ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY IN HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS: EVALUATION OF THE AUSTRIAN RED CROSS WASH TEAM

COLLABORATION BETWEEN AUSTRIAN RED CROSS AND CEU

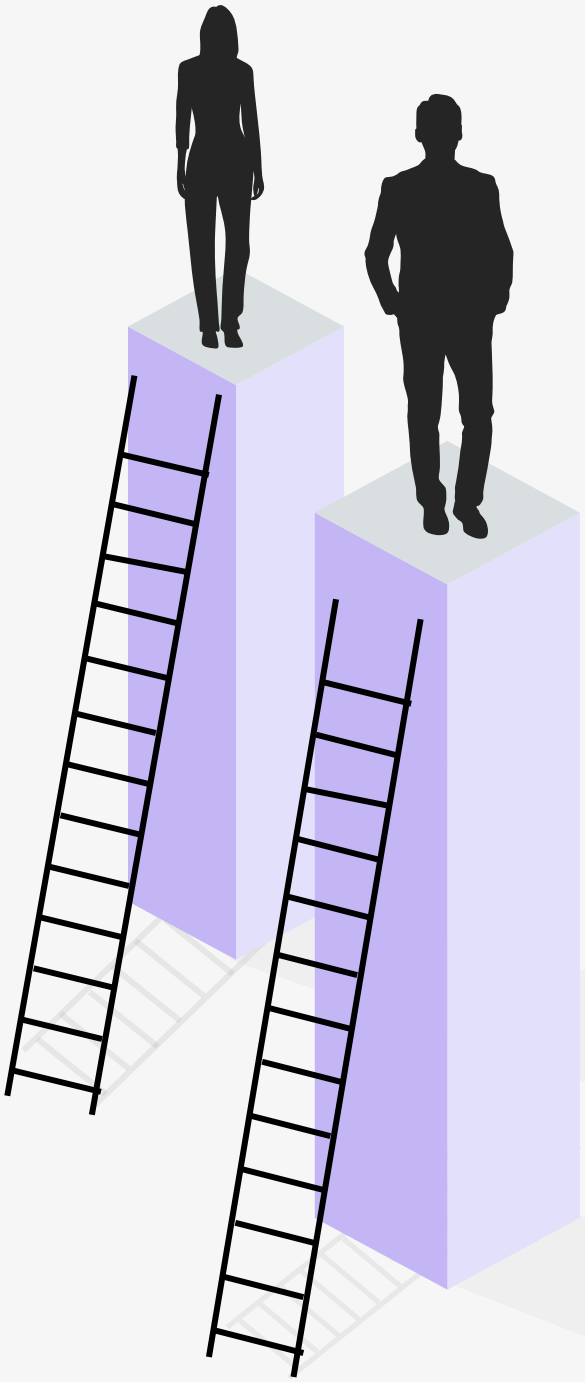

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a core value of the Red Cross Movement and a prerequisite for effective humanitarian action. This report evaluates gender equality within the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) team of the Austrian Red Cross (AutRC) and is intended for internal AutRC staff and decision-makers.

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The report was developed as part of a capstone project by graduate students from the Master of Public Administration program at Central European University (CEU). Each year, CEU students collaborate with external partner organizations on real-world policy challenges. In this case, the International Cooperation Department of the Austrian Red Cross proposed an assessment of gender equality in its WASH operations. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of how gender dynamics shape staff and volunteer experiences and how well the organization's commitments to gender equality are reflected in day-to-day practice.

The analysis draws primarily on qualitative interviews with WASH staff and volunteers (using coded insights from those interviews), supported by a review of AutRC internal policy documents on gender and inclusion and external literature on gender equality in humanitarian organizations. The focus is on how gender equality issues manifest in the AutRC WASH operations – including team composition, policies, training practices, and monitoring mechanisms – and how well these align with the organization’s commitments. Patterns, challenges, and gaps identified through staff and volunteer perspectives are highlighted. The report concludes with actionable recommendations to strengthen gender equality in the AutRC WASH program.

(Note: To respect confidentiality, quotes from interviews are presented without names.)

Methodology

This analysis is built on three main sources of information: an external literature review, a review of Red Cross policies, and qualitative interviews with members of the AutRC WASH team. In addition, a workshop was held with staff to validate findings and gather further insights, which forms an integral part of the participatory research process.

The literature review surveyed recent research on gender equality in humanitarian organizations and volunteer-driven teams, drawing out key lessons and best practices. **The policy review** examined relevant policies and guidelines at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) level and within the Austrian Red Cross – including codes of conduct, inclusion strategies, and WASH-specific guidance – to understand the formal commitments and frameworks in place.

Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse mix of staff and volunteers working in WASH or related roles. Participants were recruited through an open call sent via email to the WASH team and the International Cooperation department. Participation was entirely voluntary, and interviewees self-selected to join the study. This likely introduced a participation bias, as individuals who are more aware of or supportive of gender equality issues may have been more inclined to take part, while those indifferent or resistant may have opted out.

The interviews explored topics such as team composition, workplace culture, barriers to participation, and personal experiences. Responses were coded and grouped into themes to identify shared concerns and divergent perspectives. This qualitative data was then triangulated with findings from the literature and policy reviews to identify where lived experiences align with or diverge from organizational standards and external evidence. This mixed-method approach ensures that the report's conclusions and recommendations are well-rounded, evidence-based, and grounded in practical reality.

Literature Review

This section aims to strengthen institutional understanding of how gender equality can be meaningfully advanced within humanitarian aid teams. It offers a foundational overview of key practices and mechanisms that contribute to more equitable organizational structures, while also exploring how such measures can be operationalized to enhance service delivery to vulnerable populations. The core question addressed is:

How can gender equality within teams be strengthened to ensure more effective and inclusive humanitarian responses?

A detailed analysis is provided in the annex of this report; what follows is a synthesis of the principal insights.

- **Organizational culture** within humanitarian institutions is inherently shaped by gender. Historically, these cultures have been constructed around male-centric norms that reinforce systemic privilege, often without scrutiny. Such norms have become deeply internalized and institutionalized, setting professional expectations that favor traits typically associated with masculinity. Conversely, qualities traditionally linked to femininity are frequently devalued, thus limiting the recognition and advancement of women in the workplace (Tripathi, 2022).

- Although numerous gender equality initiatives have been implemented across the humanitarian sector, many of these efforts have disproportionately focused on women, encouraging them to build skills to "overcome" structural barriers. This approach has been extensively critiqued for placing the onus on women to adapt, rather than addressing the institutional and cultural practices that sustain inequality (O'Brien et al., 2024). Similar patterns are observed in **volunteer engagement**, where women are often relegated to care-based roles while strategic, technical, and leadership positions remain predominantly male-dominated.

- One of the most persistent manifestations of this inequality is the "glass ceiling" an invisible yet potent barrier that restricts women from accessing senior **leadership** roles. Addressing this gap is essential to achieving substantive gender parity. In Austria, for example, women occupy just 12.2% of management positions within the 200 largest companies, with board-level representation at 26.8% as of 2024.

While this represents some progress, entrenched structural barriers continue to impede equitable participation (Federal Chancellery of Austria, 2025).

- Moreover, women are often affected by what has been termed *"second-generation bias"* subtle and often unspoken form of discrimination rooted in cultural assumptions. This bias perpetuates the belief that leadership is inherently masculine, thereby reinforcing male dominance in organizational hierarchies. The disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities, combined with inadequate work-life balance policies, further exacerbates the challenges faced by women (Alcañiz, 2017).

- Also, disparities in promotional practices remain a significant barrier. While men are frequently promoted based on perceived potential, women are often required to demonstrate extensive prior achievements. This unequal standard generates frustration and disillusionment among female professionals and contributes to the perception that advancement pathways are fundamentally biased (Stocking & Armstrong, 2019). Limited access to mentorship, leadership networks, and institutional recognition further compounds this inequity (Michailidis et al., 2012).

- Despite these challenges, there is compelling evidence that gender-diverse leadership improves organizational outcomes, including increased innovation, enhanced risk management, and strengthened corporate social responsibility (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Female leaders are shown to foster more inclusive workplace cultures by modelling inclusive behaviors, setting higher expectations for team engagement, and promoting participatory decision-making.

- To advance female leadership, organizations should consider implementing a range of **structural reforms**. These may include the establishment of inclusive committees focused on gender equity, regular gender-focused workplace audits, leadership development initiatives targeting early-career women, and formal recognition programs to celebrate the contributions of female professionals (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). More fundamentally, organizations must confront patriarchy as the root cause of institutional inequality and pursue transformative, rather than incremental, change (International Center for Research on Women & Cartier Philanthropy, 2018).

- Research identifies several critical strategies for promoting long-term cultural transformation. First, senior leadership must explicitly acknowledge gender inequality and commit to driving structural change, informed by the lived experiences of women within the organization. Second, policies aimed at fostering inclusion must be rigorously implemented, evaluated, and continuously improved.

Third, fostering interpersonal trust and peer support networks is vital to sustaining inclusive environments. Finally, while gender inequality is primarily structural, individual behaviors and biases must also be addressed through targeted interventions and self-reflection (Stocking & Armstrong, 2019).

