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Measures for the Promotion of Women – The Austrian Case

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1 Introduction

Austria has now a more than 10 year history of promoting of women in science and research in the state-run higher education system. Women have entered tertiary education, promotion measures by the responsible Ministry led to both, an increased gender-ratio and to sensitisation for the situation of women in science and research. However, the success is mixed and has to be judged ambivalently. Although women caught up in higher education, they still dominate in certain – non-prestigious – disciplines, the glass-ceiling persists, and the leaky pipeline is a phenomenon that can be observed in Austria quite clearly. And sometimes changes in behaviour only seemingly indicate sensitisation but turn out to be strategies to circumvent e.g. legal regulations.

In order to derive holistic strategies to promote women, the situation of women in science and research in Austria must consider the higher education policy and the broader cultural context in which it is embedded:

- The Austrian higher education system is changing towards a new steering model characterised by managerialism, deregulation, and competition. For the first time Austrian universities have institutional budgetary autonomy as well as personal and organisational autonomy. New steering instruments as goal/output-agreements, reports, indicator-based budgets, and university boards have to be implemented.
- The employment system at universities is stagnant. In the 1970s, when the system expanded, there was a lack of qualified women; now, many women are qualified, but few jobs are available.
- The integration of Austria into the European Union helps to reduce gender inequality. EU-policies force Austria to compare its performance in terms of gender equity with other European countries – and Austria does poorly (She Figures 2003; Pechar & Pellert, 2004). In addition, the European integration emphasises the “economic argument” in terms of gender equity: to achieve the Lisbon goals\(^1\), the EU needs more researchers, and there is a large pool of highly qualified female researchers.
- The Austrian culture is basically conservative. There is a general consensus that women should have a good education, but they are not expected to advance beyond the first degree. Childcare-policies create expectations for women to do considerable family work while still engaging in the labour market. Women are not explicitly and broadly supported or empowered to advance in terms of job. This has some important consequences: by European standards, Austria clearly has low participation in higher education and graduation rates for both men and women\(^2\).

\(^1\) The Council of the European Union agreed in Barcelona (2002) on objectives in order to support the achievement of the Lisbon Goals (2000). The Lisbon Goals aim at the reorganisation of the European Union until 2010 into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economic area of the world who is capable to reach continuing growth, full employment, and broader und coherence.
2 Background: Higher Education Policy and Reforms

Until the late 1960s, Austrian universities were essentially organised on the basis of the Humboldtian model. Universities were state owned and government run agencies. Academics were civil servants appointed by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. The government made the most important decisions regarding admission and curriculum. Academic freedom was mainly regarded as an individual right given only to academics at the top of the hierarchy, full professors. With this traditional "chair system" (Ordinarienuniversität) each chair holder had a personal responsibility for his academic domain with other academics in that domain being, in some way, personally dependent on the professor.

The 1970s irreversibly brought an end to this traditional concept of the old regime Humboldtian University with its chair system. A process of "opening up the ivory tower" intended to widen participation for students from social backgrounds who formerly had little access to higher education (Pellert & Pechar, 1998). New fields of study (mainly in the areas of social sciences and humanities) were established that had been denied academically respectability. The process of opening and democratisation culminated in the University Organisation Act of 1975 (Universitätsorganisationsgesetz 1975, UOG 1975). This act marked the beginning of a much more complex and formalized system of academic decision making, which included the middle ranks of academics (Mittelbau³) and students.

Since power was now shared by different academic estates, this new type of academic organisation was labelled "group university" (Gruppenuniversität) (Neave & Rhoades, 1987). The new act attempted to create a just and balanced kind of equality by means of formal legal procedures. In order to take every aspect into account, these legal procedures became extremely complicated and made the university one of the most complex institutions of Austrian society (Welan, 1995). At the institutional level, faculty rectors and deans remained weak; they had little authority except to execute the decisions of the respective collegial body. And still a strong monocratic organ existed only at the level of the basic unit (Institut): the chair holder.

