Equality plan of the Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW)

Rooting diversity – shaping the future together in the forest

Valid from October 2025 / Version 1.0

BFW BUNDES FORSCHUNGS ZENTRUM FÜR WALD

Foreword

Dear colleagues,

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are not only social values, but also important prerequisites for the future viability of our institution. At the Federal Research Centre for Forests (BFW), we share responsibility - for each other as well as for science, politics, and society.

We have already achieved a great deal in recent years: we have equality officers, a budget, and structures on which we can build. Now it is a matter of continuing this work consistently and strengthening it with clear goals and measures. We want to implement this with the help of this equality plan.

It is particularly important that equality is not just a topic 'on paper', but is embodied in our daily lives - in our teams, in management decisions, and in our work culture. After all, fair opportunities and equal treatment are not only an expression of respect, but also a source of creativity, motivation, and innovation. Diversity in perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds strengthens our excellence in research and education as well as our ability to develop forward-looking solutions for society and forests.

The equality plan therefore is a process that we continuously review, develop and shape together. A visible commitment in this context is the signing of the “Diversity Charter.” With this, the BFW commits itself to a non-discriminatory and appreciative working environment in which the diversity of our employees is recognized and promoted as a strength.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our employees for their openness, commitment, and contribution to a respectful working environment at the BFW. Together, we are already creating an environment in which diversity is visible and embraced as a strength—and we intend to continue on this path.

Peter Mayer

Head of the BFW

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1. Background

Gender equality and the recognition and promotion of diversity and inclusion are among the key social and research policy concerns at European and national level. Under the Horizon Europe research framework program, an equality plan is a prerequisite for applying for and receiving EU funding. Austria supports this within the European Research Area (ERA), thereby emphasizing the strategic importance of equality in research and innovation.

For the BFW, this means not only complying with equality requirements by law but also living them as part of its values and research culture. Responsibility lies with the Human Resources department and is shared by two equality officers in close consultation with the works council and management. No new staff positions are planned; instead, existing structures will be used and strengthened.

As a non-university research and training institution with a central role in the fields of forestry, biodiversity, climate, and the environment, the BFW consciously assumes responsibility for equality. In its educational capacity, the BFW not only imparts specialist knowledge, but also shapes attitudes and values. This goes hand in hand with the task of making equality, diversity, and inclusion visible and living them in everyday life.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are fundamental prerequisites for scientific excellence, innovation and a sustainable organisational culture. On this basis, the present equality plan builds on existing structures and measures - such as the employee survey, recruiting guidelines, and the redesign of the intranet with a focus on diversity. These are continuously evaluated and further developed in order to strengthen equality and diversity at the BFW in the long term.

2. Analysis of the initial situation

This equality plan is based on a comprehensive analysis of the current situation at the BFW. This analysis drew on existing personnel data, as well as on qualitative surveys conducted in two workshops (one in German and one in English) in December 2024.

Database and evaluated dimensions

The characteristics available for analysis were personnel structure, management positions, working time models (in particular part-time versus full-time), salary structure, and length of service.

The evaluations were carried out according to the diversity dimensions of gender and age as of January 1, 2025. With regard to gender, the BFW's personnel statistics currently record the categories “female” and “male”; other gender identities are not currently represented. An evaluation of the dimension of disability showed no evidence of structural discrimination, but does not rule out individual discrimination and continues to highlight the importance of raising awareness. No statistically usable data is currently available for other diversity characteristics such as nationality, language, religion, or sexual orientation.