- Integral to this effort is the implementation of comprehensive gender sensitivity training. Such training should be mandated for senior leadership and progressively extended to all employees. These programs should address both explicit and implicit forms of bias, promote empathy, and encourage a shift in values and attitudes toward gender equity. When well-designed, such training fosters the emergence of *"change agents"* individuals who take active responsibility for challenging discriminatory norms within their organizations.

- However, training effectiveness is contingent upon participant motivation and engagement. It is essential to tailor content to be context-specific, accessible, and relevant, especially for staff, who may be less inclined to engage with gender topics. On-the-job training, which incorporates real-time problem-solving and operational relevance, has proven effective in humanitarian settings (Gupta et al., 2023).

- Following implementation, it is essential to establish robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation in order to assess the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives. A **gender-responsive evaluation framework** offers a comprehensive and integrative approach by examining how all policies, programs, and institutional activities—regardless of whether they are explicitly gender-focused—contribute to or hinder progress toward gender equality. This framework evaluates both intended and unintended outcomes, as well as the extent to which an organization systematically pursues gender mainstreaming across its operations. Such evaluations assess changes in organizational values, power dynamics, workplace culture, and access to opportunities. In addition, they can identify where, when, and how the gender perspective may have been diluted, overlooked, or lost during the various stages of the policy and programmatic cycle. This diagnostic capacity distinguishes gender-responsive evaluation from traditional gender evaluation, which tends to focus exclusively on the performance of specific gender equality policies (EIGE, 2023).

- Commonly used indicators such as workforce composition and sex-disaggregated data provide useful baselines but are insufficient in isolation. Additional indicators are required to capture nuanced shifts in organizational culture. Application indicators evaluate the extent to which disparities exist between reference and control groups.

Process indicators assess the efficacy and efficiency of policy implementation, including budget allocations and timelines. Result indicators examine the extent to which interventions translate into meaningful change in women's participation, advancement, and influence (Gender Monitoring, 2025).

- A further key instrument is gender audit. This tool enables organizations to review internal processes, identify hidden patterns of inequality, and measure institutional progress over time. Audits are particularly effective when conducted both prior to and following policy implementation, as they offer a structured baseline for comparison. However, the success of such audits depends significantly on the commitment and accountability of senior leadership (EIGE, 2019).

Policy Analysis

This section includes a review of policy documents published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Austrian Red Cross (AutRC). In this section, the policy documents are analyzed, areas that need to be strengthened are identified, and recommendations are made specific to the policy documents. The documents referenced in this review were selected based on both personal familiarity and their relevance in outlining policy frameworks and implementation guidance within the WASH sector. While the selection may inherently reflect a degree of subjectivity and may not encompass all existing or equally important documents, it is important to clarify that the list was compiled in consultation with, and upon the recommendation of, the designated contact person for the WASH project.

This approach was considered appropriate given that one of the central research questions concerned the extent to which key policy documents are known, understood, and applied in practice. It is therefore reasonable to infer that documents not included in this list—particularly those unknown to both the author and the project focal point—are less likely to be widely recognized or systematically utilized within the WASH professional community.

The Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Guidelines (2019)

- aim to ensure that women and girls in humanitarian crisis settings have safe, dignified, and private access to menstrual hygiene products, sanitation facilities, and information.
- The guideline defines menstruation as a matter of public health, gender equality, and dignity, and considers the specific needs of women, girls, and trans individuals.
- Key objectives include ensuring access to hygiene materials, adapting WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) infrastructure, dismantling myths and cultural taboos through education, and encouraging the participation of men in menstrual health initiatives.

The Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) Policy (2022)

articulates IFRC's commitment to fair treatment, equal opportunities, participation in decision-making, and protection from harm for all individuals. The policy is grounded in seven core principles:

humanity impartiality neutrality independence unity universality voluntary service

It includes measures to combat gender-based violence, promote gender-balanced leadership, establish safeguarding mechanisms, conduct diversity analyses, and strengthen advocacy efforts. The supporting **PGI-WASH Guidance Note (2022)** focuses on integrating gender equality and inclusion into water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs. It emphasizes that equitable access to WASH services is a human right and places particular importance on addressing the needs of women, people with disabilities, older people, and marginalized communities.

The document outlines strategies such as promoting community participation,

forming gender-balanced WASH teams,

installing gender-segregated sanitation facilities,

and meeting menstrual hygiene needs.

It also highlights the importance of collecting sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data (SADD) and participatory decision-making.

The AutRC Inclusion, Gender and Diversity (IGD) Concept Paper (2021) and Presentation (2024)

seek mainstream gender equality, diversity, and inclusion at both institutional and programmatic levels. The document identifies six priority areas:

- gender and diversity balance
- training
- inclusive communication
- prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)
- integration of gender and diversity in projects
- strategic partnerships

It aligns with international standards, including the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Marker, EU Gender Action Plan III, and the IFRC PGI Policy.

The AutRC Code of Conduct (2018)

defines the organization's ethical principles. Under the sections "Prohibition of Discrimination" and "Prohibition of Sexual Harassment," it explicitly bans gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment. The code mandates the reporting of ethical violations and guarantees whistleblower protection, confidentiality, and protection against retaliation. In serious cases, an independent ombudsperson is appointed to evaluate complaints impartially.

The Practical Guide for Inclusive Communication (2022)

which is an internal AutRC International Cooperation Division document, promotes the use of gender-, age-, and disability-sensitive language and visuals. It clearly differentiates between gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.

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The guide offers concrete recommendations for breaking gender stereotypes, ensuring gender-balanced representation, and using inclusive language and imagery.

- It also advises against tokenism and emphasizes meaningful inclusion of marginalized gender identities in events and public representation.

The AutRC International Cooperation Strategy (2020)

adopts gender equality as a cross-cutting issue and commits to aligning all programs with the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Marker.

- The strategy acknowledges that gender analysis reveals existing disparities and inequalities and explicitly sets the goal of strengthening women's leadership at all levels.

It promotes inclusive and humanitarian values aimed at fostering positive change.

Areas in Need of Strengthening

The documents include significant measures aimed at reducing the risks of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly in sanitation contexts.

- The provision of safe, private, well-lit, and gender-segregated toilet facilities is recommended to ensure that women and girls can access these services without the risk of violence.

- However, the definition of violence is primarily limited to physical threats in public or sanitation spaces. Broader forms of gender-based violence—such as economic violence (e.g., price discrimination in menstrual products), digital violence (e.g., online harassment), or political violence—are not addressed. This indicates a limited scope in the current understanding and framing of GBV within the documents.

- Although the documents refer to the LGBTQ+ community, they fall short in developing strategies specifically tailored to the unique needs of this group. Terms such as “trans,” “transgender,” and “non-binary” are used as umbrella concepts, but there is a lack of detailed analysis or policy recommendations that address the specific challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. This gap restricts the capacity of policies to address intersectional inequalities in a meaningful and inclusive way.

- IFRC policies clearly state the necessity of achieving gender balance within leadership teams. However, they do not outline concrete implementation mechanisms to support this goal. There are no defined measures such as mandatory quotas, systematic monitoring processes, regular assessments, or enforcement mechanisms that would ensure adherence to gender parity targets in leadership structures.

- The documents primarily emphasize the vulnerabilities of women and girls, yet they do not present an approach that involves men and boys as allies in the pursuit of gender equality. There are no suggestions regarding the transformation of harmful masculinity norms, the promotion of positive male engagement, or the inclusion of men in gender equality advocacy. This absence limits the framing of gender equality as a shared responsibility across all genders.

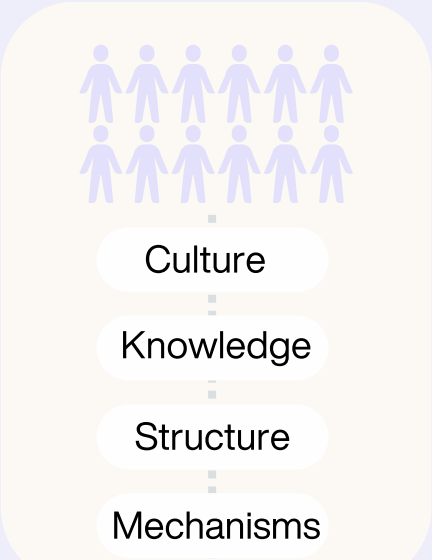
- While the policy documents set out various goals in the areas of gender equality and inclusion, they lack a structured monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess the achievement of these objectives. There is no information on timelines, measurable indicators, or performance evaluation systems. This represents a critical gap that affects both the applicability and the accountability of policies.

- The training materials provided by IFRC introduce basic principles related to gender equality, protection, and inclusion, and they include some practical content. However, these training courses are not addressed in sufficient detail. The scope of training content dissemination strategies, target audiences, and mechanisms for assessing learning outcomes are not clearly defined. This makes it difficult to evaluate the overall impact and effectiveness of the training programs.

Key Interview Findings

This section presents a structured summary of insights from 12 interviews with Austrian Red Cross WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) team staff and volunteers regarding gender equality.