During the 1980s, student numbers continued to grow and went far beyond the levels that had been forecast only a few years earlier. However, due to fiscal constraints, public expenditures for universities could not keep pace with the growth of student numbers (Pechar, 2003). Only minimal additional income came from private sources because Austrian universities were not allowed to charge fees, and third-party-funding was low. Under these circumstances, it became crucial to increase efficiency. Austrian universities do not have an entrepreneurial tradition and they have been state run for many centuries. Beginning in the 1980s, however, the strong paternalistic tradition in Austrian politics was undermined, and by the late 1980s the demand for greater autonomy of universities became one of the primary issues of higher education policy.

¹ 14% of the population from 25–34 years holds a tertiary education degree. In an OECD comparison, Austria ranks fourth from last among 30 countries (OECD 2003)
³ Including assistants and assistant professors (außerordentliche Professoren/Professorinnen).
University autonomy has been interpreted very differently by different actors. There are, however, distinctions between the concept of individual autonomy and institutional autonomy. In the Humboldtian tradition, autonomy was mainly used as a synonym for academic freedom of the individual academic, the full professor. Many professors saw this kind of autonomy endangered both by state intervention and by academic co-determination of students and Mittelbau. From the professorial perspective, autonomy was a buzzword for restoration of the “old regime” of the Ordinarienuniversität.

Embracing the notion of institutional autonomy meant that universities would become self-governed enterprises with respect to academic, financial, and administrative affairs. Many academics and students claimed that Austrian universities were able to take this responsibility into their own hands. However, politicians and state bureaucrats as well as a minority of academics seriously doubted that the existing decision-making structures would be adequate for the new tasks. They argued that increased institutional autonomy should go hand in hand with the development of a professional management (Bast, 1991; Höllinger, 1992).

A new organisational act passed by Parliament in October 1993 [University Organisation Act of 1993/Universitätsorganisationsgesetz 1993 (UOG 1993)]. Like its predecessor, the UOG 1975, it was one of the most divisive and heatedly discussed legal acts in Austria. One of the primary goals of the UOG 1993 was to improve the efficiency of the universities by giving them greater institutional autonomy in order to replace very complex structures that could no longer be governed well centrally. The greater institutional autonomy was expected to foster organizational creativity and innovation in response to market competition. But, adverse conditions limited reform. Financing became neither performance nor enrolment driven, financial autonomy remained low, and financial incentives were generally not feasible in a time of budget cuts.

### 3 Core problems for Women in Science and Research in Austria

Since the 1970s, the Austrian universities have slowly but steadily become feminised. The two reform cycles described above involved an immense expansion of the Austrian universities in terms of both space and personnel. Although more access for women was not an explicit political goal, the expansion of the participation in the tertiary sector system led to an enormous increase of female participation at the universities. However, the following core problem areas for women in science and research remain persistent:

**Status of Women**

With the expansion of the educational system, young women increasingly pass the general qualification\(^4\) for entering the higher education. The concentration of women in business, economic, and general educational secondary schools influences to their choice of study courses in universities.
Female students predominate for first degrees in the humanities, social and economic sciences, and in veterinarian/human medicine but are underrepresented in the technological areas. For example, the rate of women among first-year students in the academic year 2001/02 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary Medicine</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Economic Sciences</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological Study Courses</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Wroblewski et al, 2005

**Leaky Pipeline**

Women have indeed caught up in terms of access to the university system. Yet, they less frequently begin and/or finish a doctoral thesis and have a higher dropout rate than their male colleagues. In the academic year 1990/01, 49.7% of the first-year students were female, and the rate of women graduates was 43%. In comparison to the number of females with first degrees, the rate of women doctorates was only 27.2%. Until the academic year 2002/03 the rate of women steadily increased: 56.2% of the first-year students were female, the rate of women graduates was 52.2%. Also the number of female doctorates significantly rose up to 41.1% (nonetheless women still less frequently begin and/or finish a doctoral thesis and have a higher dropout rate than male students) (Statistik Austria 2004).