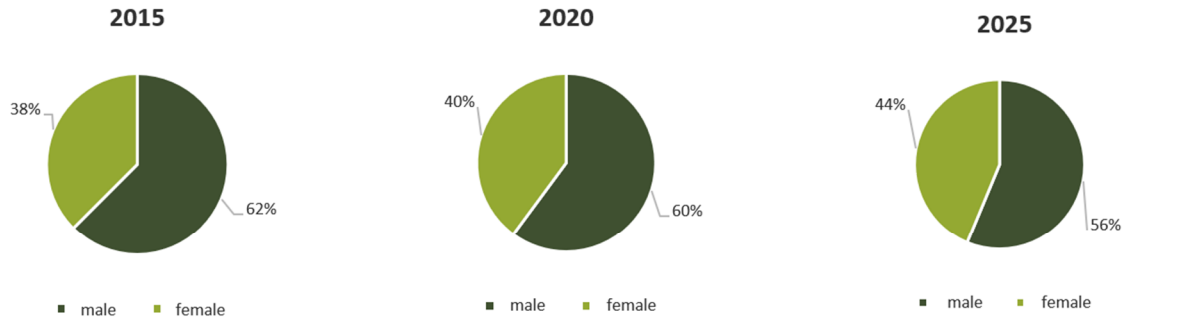
Results and findings

The evaluation enables the assessment of the distribution and representation of different genders and age groups with regard to:

a) General personnel structure

Gender distribution – development from 2015 to 2025

The development of gender distribution at the BFW shows a continuous increase in the proportion of women between 2015 and 2025 (see Figure 1). While the proportion of female employees was 38% in 2015, it rose to 40% by 2020 and reached 44% in 2025. In absolute terms, this represents an increase from 105 to 154 women – a rise of 46.7%. During the same period, the total number of employees increased from 280 to 352, representing growth of 25.7%. The disproportionate increase in female employees shows that women are becoming an increasingly important part of the workforce.



Gender distribution 2015	
male	175
female	105
total employees	280

Gender distribution 2020	
male	196
female	130
total employees	326

Gender distribution 2025	
male	198
female	154
total employees	352

Figure 1: BFW gender distribution in 2015, 2020 and 2025; data basis: 1 January 2015 n= 280; 1 January 2020 n=326; 1 January 2025 n=352

Age Distribution of employees

The age structure at the BFW is balanced, with a focus on the 35 to 59 age group, which accounts for just under 60% of the workforce (see Figure 2). The most strongly represented groups are those aged 55 to 59 (61 people), 40 to 44 (51 people), and 35 to 39 (49 people). Younger age groups are comparatively underrepresented: people under 30 account for only around 10% of employees. The 60-to-64 age group comprises 39 people, which indicates an increase in retirements in the coming years.

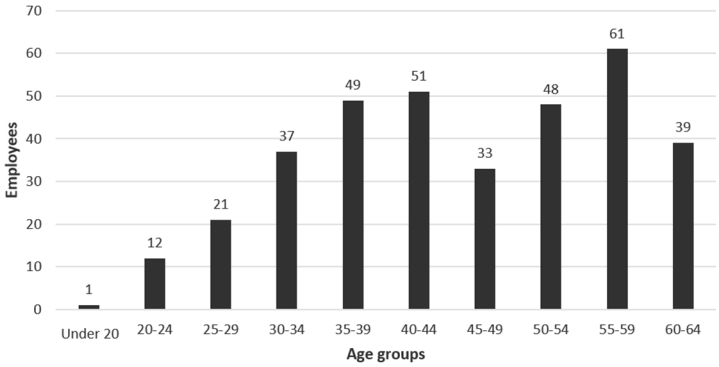


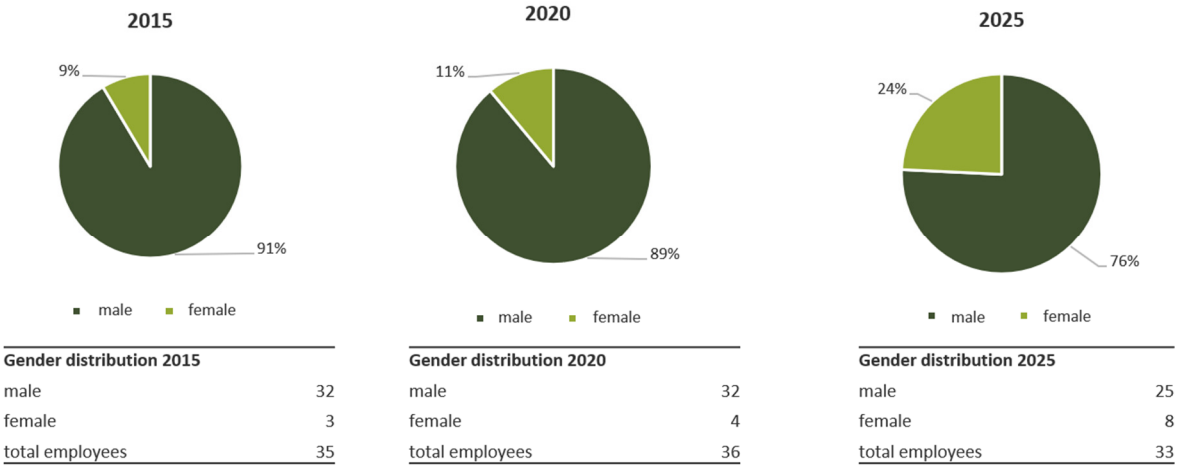
Figure 2: Age distribution of employees at the BFW; data basis: 1 January 2025 n=352