The following themes are organized to reflect a logical progression from workplace culture and attitudes (as the foundational environment) to the tools and knowledge available (training and policy awareness), followed by structural challenges (recruitment and leadership), and concluding with institutional mechanisms (reporting and accountability). This order mirrors the journey from individual experience through systemic barriers to formal processes of change.



WORKPLACE CULTURE AND ATTITUDES

Interviewees generally described the WASH team's working atmosphere as positive and respectful, especially within their immediate groups.

Within the WASH bubble, team members try to be conscious of gender issues, and many believe their direct colleagues take the topic seriously. Yet, the fact that inappropriate comments still occur (even if challenged by others) shows that the culture isn't perfect.

However, some noted that on occasion they have witnessed or heard insensitive jokes or remarks related to gender.

For instance, there were mentions of sexist or even homophobic jokes during joint trainings with other parts of the Red Cross.

Female volunteers mostly reported feeling respected and supported in their own team,

but they were not sure if the same level of respect is universal across the wider organization.

These insights suggest that while the WASH team is moving in the right direction, continued effort is needed to build a consistently inclusive culture where everyone feels safe and valued, and where outdated attitudes (like "it's just a joke") are consistently discouraged.

TRAINING

Limited & Surface-Level

Regular & Structured

Interactive Format

Need for Practical Training

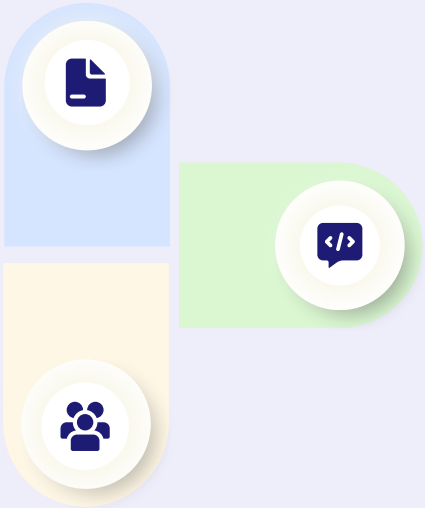
Common Understanding

Mandatory for All

Participants noted that gender-related training in the WASH team has been limited. Some mentioned that Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) topics are briefly covered in general trainings or as part of online modules, but dedicated in-depth training on gender equality is rare. Those who had received training felt it was often too short or surface-level.

Interviewees expressed a desire for more practical and regular training sessions focused on gender equality – ideally incorporated into routine training schedules. They suggested that such training should be interactive, relevant to their field work, and mandatory for all team members (including volunteers and new staff) to ensure everyone shares a basic understanding of gender issues in WASH operations.

KNOWLEDGE OF POLICIES



Most interviewees were not very familiar with specific gender equality policies in the Red Cross. While they acknowledged signing the Code of Conduct or other documents (for example, before deployments), few could recall details of these policies.

This suggests that, in practice, team members lack awareness of the formal guidelines on gender equality.

Many agreed that regular reminders or refreshers about these policies would be helpful so that everyone understands the expectations and resources available.

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

Several interviewees observed that men still outnumber women in many roles, especially in technical and leadership positions within the WASH team.

Officially, the Red Cross encourages gender-balanced hiring (and some policies even state that if candidates are equally qualified, female candidates should be preferred to improve balance).

However, the general perception is that in practice there is no clear strategy or data to ensure gender-balanced recruitment.

Some volunteers noted that attracting and retaining women can be challenging, especially for roles requiring extensive time commitments or deployments.

Overall, the interviews suggest a gap between the intent of gender-balanced recruitment policies and the reality on the ground, as the team's composition remains uneven.

This highlights the need for more proactive efforts in recruiting and encouraging qualified women, as well as perhaps collecting data to track gender balance in hiring and volunteer intake.

LEADERSHIP AND ADVANCEMENT

Many interviewees discussed the topic of leadership opportunities and agreed that higher leadership levels in the WASH context are male-dominated. Women are present and active in the team, but fewer are seen in top roles or long-term career paths within WASH.

A common view was that structural and cultural factors make it harder for women to advance. For example, several people mentioned that the time investment required for certain senior volunteer qualifications or deployments can be difficult for women who might have other responsibilities. In recent years, there have been improvements – a few women have moved into officer roles and become role models – but the consensus is that progress is slow.

The interviews indicate that while no formal policy prevents women from taking leadership, in practice there are invisible barriers (like networking dynamics, work-life balance challenges, or historical biases) that need to be recognized and addressed to achieve truly equal opportunities in leadership.

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

When it comes to reporting problems or ensuring accountability for gender equality, many interviewees were unsure about the processes in place. Few could clearly describe what would happen if someone violated a gender-related policy (for example, a case of harassment) beyond referencing the Code of Conduct. While there is an ombudsperson and a system on paper for handling serious issues, team members did not express strong confidence or awareness of these mechanisms.

Some people referenced recent news of gender and harassment issues in the broader Red Cross, suggesting that if such problems became public, the internal mechanisms might not be fully effective.

This indicates a gap in communication: staff and volunteers need to know how to safely report any incidents and trust that actions will be taken. It also points to a need for better monitoring of gender equality progress – for instance, gathering feedback on team climate or checking if policies (like gender balance goals or training completion) are actually being followed. Without these mechanisms, it becomes difficult to assess or enforce gender commitments.

SUMMARY

The interviews reveal a team that is generally motivated to improve gender equality but faces both structural and cultural barriers. Team members value a respectful working environment, recognize gender imbalances, and want better tools, training, and systems to promote change.

However, policies alone are insufficient.

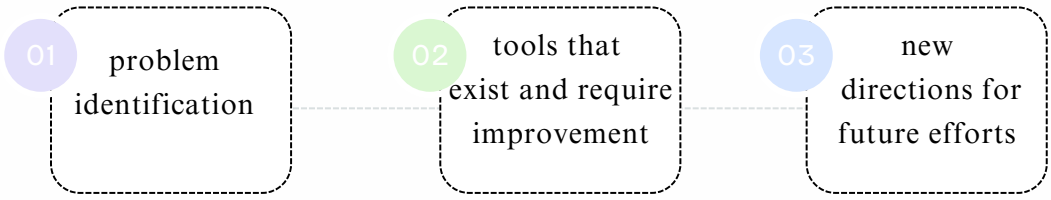
To close the gap between intention and impact, clearer procedures, stronger leadership engagement, and consistent monitoring are needed. This section highlights not only the challenges but also the willingness within the team to move toward a more inclusive and equitable future.

Linking Interviews, Literature Review, and Policy Analysis

Bringing together the insights from the interviews, the external literature review, and the Red Cross policy analysis provides a holistic view of gender equality in the Austrian Red Cross WASH team. Each source offers a different perspective:

- **the interviews** show the on-the-ground reality and personal experiences of team members;
- **the literature review** offers broader context and evidence from global practices on gender in WASH;
- **and the policy analysis** reveals the formal commitments and frameworks that are supposed to guide the team.

When we compare and combine these sources, we find notable alignment on certain points, as well as clear disconnects between what is supposed to happen and what is actually happening. Overall, this triangulation of evidence helps us understand not only the current state of gender equality in the WASH team, but also where efforts should be focused to make improvements. The findings are organized into three interlinked dimensions:



This format clarifies where the WASH team stands and where targeted action is needed.

Problem Identification

The interviews, external literature, and policy review all reinforce the understanding of common **barriers and challenges** that hinder gender equality efforts. Many of the barriers raised in interviews – such as cultural norms in communities, lack of resources, or competing priorities – are well documented in the gender and WASH literature. The complete literature review provided examples or case studies from other organizations or countries where similar challenges occurred, reinforcing that the WASH team's struggles are not unique. This external perspective validates the

interview findings: for instance, if team members feel that "technical deliverables are prioritized over gender considerations," the literature confirms that this pattern happens widely in humanitarian programs under pressure, and it emphasizes the importance of leadership and donor requirements in counteracting that tendency. On the policy side, while policy documents may not list these barriers explicitly, they implicitly acknowledge them by calling for measures to overcome them (for example, a policy might call for dedicated budget for gender activities or the appointment of gender focal points to ensure the issue doesn't get sidelined). By comparing sources, we see that there is broad agreement on what stands in the way of gender equality – be it social norms, institutional inertia, or knowledge gaps – and there is also agreement that these barriers can and should be addressed. The convergence of internal and external viewpoints on the nature of the problem means the team can move forward with confidence that the challenges they face are real and recognized, and that solutions proposed in the wider sector (like having a gender focal person, allocating time for gender work, etc.) are relevant to their situation as well.

Another problem highlighted is the **male dominance in the sector and its implications**. The interviews described a male-dominated leadership and culture within the team, and this is echoed in the wider literature: studies on WASH programs frequently note that men often hold most technical and decision-making positions, which can inadvertently marginalize women's input. The Red Cross policy framework, for its part, formally acknowledges the need for diversity and gender balance (for example, through its gender and diversity policies or strategies) – implicitly agreeing that having more women involved at all levels is crucial. All sources, therefore, agree that increasing women's participation and leadership is an important goal. The alignment of perspectives here – personal accounts, external research, and organizational commitment – provides a strong mandate for change. It means that both the people experiencing the issue and the experts studying it conclude that the WASH team would benefit from a better gender balance and a more inclusive culture. This convergence lends weight to recommendations aimed at recruiting and promoting more women and creating a work environment where they can thrive, because such actions are supported by internal voices, empirical evidence, and official policy.

