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## **VIENNA – A CITY OF EQUALITY**

Internationally speaking, the City of Vienna occupies a top position in the field of gender equality policy. For more than 20 years, the City has been successfully implementing measures to foster equality between women and men. The success is visible in many areas: in labour market policies, public health and social security, communal housing, urban planning, child care facilities and education. Vienna also provides a tight network of facilities for the protection and acute care of victims of violence as well as gender specific health care services and adequate funding for women's associations.

This might be one of the reasons why Vienna is one of the safest cities in Europe and it was ranked the most liveable city worldwide in 2011 and 2012. Safety and the feeling of security do not “just happen”, local government policies have to set up the framework for equal opportunities and an inclusive society. Since the beginning of the 1990s there has been a clear commitment to an equal opportunity policy by local politics as well as by the senior management of the city administration.

Despite all efforts, however, differences of opportunities and scopes for self-realisation still persist in Vienna, often at the detriment of women and girls.

### **What can be done to make the city a better and safer place for women?**

The experiences made in Vienna within the past years show that a four-track-strategy proves to be a good way of making the city as a whole a better place for women:

1. Making gender differences visible
2. Implementing a widespread equality support structure
3. Setting up an efficient reporting and controlling system
4. Taking action: setting up pilot projects and making sure to mainstream the results and experiences

#### **1. Making gender differences visible**

Above all, gender differences have to be made visible and discussed in public. Gender-specific aspects in urban politics with a strong focus on urban planning were first addressed in Vienna in 1991 when a group of female city planners organised an exhibition about “Who owns public space – women's everyday life in the city.” This was the very first time that gender audits about the different needs of women were launched. Since then gender-specific studies and surveys have been carried out on a regular basis by the women's department.

In addition to audits and studies, several campaigns were launched in order to raise awareness for gender issues. The most popular one started in December 2006 with the slogan “Take a different perspective! Vienna is gender mainstreaming.” The campaign

showed familiar images in an unfamiliar way and centred on commonly known pictographs and signs – with reversed gender roles. Posters and print ads were designed to raise awareness for gender equality. By playing with expectations, the campaign aimed at changing the way of thinking and the perception of traditional gender roles.

## **2. Implementing a widespread equality support structure**

To be able to cover the issues of gender equality in all its facets an equality support structure has been installed within the city administration. In 1992 the City of Vienna set up a special, adequately funded Women's Department staffed with over 30 employees to provide women-specific fundamental studies, information and expertise and to safeguard a close-knit counselling network for women and girls through both subsidised and own services. Five Equal Opportunities Advisors for gender equality measures were appointed in 1996 to act within the scope of the City Administration. Since 1998, the positions of a Commissioner for Women's Health as well as of gender experts of the Executive Group for Construction and Technology were established, followed by setting-up an Office for Gender Mainstreaming at the Chief Executive Office – Executive Group for Organisation, Safety and Security and the appointment, in 2005, of gender budgeting experts at Municipal Department 5 – Financial Affairs. This support structure allowed for the development of gender analyses in legislative and budgeting processes; combined with the intense dissemination of information through trainings, workshops and events. A coordination platform and a pool of gender experts have been established and linked to meet the growing demand for counselling and further training all over the city administration.

## **3. Setting up an efficient reporting and controlling system**

However, sustainable changes in behaviour can only be achieved through the identification of clear targets, reporting and controlling systems. When preparing their budget estimates and annual accounts all municipal departments are called upon to closely examine their objectives and task accomplishment on the one hand and the resources needed for that purpose on the other hand. This constitutes an ideal time to examine the gender relevance of the objectives and the distribution of resources. The gender budgeting reports provide information on the extent to which gender-related objectives are considered in the departments' budget estimates, the extent to which measures to achieve these objectives are taken, the current beneficiaries of the expenditure and the indicators which may be used to measure progress.

## **4. Taking action - setting up pilot projects and making sure to mainstream results and experiences**

Last but not least, it is necessary to make changes visible and perceptible for the public by means of pilot projects. Since the 1990s various pilot projects and specific programmes for the promotion of women and girls have been set up in Vienna. Projects particularly worth mentioning include: gender-sensitive assistance to homeless persons, a checklist for the assessment of subjective safety in relation to the planning of street lighting schemes, the development of criteria for gender-sensitive drug and addiction services, the firm establishment of gender aspects in urban development processes,

guidelines for gender sensitive planning of parks and playgrounds, the pedestrian action plan, the integration of gender aspects in the quality handbook for the granting of social assistance, the consideration of gender-related aspects in data collection and the analysis of social planning activities, using gender related aspects as a basis for the compilation of information packages for immigrants (welcome packages, information events including special events for women), health information packages for girls and women, development of a “gender index” for project evaluation at the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund and a new presentation of district budgets following the example of the district of Meidling, gender sensitive social housing projects and, finally, gender-related lead projects for relevant street planning schemes.

The main challenge is to integrate the experiences and results of pilot projects into everyday work.

### **Conclusions**

The experiences made in Vienna in the past few years revealed that the number of parties interested in this subject and acting in a gender competent way is continually increasing. After rather discouraging comments at the beginning of the 1990s such as “So let’s paint the pavements pink!” and the essential question of “Why do we need this? It does not make any difference anyway!” considerations have become more pragmatic and have finally focused on the issue of implementation and on the question of “How can we get it right?”

Or as Kerstin Dörhöfer, the doyenne of feminist architecture in Germany, brilliantly put it, “*Women’s idea of utopia is the subversion of everyday systems becoming manifest in 100,000 small things. The sum of the subverted elements would create totally different cities.*” (Dörhöfer, 1993).