This distribution shows that action is needed in the areas of recruiting young talent, age-appropriate work design, and knowledge retention. Equality measures should also take into account equal opportunities across all age groups.

b) Management positions and decision-making levels

Gender distribution in leadership positions

As Figure 3 shows, the proportion of female managers at the BFW has been very low for many years. In 2015, only 3 of a total of 35 managers were women - corresponding to a share of just under 9%. This figure increased only slightly to 11% (4 out of 36 people) by 2020. A more significant change is apparent only between 2020 and 2025: the proportion of women in management positions increased to 24% (8 out of 33 people), while the number of male managers fell from 32 to 25.



Gender distribution 2015	
male	32
female	3
total employees	35

Gender distribution 2020	
male	32
female	4
total employees	36

Gender distribution 2025	
male	25
female	8
total employees	33

Figure 3: Development of gender distribution in management positions (2015, 2020, 2025) (institute, department, FAST, and faculty management); Data basis: January 1, 2015 n=33; January 1, 2020 n=36; January 1, 2025 n=33

This development represents a positive trend. At the first management level (institute and FAST management), a balanced gender ratio has already been achieved. At the second management level - i.e., in department and division management - women are still underrepresented. The goal is not a rigid 50:50 ratio, but rather a balanced representation that reflects the composition of the workforce. Qualifications remain the central basis for management decisions. Where women with equal aptitude and qualifications have been underrepresented to date, the Equal Treatment Act opens up the possibility of preferential consideration. Targeted measures are being taken to reduce this structural imbalance, in particular to promote women's careers, raise awareness among selection committees, and review and further develop promotion procedures.

Age structure in management positions

The age distribution of managers at the BFW shows a clear focus on the older age groups (see Figure 4). Around 64% of managers are 50 years of age or older. The 60 to 64 age group is particularly well represented with 10 people, followed by the 50 to 54 age group (7 people) and the 55 to 59 age group (4 people). Younger managers are significantly underrepresented: only one person is under 35 years of age. The 35 to 44 age groups are represented by only a few people.

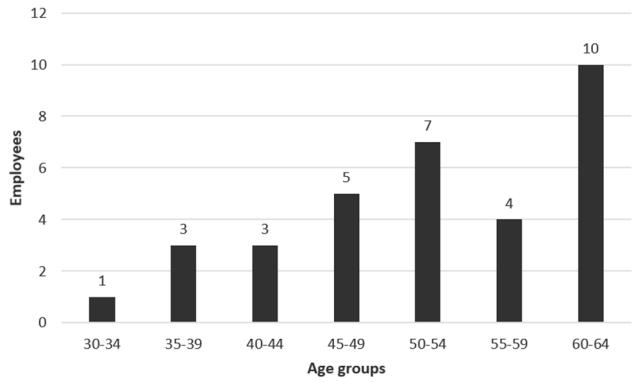
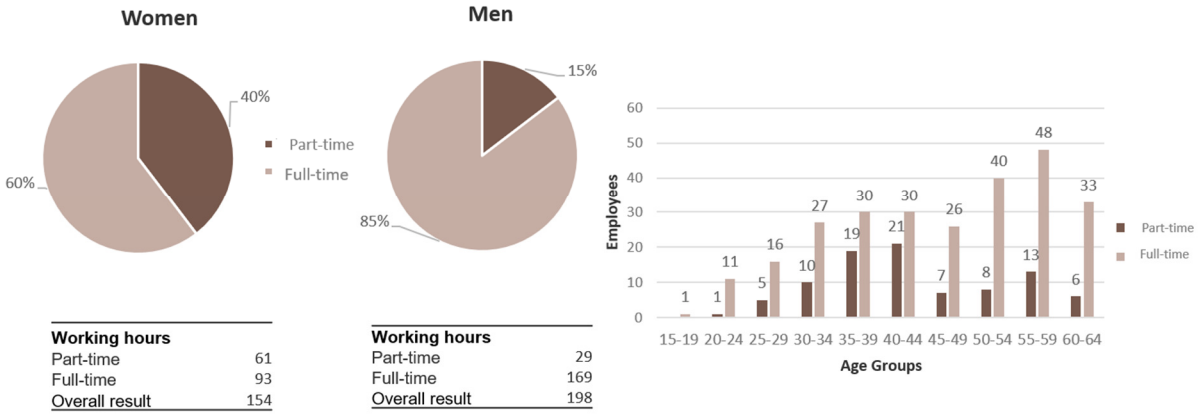