The issue of **workplace culture versus stated values** also emerged. Official Red Cross values and policies promote respect, diversity, and equality. However, the interviews brought to light elements of the workplace culture – such as inappropriate humor, and informal "boys' club" networks – that run counter to those values. This reflects a broader cultural lag within the organization, not only as a gap between formal policies and everyday practices, but also as varying norms and behaviors across different departments or "sub-cultures" within the Austrian Red Cross.

While some teams may already embrace inclusive values in practice, others appear slower to internalize and reflect the organization's gender equality commitments. The literature on gender in organizations often points out that transforming culture is the hardest part – it's easier to change policies than to change mindsets. Our findings reflect that: despite a policy environment that does not condone sexist behavior, some team members still engage in or tolerate jokes and attitudes that undermine gender equality. There is a disconnect between the inclusive culture the Red Cross aspires to and the actual culture some WASH team members have experienced. This misalignment can erode trust in the organization's commitment – for example, a female staff member who reads a policy about gender inclusion but then faces casual sexism at work will likely feel that the commitment is superficial. Recognizing this disconnect is important because it shows that interventions must go beyond checklists and into the realm of team building, awareness, and accountability for behavior. It's not enough to have a rule against harassment; the team needs to actively cultivate a professional culture that reflects the spirit of that rule. Moreover, the organization could encourage cross-learning between departments or regional branches. Highlighting and sharing good practices from areas where inclusive workplace culture is already well established can help inspire and guide change in parts of the organization that are still struggling. The combined insights make it clear that addressing cultural issues—such as humor, informal dynamics, and unspoken norms—is just as necessary as procedural fixes, even though it can be challenging.

Tools That Exist and Require Improvements

A strong area of agreement across interviews, literature, and policy reviews is **the need for improved training and capacity building on gender equality**. The literature review emphasized that knowledge and skills are key to mainstreaming gender in any sector – a common finding in research is that organizations that invest in gender training see more progress, whereas those that don't struggle to translate intentions into practice. The policy analysis presumably found that the Red Cross (internationally and nationally) has provisions or at least stated expectations for staff training on gender and inclusion. For example, many organizational policies call for integrating gender into staff development and may even mandate training sessions or modules for field staff. Meanwhile, our interviews with the WASH team revealed a clear lack of training in practice, but importantly, they also revealed *enthusiasm for training* – team members want more guidance and skill-building opportunities. When we link these points, a consistent story emerges: everyone agrees training is essential (it's important to acknowledge a possible participation bias, since the interviewees volunteered to be part of a gender-focused study, they are likely more aware of or supportive of gender equality issues than others in the team). The organization says it in policy, experts say it in literature, and staff on the ground say "we need it."

While the policies promoting gender equality exist, the combined analysis also reveals clear disconnects – particularly between the **organization's policies/ideals and the reality of implementation in the WASH team**. The policy analysis no doubt outlines a suite of guidelines, commitments, and expectations that the Red Cross has formally endorsed – for instance, commitments to gender equity, non-discrimination, and inclusive programming. However, as the interviews showed, many of these policies have not effectively trickled down to the team members who should be implementing them. This disconnect suggests an implementation gap: the existence of a policy doesn't guarantee practice on the ground. The literature on organizational change would not find this surprising – it often notes that without proper dissemination, training, and accountability, policies remain paper promises. In our case, the Red Cross's gender equality policies are not yet living documents within the WASH team's daily work. The interviews revealed ignorance of the policies and lack of guidance stemming from them, indicating that there is a breakdown somewhere in the chain of communication and management. In effect, what the policy analysis tells us "should" be happening (like integrating gender into every project, or zero tolerance for harassment) is not fully reflected in the experiences staff reported. This gap is critical: it highlights a need for better internal communication, leadership emphasis, and perhaps monitoring of policy implementation. Without bridging this gap, the best-intentioned policies will have limited impact.

Both the literature and policy frameworks increasingly emphasize the importance of engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality — the literature, because evidence shows that progress is limited without addressing male attitudes, and the policies, because modern gender strategies (including those used by humanitarian organizations) advocate for a whole-of-society approach. The interviews indicated that the team conceptually understands this idea. Yet, in actual operations, explicit efforts to engage men were sparse. This suggests a disconnect between what is conceptually accepted and what is operationally executed. In other words, "everyone knows we should involve men too" (an idea reinforced by literature and policy rhetoric), but there is uncertainty or inertia about how to actually do that within WASH projects. This may be due to lack of practical guidelines or examples – a gap that could be filled by better sharing of best practices (something literature could provide) or by policy providing more explicit directives or training on male engagement strategies. The fact that this disconnect emerged tells us that the team might benefit from very concrete tools or initiatives that operationalize the notion of engaging men and boys – moving it from a talking point to a standard part of program design. It's a classic case of an idea being agreed upon in principle across all levels yet falling into a gap when it comes to action.

A further area that should be improved is **monitoring and accountability mechanisms**. The policy review highlights that the Red Cross has committed to certain gender outcomes or at least to reporting on gender (for example, many organizations have gender action plans or are expected to track progress on gender indicators as part of their accountability to donors or stakeholders). However, the interviews revealed that on the ground, there is very limited monitoring or reporting actually happening regarding gender equality. The literature often stresses that what doesn't get measured doesn't get done – a truth reflected in our case. The disconnect here is between expectations and follow-through: the organization might expect teams to gather data and assess gender impact, but it seems this hasn't been enforced or supported in the WASH team. Possibly the policy analysis found that while high-level strategies call for gender-sensitive M&E, there were no specific tools or requirements passed down to the WASH unit. The result is a lack of accountability – without data or evaluations, the team isn't held accountable (and perhaps doesn't hold itself accountable) for progress on gender equality. All sources collectively highlight this gap: interviews explicitly state M&E is weak; literature warns that without accountability, gender goals slip; and the absence of evidence of strong M&E in the policy implementation points to a systemic lapse. This is an area where alignment is actually found in agreement that something is lacking – which is a somewhat negative alignment, but useful nonetheless. Everyone, in effect, is pointing out "we are not monitoring gender outcomes enough," which again strengthens the argument that establishing clear M&E practices is necessary.

New Directions for Future Efforts

Overall, looking at all the evidence together, we gain a clearer picture of the state of gender equality in the WASH team – one that mixes concern with optimism. All three sources – interviews, literature, and policy – converge on the idea that gender equality is both important and beneficial: it's valued by team members (no one argued against its importance in the interviews, though it should be noted that participation was voluntary, and those indifferent or hostile to gender equality may have opted not to take part), it's backed by research (which shows that considering gender leads to more effective and equitable WASH outcomes), and it's mandated by the Red Cross's values and policies. This is a fundamental point of alignment: the why of pursuing gender equality is unquestioned across sources. This collective insight is crucial because it means any resistance to improvement is likely due to practical challenges rather than disagreement in principle. Everyone from frontline staff to researchers to policymakers agrees that a more gender-equal WASH team and programming will strengthen the mission. These findings directly inform the recommendations in the following chapter, offering concrete steps that address the identified gaps and build on existing strengths within the WASH team.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the literature review, policy analysis, and WASH team interviews, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance gender equality in the Austrian Red Cross WASH team. These recommendations aim to address the identified barriers, build on strengths, and create a more inclusive and effective team. They are practical steps that draw on all three sources of insight:

DEVELOP A CLEAR GENDER ACTION PLAN FOR THE WASH TEAM

- Formulate a concise plan that sets specific, measurable targets for gender balance and inclusion within the WASH unit.
- Developing a base line that can be used in the future to evaluate the plan, could be extremely beneficial to do an audit before designing the plan. For example, the plan could state goals such as “increase the percentage of women in the deployable WASH roster to 40% by 2026” or “ensure at least one female team leader in every WASH emergency deployment.” This plan should align with the broader AutRC gender strategy but translate it into WASH-specific terms.
- Include timelines, responsible parties, and required resources for each target, ensuring accountability. Share this plan with the whole team so everyone knows what the collective aims are.

STRENGTHEN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FEMALE WASH VOLUNTEERS

- To address the pipeline issue, implement proactive recruitment strategies.
- Work with volunteer coordinators to reach out to networks like universities (especially engineering or public health programs with female students) and women’s professional groups to promote WASH volunteering opportunities. Emphasize that technical skills can be learned and that the Red Cross provides training – interest and commitment are key.
- When new volunteers join, aim for gender-balanced training cohorts (even if that means running with slightly smaller groups or doing extra outreach to get more female candidates).

- For retention, introduce flexibility: consider offering modular or spread-out training schedules for those with limited time (e.g., weekend-based courses or online components) so that volunteers with jobs/families (often women) can still progress.