**Glass Ceiling as Part of the University Culture**

Although the majority of beginning students are women, the probability of a women becoming a university professor is incomparably lower than for a male academic. The rate of women habilitating\(^5\) was only 19.2% in the year 2001. Ten years earlier, in the 1990/91 academic year, females represented 3.0% of the full professors at scientific universities and by the 2002/03 academic year they had increased to only 8% (Statistik Austria 2004). In the natural sciences, technology, and social sciences, the rate of professors has remained lowest of all in Austria. Moreover, in an international comparison Austria has even the lowest rate of female professors in natural sciences, in engineering an in the social sciences (She Figures 2003).

\(^4\) Usually, a general qualification for university entrance (Matura) is reached after passing the final exam of a comprehensive secondary school (Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule or Gymnasium) or a school providing vocational education (Berufsbildende Höhere Schule).

\(^5\) Habilitation is a qualification step consisting of an advanced scientific publication (elaborating on perennial research) and a final hearing in order to be formally allowed to apply for a professorship. Although now formally abolished, habilitation is still the main prerequisite to become a professorship.
The rigid scientific career scheme of Austrian universities contributes to inferior career opportunities for women. Their hierarchical system rarely acknowledges a member of the scientific community and considers an individual a “young scientist” until their habilitation at about 40 (the average age of habilitation). And habilitation creates an added barrier for women by expecting them to meet private obligations (such as birth and caring for children). Moreover, often women are not promoted and supported in the same way in accomplishing and finishing their habilitation theses as their male colleagues are. The pivotal phenomenon of “homosocial reproduction” (Rosabeth Moss Kanter, 1977) or “male homosociability” (Witz and Savage, 1992) stating that men can and commonly do seek satisfaction for most of their needs from other men is considered to be a highly relevant conceptual framework for understanding the persistence of the gender order in academia not only in Austria. Finally, the definition of “scientific quality” in recruitment procedures is based on indicators like age, publication list, citation rate and the scientific suitability (“Passfähigkeit”, Zimmermann 2002); the common understanding of scientific quality is oriented on male norms and contributes to the exclusion of women.

The culture of university and academic life perpetuate a glass ceiling. As students women are accepted as recipients of university services, but the producers of these services, university scholars, continue to be principally men. Female students, regardless of their discipline, find few female role models among the professoriate. In contrast, administrative staff members are overwhelmingly female except at the highest ranks of the hierarchy. Despite the increasing number of female academic professionals, an optimal situation will take several decades if one trusts in a natural transformation from a male dominated organization to a gender-balanced organization.

4 Measures for the Advancement of Women in Science and Research in Austria

Judging by the numbers of women attending university, Austria has successfully increased women’s access to higher education. With an open policy, women from diverse social backgrounds are increasingly able to study at universities and during the 1990s, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture and the universities initiated several measures to promote equal opportunity. Legal procedures were implemented in 1990 to reach a balanced ratio between the number of male and female employees in both the Ministry and universities.

Since the mid-1990s, there has also been an increased effort to coordinate policy strategies. The “White Paper for the Promotion of Women in Science” (Weißbuch zur Förderung von Frauen in der Wissenschaft) for example, is a key programmatic document. Developed in 1999 by the Ministry of Science in cooperation with female experts from the university and non-university sectors, the White Paper contains measures and recommendations to increase the support and promotion of women as
well as to improve the general conditions of science, research, and art. These legal and programmatic approaches have been augmented by financial and other forms of support for individuals.

Legal Regulations
Most of the legal regulations were established in the 1990s, with the aim to reach a balanced ratio between women and men in the total number of employees and functions in the Ministry and at the universities. This aim is pursued by a ban of gender-based discrimination, a qualification-oriented quota system for admission to the federal service (40% target quota of women in all employment groups of Federal State agencies), affirmative measures, and the appointment of persons and institutions responsible for questions of equal treatment and the promotion of women. Since 1993, the “Federal Government Equal Opportunities Act“ has aims at both, protection from discrimination as well as regulations intended to advance women. This goal is to be achieved through preferential employment, promotion, training, and the education of women. In order to make the regulations of the Equal Opportunities Act applicable, a “Decree for Affirmative Action Plan in the Sphere of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture“ is released regularly.