Figure 4: Age distribution of managers at the BFW; data basis: January 1, 2025 n=33

The age distribution points to an impending generational change in management positions and opens up the possibility of specifically promoting the development of young managers. At the same time, this raises the question of equal opportunities for younger employees in accessing management roles.

c) Working time models (e.g., part-time employment rate by gender)

An analysis of working time models at the BFW reveals gender-specific differences in part-time employment (see Figure 5). While 40% of female employees work part-time, the proportion of male employees working part-time is 15%. A total of 61 out of 154 women are employed part-time, compared to 29 out of 198 men.



Working hours	
Part-time	61
Full-time	93
Overall result	154

Working hours	
Part-time	29
Full-time	169
Overall result	198

Figure 5: Employment relationships (part-time/full-time) by gender and age structure; data basis: January 1, 2025 n=352

This difference may indicate an unequal distribution of care work, which continues to be borne more heavily by women. This is a societal issue over which the BFW has only limited influence. Although part-time models make it easier to balance work and private life, they also entail considerable risks—particularly with regard to income and future pension entitlements. The BFW offers its employees part-time models and flexitime to make it easier to balance work, family, and private life. The distribution across age groups shows that part-time work occurs in almost all age groups, particularly frequently in the 35 to 39, 50 to 54, and 55 to 59 age groups. In the 55 to 59 age group, around a quarter of employees work part-time (13 out of 61 people).

d) Monthly salary, differentiated by gender

The distribution of employees across salary ranges at the BFW shows that women are particularly well represented in the middle salary ranges, whereas men dominate the higher ones (see Figure 6).

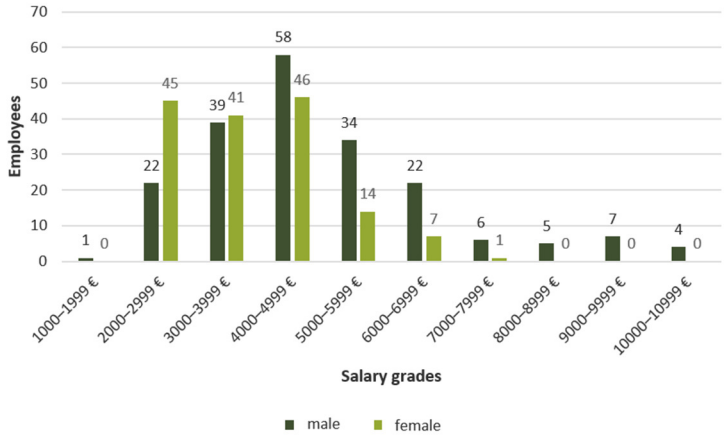


Figure 6: Adjusted monthly salaries by gender and broken down into salary brackets in increments of thousands. For better comparability, the monthly salaries of part-time employees have been extrapolated to full-time equivalents. Data basis: January 1, 2025 n=352

Most employees are in the €2,000 to €4,999 bracket. Women are more strongly represented than men in the lower brackets (up to €2,999) (e.g., 45 women compared to 22 men between €2,000 and €2,999). Between €3,000 and €3,999, the distribution is almost balanced. From a monthly salary of around €4,000, men predominate, and from around €5,000, the proportion of female employees decreases significantly. In the highest salary brackets above €7,000, almost all employees are men; above €8,000, there are no women at all.