IMPLEMENT WORK-LIFE BALANCE ACCOMMODATIONS AND SUPPORT

- Recognizing that family responsibilities disproportionately affect female members, the WASH team (in coordination with HR) should introduce measures to mitigate this barrier.
- Ideas include: allowing job-sharing or co-lead roles for key positions (so two people can split deployment periods, for instance), offering shorter rotation options (e.g. a 4-week deployment instead of 3-month, when feasible) to those who cannot be away long, and ensuring that volunteers who take a break for childcare can easily re-enter training or deployment pipelines when ready.
- Additionally, consider providing childcare support during critical trainings or meetings – for example, offering a stipend for babysitting for volunteers attending a weekend training camp.
- Such family-friendly practices echo the literature's call for "comprehensive policies" to balance caregiving and work and will help retain talented women who might otherwise drop out.

INVEST IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR WOMEN

- To continue building the pool of female leaders, create opportunities tailored to women in the WASH team.
- This could involve sponsoring promising female volunteers/staff to attend advanced leadership or technical workshops (externally or within Red Cross), establishing a mentorship scheme where senior management (e.g., Heads of Department or experienced male allies) mentor female staff/volunteers on career progression, and ensuring women get "acting" or deputy leadership roles as experience.
- Encourage and prepare women to apply for roles like WASH coordinator or project manager when they open up.
- Since the IFRC is already reserving slots for women in certain trainings, take full advantage of those by nominating strong candidates and coaching them through the process.

- Over time, aim to have women represented not just in informal leadership but in formal positions (one interviewee noted the absence of women in upper management boards; while changing the governing board may be outside the WASH team's direct control, feeding more women into the leadership pipeline will eventually rise to that level).
- This recommendation aligns with AutRC's strategic goal of expanding women's leadership across all levels.

MANDATORY PGI & GENDER TRAINING FOR ALL TEAM MEMBERS (WITH REFRESHERS)

- Make the Protection, Gender, and Inclusion training a required module for every WASH team member – both new and existing, volunteer and staff.
- As one team member suggested, a PGI orientation should be part of basic training for anyone joining the Red Cross, including WASH.
- Ensure this training covers not just theory but practical scenarios relevant to WASH (e.g., case studies of how gender dynamics play out in field camps, or role-playing responding to a discriminatory comment).
- Augment these with the IFRC's interactive exercises, for example, "Accessibility Exercise – Using a Latrine". In this activity, participants simulate the experience of using a latrine as individuals with various limitations—such as mobility impairments, blindness, old age, pregnancy, or menstruation. The exercise aims to raise empathy and awareness by confronting participants with the emotional and physical challenges that others may face when using poorly designed sanitation facilities.
- Because a single training can fade from memory, implement regular refreshers or brief annual workshops. These could be short sessions at annual team gatherings or online refreshers highlighting new issues (such as LGBTQ+ inclusion, or lessons learned from recent missions).
- Also, critically, include senior staff and male team members in these trainings, not just as participants but perhaps as co-facilitators or spokespeople for why it matters. When the head of a unit sits through the same training, it sends a message that this is taken seriously by leadership (which was noted as lacking historically, with leaders seldom present in training).

- Consider bringing in an external gender expert occasionally to run a "male allies" workshop or a seminar on unconscious bias – an outside perspective can sometimes provoke honest discussion. The goal is to make knowledge of gender equality principles universal and to signal that learning in this area is ongoing, not optional.

FOSTER A CULTURE OF OPEN DIALOGUE AND ZERO TOLERANCE FOR HARASSMENT

- Building on the progress in culture, institutionalize the expectation that inappropriate behavior will be addressed.
- Continue to encourage team members to speak up if they witness sexist or derogatory jokes, and back them up through official channels. For example, team leaders should state upfront (at trainings, team meetings, pre-deployment briefings) that discrimination or harassment will not be tolerated and that calling out concerns is welcome.
- To strengthen this, ensure everyone knows how to use the Ombudsperson system and trusts it. Perhaps have the Ombudsperson (or a representative) brief the WASH team once a year about the process, rights of reporters, and outcomes (in a general way, maintaining confidentiality). This reminds staff/volunteers that if peer intervention isn't enough or an issue is serious, there is a safe recourse.
- In line with an interview recommendation, consider establishing an *independent review panel* for sensitive cases that involve leadership, so people feel assured of fairness.
- Essentially, double-down on the Code of Conduct enforcement: not only react to complaints but actively cultivate an environment where respect is the norm.
- Recognize positive behavior too – for instance, if a team member consistently advocates for inclusion or diffuses a tense situation, acknowledge that in performance reviews or volunteer appreciation (this reinforces that "soft" skills and inclusive behavior are valued competencies).
- A respectful, inclusive culture not only benefits women and minorities but creates a healthier, more cohesive team for all.

ENHANCE FLEXIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN WASH FIELD OPERATIONS

- Address practical issues in the field that can hinder equal participation. This includes reviewing equipment and facilities: if certain gear (like the diesel pumps mentioned) is a barrier for some, look into alternatives (e.g., modern pumps with push-button start) or ensure that team composition accounts for a mix of strengths so tasks can be shared without stigma.

ENGAGE MEN AS ALLIES THROUGH DEDICATED INITIATIVES

Given the significance of male engagement noted in both literature and interviews, launch a specific initiative to involve men in championing gender equality.

- This could be something like a quarterly "Men for Equality" discussion group or workshop series within the WASH team (and open to others). Use formats that encourage reflection, similar to the "Barbershop" conversations pioneered by UN Women, which are structured, peer-led forums where men discuss gender equality, examine social norms around masculinity, and consider how they can become allies in challenging discrimination and promoting inclusion.
- Similar informal roundtable formats could also be adopted, adapted to the Red Cross context—for example, small-group discussions during team retreats or training days, where staff and volunteers openly share experiences and perspectives on gender-related challenges in a relaxed, non-hierarchical setting.
- Provide a space for male staff and volunteers to discuss topics such as modern masculinity, how to handle witnessing harassment, or how to support female colleagues better. Bring in facilitators who are skilled in guiding these talks, possibly male gender experts who can challenge and inspire participants (the literature suggests having external gender advisers to foster safe learning environments for men). The aim is to help men see gender equality not as a threat or a zero-sum game, but as something that benefits the whole team and requires their active participation.
- Encourage the men who are already setting a good example – like those younger ones who call out bad jokes – to share their perspective and tips with peers.
- Additionally, highlight positive stories: for example, if a male team leader mentored a female volunteer who then achieved something great, share that story to illustrate how allyship makes the team stronger.
- By normalizing men's role in promoting equality, the team can erode any remaining "bro culture" pockets and replace them with a culture of mutual respect and partnership. This directly tackles the subtle biases and power dynamics the literature warned about.

ALLOCATE RESOURCES AND BUDGET FOR GENDER EQUALITY EFFORTS

- Advocate within AutRC (and plan within the WASH budget if applicable) for dedicated funding to implement these recommendations.

- This could mean a modest annual budget line for "Gender and Inclusion in WASH" that covers things like training costs (e.g., hiring external facilitators, materials), childcare reimbursements for volunteers as mentioned, network events for women in WASH, and possibly investing in equipment upgrades to more user-friendly models.
- It might also fund periodic gender audits or surveys to evaluate progress. Having a budget affirms that this is not just rhetoric – it allows actions to happen.
- The literature on gender policy highlighted that without proper funding, initiatives risk not being sustained.
- An interviewee also noted that in the absence of dedicated internal financing, gender-related activities are often delayed or only implemented when external donor funding becomes available. For instance, if the WASH team is planning its yearly training schedule, it should include a budgeted PGI training session.
- Similarly, if there is a national simulation exercise, resources should be allocated to ensure diverse participation—such as subsidizing travel for volunteer mothers.
- AutRC could also consider applying for internal "innovation" grants or small external grants specifically aimed at gender equality, as donors often provide funding for capacity-building in this area.
- In summary, aligning funding with mission priorities is essential to turning these recommendations into sustained action.

IMPROVE MONITORING AND TRANSPARENCY OF GENDER METRICS

- Establish a simple monitoring framework to track gender-related data and progress in the WASH team.
- This could include maintaining and annually reviewing anonymized records on the gender composition of the volunteer and staff roster, the distribution of leadership roles, participation in key trainings (e.g., PGI modules), and general indicators of inclusion.
- With regard to incidents of harassment or discrimination, the framework should not require detailed case-level information but could include aggregated, anonymized data shared at the departmental level—such as the number of cases reported to the ombudsperson or line management, their general nature (if available), and whether they were addressed. This would help senior leadership understand trends and take action,

- while respecting confidentiality. The goal is to increase transparency and accountability without compromising the privacy of individuals or the sensitivity of ongoing cases, especially in smaller teams like WASH where full anonymity might be difficult to preserve.
- Also track outcomes: e.g., number of deployments with at least one woman, or community feedback related to team gender composition if available.
- Use these data to identify trends – are we seeing improvement year over year? Where are we falling short?
- Share a summary of these findings internally (transparency can build trust – for instance, if the gender pay gap is formally checked and found to be nil or addressed, say so, instead of leaving it a mystery).
- In addition, implement feedback mechanisms: perhaps an anonymous survey for WASH team members annually that asks about the inclusiveness of the team, experiences of bias, and suggestions. This qualitative input, as literature suggests, will help catch issues that numbers alone miss.
- Monitoring isn't just for its own sake – use the insights to celebrate successes (e.g., "we met our target of 30% women on the roster!") and to course-correct where needed (if, say, women still feel uncomfortable in certain scenarios, dig into why and address it).
- By institutionalizing monitoring, the team ensures that gender equality remains a visible priority, and that progress (or lack thereof) is acknowledged.