Finally, the “Working Committee on Equal Treatment“ (Arbeitskreis für Gleichbehandlungsfragen) is at the core of the legal regulations of Austrian Universities and it is charged with counteracting gender-based discrimination. The Working Committee is entitled to participate in all employment-related procedures. For example, if sexual discrimination is presumed, the Committee has to raise an objection, in which case the respective employment procedure is interrupted as long as the authorities deciding on the employment comply with the objection raised by the committee. If the employment authority denies answering the committee’s objection, the Working Committee could, according to the UOG 1993, file a complaint with the Ministry.

Programs and Measures to Promote Women
Several programs are in place to support women. Scholarships, programs, and awards such as the “Charlotte Bühler Fellowships for Habilitation“6 or the “Hertha Firnberg Programme“7, both established in 1992, provide financial support for women at the beginning of their scientific career, after a child-care break, or in the habilitation stage for a period of 12 to 36 months.

The “Austrian Program for Advanced Research and Technology“ (APART)8 supports young, highly-qualified scientists, women as well as men, who have demonstrated scientific competence (by having completed a doctorate and worked on research projects) and who seek further qualifications in a renowned research centre in Austria or abroad for the duration of three years.

The “Gabriele Possaner Award“9 has been awarded (by nomination) every second year since 1997 for scientific efforts fostering gender democracy. So far, four awards have been awarded.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the European Social Fund are providing funds to support women in science and research. Child-care facilities at universities (UNIKID)10, is one

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6 http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/projects/buehler.html
7 http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/projects/firnberg.html
8 http://www.oeaw.ac.at/stipref/info/1_stipendien/apart/11_apart-stipendien.html
9 http://www.oeaw.ac.at/stipref/n_info/1_stipendien/apart_extra/apart_extra.html

- 7 -
example. Several child-care offices offer inexpensive, flexible, walk-in child care facilities near to or on campus with hours tailored to the special time requirements of teaching and research jobs. Moreover, “Coordination Centres for Womens Studies and Gender Research in Universities”\textsuperscript{11} are operating at six universities in order to improve the infrastructure for university agendas relating to women including services for womens studies and gender research.

A “Mentoring Pilot Project”\textsuperscript{12} for women writing dissertations and post-doctoral theses began at the University of Vienna in 2000–2003 to facilitate the access of young female scientists to formal and informal networks and to support them in their transition to university worklife. Ten men and women mentors advised a total of 41 mentees at important stages of scientific qualification.

Similarly, a “Program for Correcting the Under-Representation of Women” involved both students and scientific staff at three universities in Graz. It targeted improvements for women in the areas of education (training), personal development, organizational development, and compatibility of work and family. In 2004, this program was integrated into university operations with a subsequent project, Potential II.

**National Reports, Monitoring, and Rating**

Several monitoring measures are in place. The “Minister of Education, Science and Cultures Women’s Report 2002”\textsuperscript{13} to the Federal Chancellor provides information regarding the on the status quo of the implementation of equal opportunities implementation and indicators regarding the advancement of women and the Equal Opportunities Working Party annually reports on its activities to the university council and the rectorate.

Since 2003, the “Women’s Political Advisory Board“ has advised the Minister of Education, Science, and Culture on necessary improvements and recommendations to carry out regulations concerning gender-based discrimination and the advancement of women. Topics addressed by the Board include the integration of measures for the advancement of women into the governing instruments of the new University Act of 2002 (see chapter 5), evaluation and quality assurance, advice on higher-education policy, sensitization measures, publicity and public relations, and development of measures promoting the advancement of women and equal status to strengthen the legal framework in the implementation process for the law.\textsuperscript{14}