These differences are not due to direct pay discrimination: within the same salary bracket, there are no gender-specific differences in monthly earnings. Rather, the unequal distribution is the result of structural factors: historically, the BFW has been a male-dominated work environment, especially in management positions, which often remain filled for long periods of time. Nevertheless, this distribution remains relevant for equal opportunities. Looking ahead, the aim is to increase the representation of women in higher-level positions and to systematically monitor promotion practices.

e) Length of service

A large proportion of employees have only been working at the BFW for a short time: over 43% of all employees (151 people) have been working at the BFW for less than five years, with more women (81) than men (70) in this group (see Figure 7).

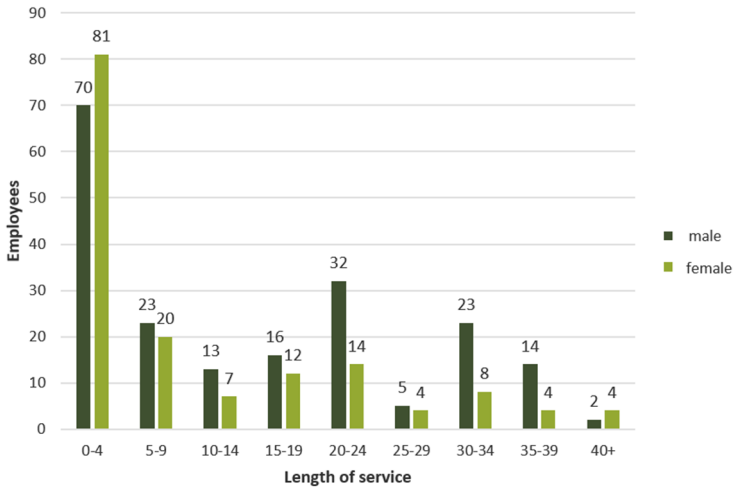


Figure 7: Length of service by gender; data basis: January 1, 2025 n=352

In the middle service length (5 to 19 years), the gender distribution is more balanced, while men dominate among employees with longer service (20 years or more). This development shows two trends: on the one hand, the historical dominance of men in older employee cohorts, and on the other hand, the significant increase in the proportion of women among new hires. For the BFW, this means that the shift toward greater gender balance is underway but must be accompanied by targeted measures to ensure equal opportunities for career advancement, knowledge transfer between generations, and the sustainable safeguarding of gender equality achievements.

Data gaps and need for supplementation

The analysis reveals data gaps in gender identities and intersectional diversity dimensions such as origin/nationality, religion, or languages, which are not currently systematically recorded.

The employee survey conducted in May 2025 was the first to also cover qualitative aspects (e.g., work-life balance). The results are fed directly into organisational development via department-specific proposals for action.

In addition, analysis of structural indicators (e.g., salary, management positions, length of service) shows that historical patterns—such as the male-dominated personnel structure in earlier years—continue to have an impact in key areas. Systematic and regular monitoring is therefore essential to ensure a differentiated and forward-looking approach to ongoing developments.

In line with a reflexive, evolving equality plan, the following is therefore planned:

- Gradually expand existing data bases
- Record diversity characteristics in compliance with data protection and ethical considerations
- Continue to conduct qualitative surveys on a regular basis
- Consistently incoporate results into management processes and the equality plan

Strengths and weaknesses analysis

The BFW already has well-structured personnel and administrative data, particularly on employee structure, working time models, and salary structure. Initial gender- and age-specific evaluations are now also available, allowing for a differentiated view of developments.

There is potential for development, particularly in the systematic consideration of other dimensions of diversity (e.g., language, origin), in qualitative surveys such as the experience of equality, and in the regular analysis of career paths and management functions with regard to gender equality.

Overall, the combination of existing data resources and a high level of sensitivity to equality forms a solid basis for impact-oriented equality management at the BFW.