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Current IFRC policy documents addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in sanitation contexts primarily focus on physical safety risks.

- While this focus is critical, there is a need to broaden the scope of analysis and intervention to include additional, often overlooked, forms of GBV.
- These include economic violence (e.g., restricted access to or unaffordability of menstrual hygiene products), digital violence (e.g., online harassment or sexual coercion related to the use of digital platforms), and political violence (e.g., systematic exclusion of women and marginalized genders from decision-making processes or suppression of their voices in public forums).
- These forms of GBV are not only relevant to the broader domestic social environments in which IFRC operates but also intersect directly with the organization's mission to protect vulnerable populations and promote inclusive humanitarian responses.

- Moreover, they have tangible implications for program design and implementation, especially in the areas of WASH, community engagement, and protection.
- Addressing them through targeted policy guidance and situational analyses would enhance the organization's capacity to deliver more holistic and context-sensitive support.
- Therefore, it is recommended that future IFRC policy documents integrate these dimensions of GBV to ensure alignment with the evolving dynamics of vulnerability and risk.

DEVELOPING SPECIFIC APPROACHES FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

While LGBTQ+ individuals are mentioned in general terms, the documents lack concrete strategies tailored to their specific needs.

- Guidance documents should be developed to address the discrimination, access barriers, and protection needs experienced by LGBTQ+ people.
- Gender identity and gender expression diversity must be reflected in policy implementation.
- Accordingly, training programs, infrastructure planning, and communication strategies should be revised to ensure inclusion.

Each of these recommendations is interlinked. For instance, recruiting more women is bolstered by having a supportive culture and flexible options; training and male engagement go hand in hand to shift culture; leadership development for women is reinforced by mentorship and allies; and all efforts need monitoring and resources to sustain them. By implementing these recommendations, the Austrian Red Cross WASH team can create a virtuous cycle – where greater gender balance and inclusion improve team performance and morale, which in turn attract and retain even more diverse talent.

Ultimately, achieving gender equality is not a one-time project but an ongoing commitment. These recommendations lay out concrete steps for the near to medium term. The team should review and update them regularly, keeping what works and adapting what doesn’t. With continued dedication, the AutRC WASH team can move from awareness to action, ensuring that every member, regardless of gender, has equal opportunity to contribute, grow, and lead – to the benefit of the team’s humanitarian mission and the communities it serves.

Further Questions and Follow-Up Areas

While this report highlights key patterns and challenges related to gender equality in the Austrian Red Cross WASH team, several important areas remain underexplored and warrant further investigation:

REGIONAL BRANCH DYNAMICS AND GENDER EQUALITY PRACTICES

Gender equality experiences appear to vary significantly between Vienna HQ and regional branches. To better understand and address these differences, it is recommended to examine:

- How do regional branches interpret and implement national gender policies?
- Are there gaps in training, support, or accountability in decentralized locations?
- Could pilot assessments in select branches help develop tailored strategies?

INTERSECTIONALITY AND OVERLAPPING IDENTITIES

This report primarily focuses on gender, but intersecting identities—such as ethnicity, disability, and age—also shape inclusion. Future inquiries could include:

- How do women with migrant backgrounds, disabilities, or caregiving responsibilities experience Red Cross volunteerism or employment?
- What additional support is needed to ensure inclusive participation across these intersecting identities?

CULTURAL SHIFTS AND MALE ENGAGEMENT OVER TIME

The engagement of men and boys in gender equality remains limited. Longitudinal research could be investigated:

What strategies are most effective for shifting attitudes among male staff and volunteers?

How can cultural change be measured or tracked in operational teams?

A MORE INCLUSIVE APPROACH REGARDING DISCRIMINATED MINORITIES

While this report has primarily focused on the experiences of women within the WASH team, future research should also examine the inclusion and protection of LGBTQIA+ individuals - both among Austrian Red Cross staff and volunteers, and in the communities served by AutRC programs.

What is the level of acceptance of LGBTQ+ within the team?

Which is the level of protection of the minority?

How does AutRC address the needs of LGBTQIA+ beneficiaries in program design and delivery, especially in contexts where these individuals may face heightened risks?

Conclusion

This report brings together insights from policy analysis, literature review, and interviews to assess the current state of gender equality in the Austrian Red Cross WASH team. While policies and commitments to gender equality exist, implementation gaps remain—particularly in training, leadership representation, and accountability mechanisms. Interviews revealed both a willingness to improve and areas of concern, such as male-dominated leadership, limited awareness of policies, and cultural barriers.

When aligned, the three sources show a shared recognition of the importance of gender equality and highlight opportunities to build a more inclusive and balanced team. Concrete recommendations have been proposed to close the gap between policy and practice. These include clearer action plans, improved recruitment strategies, leadership development for women, enhanced training, and stronger monitoring systems.

Moving forward, sustained effort, leadership engagement, and inclusive practices are essential to ensure gender equality is not just an aspiration, but a lived reality within the WASH team and beyond.

ANNEX 1. GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACEE. LITERATURE REVIEW

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

This paper is framed in the project with The Austrian Red Cross (AutRC), a member of the IFRC, operates under the federation's guiding principles while adapting its initiatives to meet both domestic and international needs. Beyond its work within Austria, the AutRC is a prominent player in international humanitarian efforts, particularly through its WASH activities.

The project focuses on the division of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sectors, referred to as the "WASH bubble," which includes a team of approximately 100 individuals, consisting of both staff members and volunteers. This team is tasked with delivering essential water, sanitation, and hygiene services during crises, aiming to prevent disease outbreaks and improve overall well-being in affected communities.

The purpose of the project is to review the application of gender equality principles in WASH programs, particularly in the context of policies, training, staff composition, monitoring, and evaluation systems. By incorporating these principles in the design, implementation, and evaluation of WASH programming, the Austrian Red Cross strives to ensure that WASH responses are gender responsive.

This document aims to conduct a targeted review of academic and policy literature on gender equality within organizational contexts, with a specific focus on entities engaged in human development and humanitarian aid. The insights will serve to guide the future collection of primary data. Moreover, the literature used is composed of recent academic papers which settle the scope of the problem and several reports from intragovernmental organizations such as OECD and UN that offer a guide of good practices that can be replied by Red Cross.

Gender Equality in Workplace

Gender is a social construct reproduced by social institutions enabling traditional masculinity. Stereotypes and traditional perceptions of women hinder their opportunities in the workforce, creating tensions among colleagues who may struggle to adjust to the evolving roles of women within organizations (Michailidis et al., 2012). Therefore, it can be stated that the workplace can reproduce inequality, enhancing women discrimination.

Gender equality refers to equal opportunities regardless of gender, meanwhile gender equity relates to people having access to the rights, resources, services and opportunities according to their specific needs, which adopts a more comprehensive framework (IASC, 2017). Organizations should take into account the divergences of experiences ensuring delivering services that will not enhance disparities.

It can be stated that organizational culture is inherently shaped by gender, which has historically been constructed around male norms. Thereby reinforcing systemic privileges that often remain unexamined. These privileges have been internalized and institutionalized within workplace structures, operating under the pervasive influence of patriarchy. Masculine traits have been established as the normative standard, shaping professional expectations for both men and women (Tripathi, 2022).

In contrast, traditionally associated with femininity are frequently perceived as deficiencies, hence limiting women's opportunities for career advancement and influencing their professional relationships. Recent investigation suggested that women have contested cultural norms contributing to reshape organizational dynamics (Tripathi, 2022). However, the extent of their influence remains ambiguous, particularly given the continued dominance of men in leadership positions, which may constrain the transformative potential of these changes.

Throughout this section, the concept of power has been implicitly referenced, however, it will now be examined. While employees can readily identify explicit forms of power, more deeply embedded power dynamics within the social structures of an organization often remain imperceptible. These subtle forms of power are so ingrained that they become difficult to recognize, let alone challenge (Champion of the Change, 2024).

Power within organizations can be categorized into formal and informal dimensions. Formal power refers to the authority conferred by a specific position within the organizational hierarchy, whereas informal power encompasses all other forms of influence that operate independently of official roles. Informal power is particularly significant in shaping workplace culture, as it often compels women to modify their behavior and attitudes to align with dominant norms associated with white male.

Any challenge to these established norms is frequently met with resistance or punitive measures. Moreover, informal power is more complex to identify, acquire, and exercise, and it is predominantly controlled by men (Champion of the Change, 2024).