**Gender Mainstreaming Tools and Policies**

In line with the European Union gender mainstreaming approach, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture has begun incorporating gender mainstreaming into its approaches to promoting women and equality policies. E.g., a pilot project in research (programs and funding) at the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture aims to promote the participation of women,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9} http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/forschung/frauen/foerderung/poss fp_ausschr_2003.xml
\item \textsuperscript{10} the Offices are supported by the UNIKID a web-based information and exchange system for members of the university community who have children. For details visit: http://www.unikid.at
\item \textsuperscript{11} e.g. http://www.gendup.sbg.ac.at
\item \textsuperscript{12} http://www.univie.ac.at/frauenfoerderung
\item \textsuperscript{13} http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/forschung/frauen/fber.xml
\item \textsuperscript{14} http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/universitaeten/kontakte/Frauenpolitischer_Beirat9901.xml
\end{itemize}
strengthen research by, on, and for women, and create awareness for gender specific topics in research and teaching. Funding procedures and the integration of gender-criteria in current research programs and selection procedures are analyzed. For example, in some research programs, this initiative led to an increase of up to 50 % women among project leaders.

**Initiatives to Promote Women in Industrial Research**

Women are strongly underrepresented in the research and technology intensive occupational segments; especially in management positions. Therefore, initiatives have been specifically designed to promote women by improving access to the professional field and career opportunities. “fFORTE” (Women in Science and Technology), a comprehensive program, aims to raise the rate of women in scientific and technical occupations and to enhance both, typical female careers and women’s access to jobs in research in general and in natural and technical sciences in particular. fFORTE is an extensive framework programme which includes several measures for the advancement of women in engineering and the natural sciences\(^\text{15}\), such as “FEMtech”, a program to promote women in research and technology and create equal opportunities. It funds the development and the implementation of measures to improve equal opportunities between men and women.\(^\text{16}\)

Another Example is the “University Graduate Start-up Enterprises (UNIUN) Program” which allows university graduates to acquire the necessary skills for entrepreneurship by offering qualification modules and coaching. At participating universities, 50% of the places are reserved for women and some seminars are offered for women only to help them tackle women-specific challenges in entrepreneurship.\(^\text{17}\)

**5 Managerial Turn – Current Situation in Higher Education**

The Austrian universities are currently going through a far-reaching reform, which can be characterized by the concepts of managerialism, new governance, and autonomy. A new University Act 2002 (Universitätsgesetz 2002)\(^\text{18}\) was enacted at the beginning of 2004. This act confers upon the universities the legal status of fully autonomous institutions. The universities now get a global budget and act as the employer of university staff, with the employment conditions being no longer governed by public, but by private law. The internal decision-making structures are also largely modified (Pellert 2003). This development from a state-run to an institutionally autonomous university is a fundamental shift in the paradigms of higher education policy and consequently of equality policy as well. With the redesign of the organisation model, the universities have become actors in various areas in which the Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture used to assume a steering role.

For gender equality, this latest legal reform tried to adopt most existing instruments. The 40% target quota of women stipulated earlier in Federal Government Equal Opportunities Act was integrated into

\(^{15}\) [http://wwwapp.bmbwk.gv.at/womenscience/d/fforte_01.htm](http://wwwapp.bmbwk.gv.at/womenscience/d/fforte_01.htm)

\(^{16}\) [http://www.femtech.at/index.php?id=133](http://www.femtech.at/index.php?id=133)

\(^{17}\) [http://www.uniun.at/](http://www.uniun.at/)

University Act 2002. Equal treatment of women and men is considered a guiding principle of university policy, universities must enact an affirmative action plan, and they must have an organisational unit to coordinate equal treatment and promotion of women and gender studies. The “Working Committee on Equal Treatment” remained in its basic structure, but instead of the ministry now an internal arbitration commission has the final say. Like under its predecessor, the UOG 1993, affirmative action includes legal regulations for equity, establishment of institutions for affirmative action inside universities, incentive programs (prizes, financial rewards), and reporting on results. Moreover, the University Act 2002 brings issues of gender equality closer to the institution by entailing new mechanisms of controlling that have yet to be implemented (i.e. output agreements, evaluation, indicators, etc.) and into which the gender dimension remains to be integrated. It remains to be seen how the responsibility of the autonomous universities in terms of promoting and advancing women will be translated into concrete practice.