3. Setting priorities and goals

The objectives of the equality plan are based on the results of quantitative analyses, the legal framework, and the recommendations of the BM guidelines (Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research (2023)). They follow a realistic but ambitious perspective: to reduce discrimination, systematically consider diversity, and continue to anchor equality in the BFW in a sustainable manner. The objectives are divided into short-term (1 to 2 years) and medium to long-term (3 to 5 years) development goals.

Continue and refine existing structures

- Utilisation and further development of existing resources: At the BFW, the equal treatment officers, a dedicated budget, and established structures and responsibilities already provide an essential foundation for equality work.

- Job description of the equal opportunities officer: Implementing the measures outlined in the equality plan, acting as a point of contact for incidents relating to gender and diversity, and planning and organising training courses, workshops, and seminars. These framework conditions should be secured, strengthened, and their effectiveness continuously reviewed.

- Involvement of other social initiatives: The BFW also has a disability representative and social initiatives such as “social forestry work.” In the future, such initiatives will be made more visible and specifically strengthened in order to promote inclusion comprehensively.

Short-term goals (2025–2026)

- Establishment of annual equality monitoring: Introduction of monitoring based on the employee database (start: June 2026)

- Ensuring a reliable database: Establishing a differentiated database for equality and diversity

- Defining common goals: Developing objectives in cooperation with institute and FAST management, equal opportunities officers, and Human Resources management

- Establish regular evaluation: Systematic review of goals, measures, and implementation steps within the framework of the equality plan

- Anchoring equality in the BFW: Making equality, diversity, and inclusion visible as cross-cutting issues in all strategies, mission statements, and development plans

- Promoting awareness: Continuing awareness-raising measures on gender-neutral language, unconscious biases, and diversity in teams
- Designing gender-sensitive communication: Reviewing and implementing non-discriminatory, inclusive language in internal and external communication

Medium- and long-term goals (until 2030)

- Ensuring a balanced gender distribution: There is already near parity at the first management level. The focus is therefore on the second management level, with qualifications remaining the basis for all decisions.
- Strengthening its appeal as an employer: The BFW is visibly positioning itself as a family-friendly, inclusive organisation that embraces diversity as a strength.
- Promoting equal career opportunities for all genders: ensuring equal career opportunities for part-time and work-life balance models
- Ensuring equal pay: Equal pay for equal qualifications and performance - regardless of gender or employment status; continuous improvement through targeted measures
- Shaping demographic change: Strategic support for generational change, for example through age-diverse teams, knowledge management, mentoring, and promoting young talent
- Expanding diversity management: Greater consideration of intersectional aspects (age, origin, language, disability, social background) while ensuring data protection

These objectives form the basis for the following chapters on measures and evaluation. They are dynamic in nature and are regularly reviewed and further developed as part of gender equality monitoring.

4. Development of concrete measures

Data collection, process control, and monitoring

The BFW has well-structured personnel and administrative data (e.g., on gender, working hours, functions). However, there is a lack of systematic monitoring with clear evaluation points and the recording of other diversity dimensions (e.g., origin, language). Regular equality and diversity monitoring is therefore central to management and further development.

Responsibility lies with the Human Resources department, which coordinates the processes in consultation with the equal opportunities officers.

Objective:

Establish data-based equality and diversity monitoring that highlights developments, provides guidance, and assesses the effectiveness of measures.

Measures:

- Introduce annual monitoring: deadline June 1; systematic recording of key figures (gender, age, working hours, position, remuneration, etc.)
- Expand the data basis: Examine how diversity dimensions such as origin, gender identities, or language can be recorded voluntarily and anonymously—in compliance with data protection and ethical standards.
- Continue qualitative surveys: Regular employee surveys (follow-up to the 2025 survey) on equality, work-life balance, experiences of discrimination, and job satisfaction.
- Establish a monitoring process: define responsibilities (HR department in cooperation with the equal opportunities officers) and reporting formats, provide internal feedback on results, and incorporate them into strategic planning processes.

Awareness-raising measures and training - in relation to gender equality, diversity, and inclusion

Initial situation / challenge:

The level of knowledge and awareness of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion varies among employees. Managers in particular need in-depth gender and diversity skills in order to effectively implement equality.