Workplace composition further reflects systemic disparities, following what has been termed the 50:30:10 rule where women constitute 50% of entry-level positions, 30% of middle management, and only 10% of senior leadership roles (Stocking and Armstrong, 2019). Common cultural issues within the workplace include gender inequality, direct discrimination, lack of support from managers and colleagues, workplace bullying, the undervaluation of women's contributions, and the expectation that women must consistently overperform to validate their presence. (Stocking and Armstrong, 2019).

According to the Federal Chancellery of Austria in the country, women represent 12.2% of management positions in the top 200 companies in 2024, while they account for 26.8% of board members, showing a slight improvement compared to previous data. The Act on Equality between Women and Men in Supervisory Boards (GFMA-G), adopted in June 2017, introduced measures to increase the representation of women in leadership positions. This law mandates that the supervisory boards of publicly traded companies and private enterprises with more than 1,000 employees must consist of at least 30% women or men, depending on the gender majority, otherwise, agreements made by non-compliant boards will be declared null. The impact of this quota has been significantly positive, increasing women's participation from 22.4% in 2018 to 36.5% in 2024, as reported in the Frauen Management.Report 2024 (Federal Chancellery of Austria, 2025).

Women and Leadership

Enhancing women's participation in leadership positions is essential for achieving true gender parity. To attain this goal, it is crucial to identify the harmful and limiting social or cultural norms, as well as gender attitudes, that perpetuate inequality within teams.

Women have become more active in the labor market, increasingly entering spaces traditionally dominated by men which is a positive development. However, this increased participation has not necessarily translated into greater opportunities for career advancement. Women often need to work twice as hard as their male colleagues to receive equivalent recognition. This disparity cannot be attributed to a lack of education but rather to the phenomenon known as the "glass ceiling" (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

Currently, women face second-generation bias, refers to subtle, often unintentional systemic conditions within workplace structures and norms that disadvantage women. It does not require deliberate intent or result in immediate, individualized harm. Instead, it fosters an environment similar to an invisible pervasive influence that hinders women's ability to succeed or advance (Ibarra et al., 2013).

As a result, successful women are often seen as exceptions, whereas those who face professional setbacks are blamed for a perceived lack of commitment rather than the systemic barriers that hinder their progress (Idem). This phenomenon is particularly difficult to identify, shifting responsibility onto women rather than addressing the structural inequalities designed to limit their success.

Furthermore, a significant disparity exists in promotion criteria, as women are generally promoted based on their experience, whereas men are often advanced based on their perceived potential. This discrepancy reduces the time men must invest in career progression, creating a sense of unfairness among women and fostering disillusionment regarding their prospects for advancement. Moreover, the lack of effective communication in professional settings further hinders women's career progression. Research conducted by Stocking & Armstrong, indicates that men are less likely to acknowledge or engage with women's contributions in discussions, which diminishes women's perceived competence and, in turn, reduces their chances of being entrusted with high-profile assignments. Additionally, communication barriers negatively affect performance evaluations, as women are more likely to receive unfavorable assessments compared to their male counterparts (Stocking & Armstrong, 2019).

Motherhood is a factor that restricts women's access to management positions. The lack of work-life balance policies exacerbates this issue, as women continue to bear the primary responsibility for caregiving, effectively working a "double shift" upon entering the formal workforce (Alcañiz, 2017). The sexual division of labor can lead to burnout, discouraging women from assuming additional workplace responsibilities, ultimately affecting their long-term career prospects (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

Another significant barrier is limited access to both internal and external networks, recognition, opportunities, and resources. Women often attend networking events less frequently due to family obligations or restrictive stereotypes imposed by leadership, thereby missing potential opportunities (Michailidis et al., 2012). Women are often judged more harshly than men and must carefully manage their expressions of femininity, leading them to overinvest in how they are perceived rather than focusing solely on their professional goals (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Despite the lack of public confidence in women's leadership abilities, empirical evidence shows that having women in leadership positions benefits organizations by enhancing firm value, innovation, risk management, and social responsibility (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Female leaders tend to challenge hierarchical structures, adopt strategic approaches, and exercise caution, which contributes to a positive impact on organizational behavior. This influence is reflected in areas such as people’s development, role modelling, inspiration, setting expectations and rewards, and participative decision-making.

Gender Equality in Organizations based on Volunteering

The degree of gender equality within a country significantly influences individuals' willingness to engage in public life, including volunteering in private organizations. This phenomenon is closely linked to women's capacity to challenge broader societal norms. Volunteering itself requires a substantial investment of time and energy, and one of the most common barriers to participation, particularly for women, is the burden of pre-existing work obligations and caregiving responsibilities, such as childcare. Age is another important determinant, intersecting with variables like family background, education level, gender, and disability.

Volunteer organizations often mirror the gender segregation observed in the formal workforce, with men and women tending to take on different tasks (Borromeo, 2021). This division of roles may stem from personal choices influenced by prevailing social norms. However, when women pursue the same trajectories as men, they frequently encounter unwelcoming work environments or are compelled to withdraw, reflecting the persistence of broader societal expectations.

Evidence recollected by Söderhielm shows that perceptions of gender equality among volunteers differ between genders. Men are more likely to perceive high levels of gender equality among volunteers, possibly indicating a gap in communication about internal workplace dynamics. In contrast, women often feel that the contributions of their male colleagues are more highly valued. The archetype of the "ideal volunteer" continues to be shaped by male-centric norms, envisioning a figure who is fully committed, free from caregiving responsibilities, and physically strong. These attributes sustain an environment in which male bonding may include misogynistic jokes or behaviour, further marginalizing women (Söderhielm, 2014).

Despite their lower representation in leadership roles, many women engage in volunteering to acquire and develop professional skills such as management and decision-making, which are often less accessible in the formal job market. Even in countries with higher levels of gender equality, women remain underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated volunteer organizations (Wemlinger & Berlan, 2015).

At a personal level, women often perceive volunteering as a way to redefine their identities, gain personal fulfilment, and broaden their social networks. However, time constraints continue to disproportionately affect women, particularly those employed in formal sectors who are less likely to receive institutional support for volunteering.

Parents, especially single mothers of young children, are more inclined to participate in volunteer activities tied to their children's schools (Southby & South, 2016). As a result, international volunteering opportunities, such as those offered by the Red Cross, may be less accessible to women during their children's school years.

Gender Equality and WASH

Training on gender equality in the context of delivering humanitarian aid within the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector is essential to ensuring a non-harmful approach to local populations. In recent years, gender-responsive policies in WASH have gained increased significance due to growing awareness of the gendered impact of emergency situations (Chatham House, 2023). Research highlights the need to enhance training programs that improve volunteers' and staff members' understanding of gender dynamics. These programs should include discussions on how the principle of impartiality can support gender-responsive practices assuming that conflicts do not affect equally to the members of a community addressing gender discrepancies in the access and delivery of the aid (idem).

Intersectionality, a theory developed by Black scholars and widely employed by women from the Global South, provides an inclusive framework for understanding how overlapping axes of identity such as race or ethnicity, gender, and class which interact to reinforce marginalization and oppression within power structures. This perspective is essential for challenging hegemonic ideas (Al-Faham et al., 2019). It is essential knowledge for international organizations working with communities of the global south, otherwise they would fail to meet the needs of the local population. Moreover, as it mentioned different standards apply to men and women to evaluate their job, a disparity that is further exacerbated when race and ethnicity intersect with gender bias with could discourage native women to volunteer Ibarra et al., 2013).

Discrimination is embedded within institutional structures, making it difficult to identify, even for those directly affected. Women who challenge traditional gender roles frequently encounter heightened discrimination in both professional and volunteer settings. Gender and hierarchical position influence the likelihood and intensity of discrimination. Tasks within volunteer organizations are often assigned based on gendered perceptions of masculinity and femininity, reinforcing societal constructs of gender roles. Certain positions remain exclusively occupied by men (Söderhielm, 2014). Therefore, volunteer work is divided. Women volunteer in groups focused on social and health services, notably unpaid care work outside the home, whereas males volunteer in political, economic, and scientific domains.

Data indicates that peacebuilding missions and sectors requiring technical expertise continue to be male dominated (Borromeo, 2021). The WASH sector aligns with this trend, with women remaining underrepresented. This underrepresentation reinforces the stereotype that women lack the technical skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to such missions.

As a result, many women feel unwelcome or discouraged from participating in the sector, ultimately missing valuable volunteering opportunities (Pillone & Lantage, 2025). To address this gap, organizations should actively promote technical training opportunities for women and make these pathways more appealing and accessible.

A successful initiative that could be adapted in Austria is a collaborative mentorship program in Mexico, which involved partnerships between universities, the technology sector, and recruitment agencies. This program established a network of women in technical fields, enhancing both their visibility and support systems (United Nations Volunteer, 2021). Drawing on this example, the WASH sector could implement similar strategies by offering mentorship programs, collaborating with technological schools and local universities, and creating a more inclusive and diverse pool of volunteers. Furthermore, the effectiveness of such programs could be increased by using inclusive and encouraging language in recruitment materials, showcasing clear opportunities through workshops, and addressing structural barriers such as lack of childcare particularly important for mentors.