Yet, Austrian universities are only at the beginning of the so-called managerial revolution in higher education: new posts of management have been created; existing ones like rectors have been strengthened. Professional management is an important prerequisite to enable the university to perceive itself as an autonomous organization instead of being subordinate to the central governments. Universities have to learn that the quality of work does not only depend on the expertise of a person in a certain field but also on the organisational circumstances of work, which have to be actively shaped and commonly formed. Universities are in urgent need of new internal modes of communication, rules and structures that turn competing individuals into communities of collaborating groups, teams and projects.

6 Conclusions and Future Challenges

In Austria, promotion measures are broad and well-established. Nonetheless they have some blind spots. On the one hand they concentrate on individual women who have already started an academic career, either by having decided to start a doctoral study programme or by being employed by the university or already working on a habilitation. While they completing university studies, however, women hardly benefit from any measures. On the other hand, Austria has started further behind than some other EU nation states to incorporate gender mainstreaming. Concluding, the following forthcoming challenges have to be faced:

Special promotion zones – active support policy

It is very important to encourage female students to slip into a scientific career – tutoring of female students could compensate the normal informal ways of recruiting young (male) researchers. Cross-Gender Mentoring is a way in the informal pathways of science and scholarship, but also

19 http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/8019/8019_up02_engl.pdf
female mentoring is necessary because of the power of role models. Mentoring and social financial aid could also help to reduce the drop out of female students which is significantly higher during the graduate and doctoral phase than the drop out of male students. With all kinds of individual promotion measures age limits should be abandoned, since they are a hindering factor and discriminatory against women.

**Monitoring at the level of the state/higher education system**

Efficient equality policy in higher education needs a transparent database. Gendered data have to be available not only at the level of the institution but also on the national system level. Based on qualified data inequalities, necessary promotion measures and high performance of women in higher education can be publicly communicated and public relation and communication measures can be tailored (and the opinion among important political actors that the “gender issue” seems to be a solved problem can be exposed). Permanent monitoring of the quantitative and qualitative developments on the institutional as well as on the national level is a mayor prerequisite for good policy. Continuous monitoring has to be supplemented by the commission of specialised studies (e.g. gender and the role of important gatekeepers in the research system). A nation wide centre could serve as a data-warehouse, as a competence centre and as a watch dog and it could be asked for consultancy at the institutional level.

**Gender Mainstreaming as an approach to institutional development**

Universities should play a more active role in supporting and promoting female careers. Up to now, in Austria mainly ministries and other state actors have played the leading role in all kinds of affirmative action for universities. Now universities are forced by law to execute institutional plans for the promotion of women. But these legal provisions will only be experienced as strategies of change, if a relevant proportion of university members realize that the improved integration of women is an integral part of a university reform.

Gender mainstreaming represents a paradigm shift, as Teresa Rees puts it, “away from individuals and their rights to ‘equal treatment’ and disadvantaged groups, such as women and their ‘special needs’ to identifying how universities, through their structures, processes and policies, through their cultures and organisations, are institutionally sexist” (Rees: 2003, 81). Gender mainstreaming is a more structural view on an organisation and how it deals with the gender dimension in its various policies, actions and decisions, taken serious as a procedural approach (and combined with an active promotion policy for women). But Gender Mainstreaming is a top down strategy – if the people in leadership functions are not prepared adequately, personnel development and gender mainstreaming will not happen, insofar training measures for the management is a first important step. Consequently, all important functions of a university – teaching, research, administration, service, etc. – have to be screened under a gender aspect. Work-life-balance, professional human resource management, active search for well trained women, transparency of appointment procedures, encouragement of female candidates, and finally lucidity in the allocation of funding are issues to be seen when implementing Gender Mainstreaming process.
Gender equality is but one of multiple strategic changes facing higher education. The legal provisions of the University Act 2002 will become the strategies of equality change if a significant proportion of university members realize that the improved integration of women is an integral part of a university reform. Thus, gender mainstreaming must be fully merged into policies and practices so that top university leaders continue to be accountable for the outcomes at their universities and that they will be expected to personally encourage and hold others accountable for reform within their organizations. Individual promotion combined with a holistic implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy can result in substantial changes toward gender equity – when more universities recognize that success in increasing the representation of women at all levels is an important condition for meeting Austria's needs.
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