Objectives:

- All employees have a basic understanding of equality, diversity, and inclusion
- Managers systematically develop their gender and diversity skills
- Gender-neutral, inclusive language continues to be used as a matter of course at the BFW

Measures:

- Annual training for employees: Workshops on equality, diversity, and inclusion (in-person and online)
- Executive program: Development of a modular training program on gender and diversity competence
- E-learning & intranet materials: Creation of digital learning resources (e.g. short videos, guides, background texts) on the intranet
- Language guidelines: Development and application of guidelines for gender-neutral, accessible, and inclusive communication
- Visibility in everyday work: Use of inclusive language and communication in all communications, minutes, social media, invitations, and public statements

Women's promotion

Initial situation / challenge:

The proportion of women at the BFW has continued to rise in recent years, partly due to new areas

of research. There has already been a significant increase in the number of female managers at the first management level. In order to consolidate this trend in the long term, young female researchers in particular need targeted support so that career paths can be strengthened in the long term.

Objectives:

- Increase the proportion of women in management and key positions at the second management level
- Actively strengthen the visibility and networking of women at the BFW

Measures:

- Female Leadership Programme: Establishment of a structured format focusing on young female scientists, including peer exchange, career counseling, and role models
- Strengthening the BFW women's network: Continuing and raising the profile of the internal network through annual meetings, thematic initiatives, and, where appropriate, external collaborations
- Continued participation in initiatives specifically targeting women and girls: Active involvement in formats such as Girls' Day, Daughters' Day, and taster days - with a focus on careers in forestry, technology, and science

Recruiting, On- und Off-Boarding

Initial situation / Challenges:

Recruitment processes shape the diversity of the workforce. Onboarding and offboarding are crucial for the organisational culture experienced. International employees in particular need supportive structures.

Objectives:

- Ensuring the best possible gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory recruitment process by involving the HR team
- Enabling a structured, appreciative start for all new employees
- Promote an inclusive welcoming culture for international employees
- Systematic learning from reasons for leaving

Measures:

- Recruiting guidelines: The existing gender-sensitive guidelines are continuously being developed by the Human Resources department; managers receive targeted training and support in consistently applying the guidelines in selection and application processes
- Welcome Centre & Intranet Resources: Establishment of a digital Welcome Centre with target group-specific information for new employees - including a glossary of relevant terms, legal framework conditions, and everyday information for international colleagues (“Your Start at BFW and in Austria—A Practical Guide”)

- Buddy system: Optional support program for new employees (German/English) to assist them during their first few months

- Exit interviews: Continuation of established offboarding discussions with annual evaluation by gender, age, and function.

Personnel and career development; organisational culture

Initial situation / Challenges:

The BFW is undergoing a transformation - from a traditionally male-dominated, administration-focused organisation to a diverse institution focused on research and training. Transparent career paths, active knowledge transfer, and discrimination-sensitive organisational culture are key success factors.

Objectives:

The BFW is continuously working to improve its structures for equality, equal opportunities, and work-life balance.

- Continuation of equal career development opportunities for all employees, regardless of gender, age, origin, or working time model

- Promoting an open, respectful organisational culture that values diversity

Measures:

- Systematise career development: Continue regular employee appraisals on goals, training, and development opportunities.

- Strengthen parental leave management: Offer voluntary continuing education during parental leave, support for returning to work, and transparent communication of development opportunities. Parental leave should be equally accessible and a matter of course for everyone. Clear substitution arrangements should also be established for periods of parental leave, creating planning security for those affected and their teams.

- Establish knowledge management: Structured concept for knowledge transfer between generations, for example, through a mentoring program

- Team development & exchange: BFW-wide and institute-specific team-building formats, intercultural workshops, regular exchange formats to strengthen cooperation

- Focus on psychosocial health: Continuation of regular surveys on psychosocial stress in the workplace and derivation and implementation of targeted improvement measures

- Intranet & work-life balance: Gradual provision of processes and guidelines on the new intranet; support through working from home and part-time models; information available in German and English

Work-life balance

Initial situation / Challenges:

The unequal distribution of care work is also reflected in the BFW in terms of part-time rates and

career paths. Work-life balance issues affect employees of all genders—especially in care, parenting, or crisis situations. Structural support and active acceptance are crucial.

