix the numbers” (measures to support the career development of female academics), “fix the institutions” (gender awareness, women in decision-making), and “fix the knowledge” (gender aspect in flagship research programmes). These activities include a career development programme for women, awareness raising initiatives, specific coaching workshops for female applicants, coordination on structural change towards gender equality with other research funding bodies, “gender equality standards” for implementing gender mainstreaming in evaluation procedures, prescriptions for participation of female researchers and consideration of gender relevance in two of the flagship funding programmes.

Besides striving for attaining gender balance in their staff (at all levels), the Austrian Research Promotion Agency promotes gender awareness trainings for employees and ensures that gender-sensitive criteria are used in the evaluation of project proposals (considering both the integration of gender in research content, as well as the equal participation of female and male researchers in projects).

Key actors

The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy, more specifically the Staff Unit Gender- and Diversity Management, is responsible for coordinating the legal gender equality prescriptions and several stimulatory initiatives.

The Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology is organising the initiative “FEMtech”.

The Austrian Science Fund is running gender mainstreaming activities supporting the career development of female academics, coaching female researchers, and promoting gender in research.

The Austrian Research Promotion Agency (funding applied research and innovation) implements gender mainstreaming in all work areas.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Since the 1990s, every public university in Austria is required by law to have a “Plan for the Advancement of Women” as part of its statutes. Additionally, since 2015, the University Act also requires every public university to develop an “Equality Plan”.

The bulk of the “Plans for the Advancement of Women” consists of elaborate descriptions of how the university implements the legal gender equality duties (as prescribed by the Federal Law for Equal Treatment in Federal Bodies and by the University Act) and mainstreams gender equality in the decision-making procedures, specifically concerning personnel selection and promotion. Additionally, many universities outline further projects that exceed legal prescriptions, such as gender budgeting or mentoring projects, in their gender equality plans.

These gender equality plans are developed by the universities’ Equal Treatment Commissions. As this plan is part of the university statutes, the Senate officially adopts it. The implementation of the gender equality plan is generally defined as being the responsibility of every member of the university (i.e. leadership personnel, administrative staff, academic staff, students and other affiliated persons). The rector is often assigned the responsibility for undertaking specific tasks, this being explicitly highlighted in the plans. In practice, the Equal Treatment Commissions and the Gender Equality Officers in the universities are the ones who coordinate the implementation of these plans.

The gender equality plans are regularly updated, mostly to accommodate changes in the national legal framework, and sometimes to reflect and promote policy changes in the university. The Equal Treatment Commissions frequently involve other actors in the university in the process of updating or changing the gender equality plans. The main rationale for doing so is to increase awareness of and commitment to the plan among other actors in the university.

Every public university in Austria is required by law to have an “Equal Treatment Commission” (which monitors discrimination), as well as administrative units coordinating gender equality and women’s advancement initiatives, and gender in research. Some universities have additional bodies, such as the University of Graz which established a gender mainstreaming advisory board, and a gender budgeting advisory board.

Universities and non-university research organisations conduct a broad variety of gender equality initiatives, focusing on the following areas: awareness of gender issues, gender budgeting, individual support measures (grants and/or coaching) for female academics, initiatives to improve networking between female academics, initiatives to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, and sexual harassment.

Two research organisations were or are part of consortia of EU-funded structural change projects, namely the University of Krems (GENDERTIME) and the Vienna University of Economics and Business (DIVERSITY). Other institutions have the role of evaluators in such projects, i.e. JOANNEUM Research (GARCIA and GENERA) and the Institute of Science, Technology and Society Studies (GENDERTIME).

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

University of Graz: Bias Sensitising Workshops

As part of the internal leadership training programme of the University of Graz, the gender equality office organises a bias sensitising workshop. This training was conceptualised by the Coordination Centre for Gender Studies/Research and Equal Opportunities and took place for the first time in 2010. When the University of Graz created a training programme for academic leadership personnel in 2013, this workshop was integrated as an optional module in this general training programme.

This workshop aims at creating reflexivity about gender and other discrimination-related biases in personnel selection procedures, and at creating a general understanding that equality and quality are mutually reinforcing aims. It is targeted at members of academic personnel at the university, who fulfil internal administration duties as members of committees in decision-making bodies.

The training takes place over two half-day sessions of five hours each, and is facilitated by external experts as well as university internal gender equality experts. In this workshop, participants gain knowledge about diversity issues, societal inequalities, and academic evaluation procedures. They also participate in a mock personnel selection procedure, as well as discussions on academic curricula vitae, to initiate reflection about their own selection criteria, prejudice and biases.

This training is well regarded and highly attended. It is conceptualised as a means for improving the quality of personnel selection procedures, and therefore also attracts academic personnel who would normally not participate in gender equality and diversity activities. Because of the success and the good reputation of this training, some other universities in Austria are collaborating with the gender equality coordinators at the University of Graz in order to create similar trainings at their own universities.

Cooperation between the University of Linz, the University of Salzburg and the Danube University Krems: Mentoring III

This mentoring programme is a collaboration of three universities: the University of Linz, the University of Salzburg, and the Danube University Krems. It was initiated in 2010 at a meeting of the "Genderplattform", the main coordination and networking forum for gender equality coordinators at Austrian universities.

The programme tackles the overarching problem of underrepresentation of women in academia and academic research as a whole, as well as specifically in leadership positions in universities. The approach that this programme takes in order to tackle these problems is by supporting individual women and giving them the tools necessary to develop successful careers in academia.

Mentoring is a method of transmitting knowledge by building supportive relationships between a mentee (an academic at the beginning of her career) and a mentor (a well-established academic). Each mentee is paired up with a mentor from either their own university or an external university or research institution.

During this programme, which lasts about one and a half years per cycle, young female academics build relationships with established academics in their respective academic disciplines. Furthermore, they gain knowledge about core competency areas of the academic field and widen their professional networks. The main elements of this programme are face-to-face mentoring (at least three face-to-face meetings), telephone and e-mail exchange, four workshops (career specific knowledge and tools), and four group coaching sessions (targeted at specific needs of mentees).

The first cycle started in 2011, and the second cycle was initiated in 2014. Whereas 15 mentees-mentors (i.e. five mentees per university and respective mentors) participated in the first cycle, 18 mentees-mentors (i.e. six mentees per university and respective mentors) took part in the second cycle.