Objectives:

- Promoting an open approach to parental leave, caregiving responsibilities, and part-time work - especially for men
- Provide visible, multilingual information (German/English) and support resources

Measures:

- Intranet: Development of a multilingual (German/English) intranet page with information on parental leave, care leave, part-time models, teleworking—including contact persons and information on the legal situation.

Integration of gender dimensions into research content

Initial Situation / Challenges:

Research questions, data analysis, and interpretation of results are never neutral—they are always influenced by society. At the BFW, the integration of gender and diversity aspects is not yet systematically anchored, even though individual employees are already working on this.

Objectives:

- Making gender dimensions visible and reflectable in research projects
- Raise awareness and provide support to project managers and researchers
- Strengthen research findings with regard to social relevance and inclusion

Measures:

- Literature collection & information pool: Compilation and provision of relevant literature and resources (e.g., gendered innovations, EU guidelines, specialist literature) via the intranet
- Project proposals: Inclusion of gender and diversity issues in internal proposal checklists and evaluations, especially for EU or Horizon Europe projects

Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment

Initial situation / Challenges:

There is no known systematic problem with gender-based violence or sexual harassment at the BFW, but experience from other organisations shows that prevention, clear procedures, and confidential contact points are essential for safety, respect, and a discrimination-free working environment.

Objectives:

- Strengthen prevention through structural, organisational, and cultural measures
- Provide low-threshold, discreet support to those affected
- Establish and ensure a clear, legally compliant procedure for dealing with incidents

Measures:

- Preventive structural and organisational measures: Review and, if necessary, improvement of premises (changing rooms), lighting, and signage.
- Advanced training & awareness training: Regular internal training courses for managers and employees on topics such as sexual violence, abuse of power, discriminatory behavior, and moral courage.
- Clear procedural rules: Development and communication of transparent guidelines for dealing with incidents (e.g. bullying, harassment), including consequences for perpetrators, reporting procedures, and protective measures for those affected.
- Contact persons: Managers, HR department staff, equal opportunities officers, and works council members are available as low-threshold confidants.
- Intranet information page: Creation of a multilingual information page (German/English) with a clear overview of support options, responsibilities, procedures, and external counseling centres.

5. Monitoring

Objective:

Monitoring serves to regularly review the achievement of objectives, the impact of the measures taken, and the further development of the equality plan. It creates transparency, enables control, and is an essential component of impact-oriented equality and diversity management at the BFW.

Measures:

- Monitoring is carried out annually; the results are summarized in a report and incorporated into existing control processes.

6. Communication strategy

Objectives:

The equality plan and its measures should be communicated in a transparent, accessible, and lively manner. Communication serves not only to inform, but also to raise awareness, motivate, and encourage the active participation of all employees.

Measures:

- Transparent communication at BFW: Presentation of the equality plan and its objectives, e.g. at staff meetings, on the intranet, and in circular emails. Regular updates on progress and next steps strengthen confidence in the implementation.
- Ensure accessibility: Provision of all relevant information (equality plan, monitoring results, guidelines, contact points, training materials) on a central intranet page – bilingual (German/English).
- Making equality visible: Use internal communication channels (newsletters, info screens, internal events) to highlight successes, role models, and offerings related to equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- Cooperation with the Communications Department: Coordination of formats and channels to ensure consistent, professional, and appealing internal and external communication.
- Anchoring in external communication: Where appropriate, equality goals and understanding should also be visible to the outside world (e.g. on the BFW website, in job advertisements, or project presentations) in order to position the BFW as an inclusive employer. Concrete implementation will take place in close coordination with the Communications Department. A key signal of this is the signing of the 'Diversity Charter', which clearly demonstrates the BFW's commitment to an appreciative, open, and non-discriminatory working environment to the outside world.

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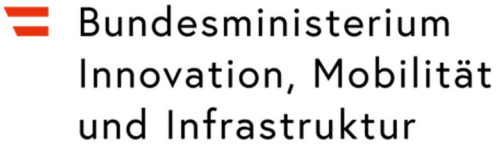

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