Aiming Transformations in the Organizations

Despite a prevailing misconception that gender equality will naturally emerge over time, achieving gender equality within an institution requires holistic commitment, with coordinated efforts across various departments. These efforts must be recognized as a priority within the organization's operational framework to ensure meaningful and sustainable progress (OECD, 2022). Furthermore, meaningful change requires a comprehensive understanding of power dynamics. Policies should address the root causes of inequality rather than merely alleviating its symptoms (Champion of Change, 2024).

Transforming an organization is not possible without evaluating the impact of current policies; therefore, the first step is establishing clear and feasible targets, accompanied by appropriate metrics to ensure accountability. In most cases, these measures are part of a broader framework imposed by the organization's international branch, which seeks to comply with national or supranational gender equality regulations, such as those of the European Union. Establishing a culture of accountability within the institution has been proven to be an effective strategy for promoting women's leadership and reducing gender inequality (OECD, 2020). Moreover, the use of inclusive language in communications and application processes can encourage more women to apply for positions (OECD, 2020).

Catalyst (2025), a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering inclusive workplaces for women in diverse sectors from high-tech to food companies, has identified key trends for advancing gender equality that could be applied in any organizations.

Their findings emphasize that all divisions within an organization must embrace dynamic change to ensure success. Establishing a strategic framework and aligning policies toward a common goal, while ensuring accountability for potential shortcomings, are essential components of this process.

Affirmative action policies can play a pivotal role in reversing ingrained biases, instilling a mindset that recognizes women's capabilities, and ultimately empowering them to pursue leadership roles which will foster cultural shift in the workplace (O'Brien et al., 2024). Research identifies several critical strategies for promoting long-term cultural transformation. First, senior leadership must explicitly acknowledge gender inequality and commit to driving structural change, informed by the lived experiences of women within the organization. Second, policies aimed at fostering inclusion must be rigorously implemented, evaluated, and continuously improved. Third, fostering interpersonal trust and peer support networks is vital to sustaining inclusive environments. Finally, while gender inequality is primarily structural, individual behaviors and biases must also be addressed through targeted interventions and self-reflection (Stocking & Armstrong, 2019).

Furthermore, there are various tools that can be implemented, such as a dedicated help desk where employees can seek guidance on gender equality issues and clarify any uncertainties that may arise. If necessary, this help desk can also facilitate referrals to external professionals for specialized support (OECD, 2022). Potential organizational solutions include forming inclusive committees dedicated to gender equality, conducting periodic anonymous workplace surveys, implementing programs that highlight the achievements of female leaders, and fostering leadership aspirations early in women's careers (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).Additionally, long-term mentoring programs are crucial for women, as they provide guidance from senior female leaders and facilitate professional networking (O'Brien et al., 2024).

Educating employees on gender equality is crucial, as it mentioned before, awareness is a fundamental step toward meaningful change. In this regard, recognizing and rewarding individuals who actively integrate gender equality into their professional responsibilities can be an effective strategy. For instance, incorporating specific gender-related objectives into performance evaluations can incentivize employees to adopt inclusive practices. Furthermore, some organizations have embedded gender equality commitments into their internal promotion criteria, requiring employees to demonstrate their engagement with gender-related goals as a prerequisite for career advancement (OECD, 2022).

However, key limitations are the difficulty of accessing such programs due to the underrepresentation of women in high-level positions and the difficulty of establishing personal connections which is essential to the effectiveness of the initiative (O'Brien et al., 2024).

Although, numerous gender equality initiatives have been implemented across the humanitarian sector, many of these efforts have disproportionately focused on women, encouraging them to build skills to "overcome" structural barriers.

This approach has been extensively critiqued for placing the burden on women to adapt, rather than addressing the institutional and cultural practices that sustain inequality (O'Brien et al., 2024). Instead, the objective of such policies should be to establish a new framework that challenges the masculine privilege embedded within organizations. Senior leaders must spearhead this transformation by creating mechanisms of accountability (O'Brien et al., 2024). A crucial aspect of fostering change is making women visible within organizations, reinforcing their presence through an inclusive culture that ensures they feel valued and respected in the workplace (idem).

Additionally, in previous sections motherhood has been identified as main barrier to advance in the organization while organizations alone cannot entirely resolve this issue, they can implement solutions to facilitate work-life balance, such as assistance programs and flexible work hours after parental leave, to mitigate indirect discrimination against women (O'Brien et al., 2024). Nevertheless, their impact remains limited due to prevailing masculine norms and gaps in existing policies. To achieve meaningful change in women's career prospects, it is essential to implement more comprehensive policies. A guiding framework for this transformation should be Nancy Fraser's Universal Caregiver model, which seeks to establish symmetry between paid employment and caregiving responsibilities by deconstructing the gendered division of labor. The objective should be to encourage men to adopt a more active and responsible role in caregiving, aligning their participation with the current contributions of women (Doucet & McKay, 2020). Workplace should take an active role supporting and advancing national policies.

Some of the possible strategies to enhance gender equality in the workplace, which can also be applied in a gender-responsive evaluation, include the use of inclusive language, integrating gender equality into selection criteria, ensuring gender parity in team composition, and establishing contractual obligations that require employees to apply a gender perspective in their daily responsibilities within the organization (EIGE, 2023).

Transformations in Multilevel Organizations

Within federated organizations, promoting gender equality is a complex challenge. These networks are not monolithic; different branches may adopt diverse approaches to gender issues while adhering to shared core values. Ensuring consistency across such structures requires effective communication and the establishment of multiple coordination mechanisms under a unified identity. However, the large scale and complexity of these organizations present structural challenges that necessitate long-term strategies and strong commitments from all branches (La Piana, 2016).

At the headquarters level, fostering gender equality should involve the creation of a dedicated gender equality team with adequate financial resources to drive organizational change. This team must work across departments and build multilateral partnerships.

Appointing gender advisers with strong technical expertise, open-mindedness, courage, innovation, pragmatism, and flexibility is critical to ensuring effective implementation (OECD, 2022).

At the regional level, gender equality responsibilities are often distributed across staff members, promoting a shared sense of accountability. Nonetheless, it is essential that each regional branch designate a specific individual responsible for gender-related matters to ensure consistent attention. While general staff commitment is important, it cannot replace the specialized knowledge and skills of a trained gender adviser. Furthermore, expecting advisers to manage gender-related tasks alongside their primary responsibilities undermines their effectiveness. Therefore, sufficient resource allocation and clear role definitions are crucial to achieving gender equality objectives (OECD, 2022).

Engaging Men and Boys

This section explores the necessity of engaging men and boys in transforming workplace dynamics, which are deeply influenced by stereotypes and patriarchal structures. As has been stated, the workplace serves as a primary arena for shaping and reinforcing societal notions of masculinity. It is essential to explore this dimension of the problem due to the gendered hierarchy remaining in the workplace cannot be challenged if all members of the community do not believe in the importance of revising their attitudes.

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, emphasized the importance of engaging men and boys in the pursuit of gender equality. The field of “Men for Gender Equality" (hereafter MFGE) operates across various domains, including humanitarian aid. A notable global initiative is the MenEngage Alliance (UN Women, 2021). Nearly thirty years after the conference, however, men’s engagement efforts remain primarily micro-level in design, with limited impact on structural inequalities. As a result, substantial changes in personal relationships and societal dynamics remain elusive.

Programs and policies in this field tend to focus on challenging individual attitudes and promoting self-reflection, with minimal emphasis on fostering communal or systemic change. This approach has largely neglected the structural dimensions of inequality, male privilege, and the social reproduction of these dynamics. There is a pressing need for initiatives that address patriarchy as the root cause of inequality, rather than merely treating its symptoms (International Center for Research on Women & Cartier Philanthropy, 2018). While a "soft" approach may be useful as an initial step, it is unlikely to result in substantial, long-term change. To address this, organizations must prioritize transformative over sensitization-based strategies. This involves embracing an intersectional perspective that accounts for the diversity of privileges and power structures while explicitly recognizing and building upon women’s contributions to gender equality (International Center for Research on Women & Cartier Philanthropy, 2018).

Men’s involvement is critical to driving change, as they both live within and perpetuate the structures of inequality that oppress not only women but also themselves. Gender-transformative approaches, which challenge toxic masculinity and promote positive redefinitions of manhood, have proven to be the most effective strategies. However, existing efforts often fail to adequately acknowledge women’s voices and the foundational work they have already undertaken (International Center for Research on Women & Cartier Philanthropy, 2018).

Although some progress has been observed, these changes have not been sufficient. A fundamental shift in mentality cannot be achieved solely through gender policies; rather, it requires targeted training programs for men to encourage a critical reassessment of their attitudes and behaviors. Engaging men in this process is essential to fostering a more inclusive and equitable professional environment.

Training on Gender Equality

Integral to the effort of fostering cultural change within organizations is the implementation of comprehensive gender sensitivity training. Such initiatives should aim to increase awareness of broader systemic issues. Training should be extended to all employees with special mention senior staff and human resource managers, in order to promote a more inclusive and equitable workplace environment.

Evidence recollected by UN suggests that gender equality training yields significant benefits at an individual level, fostering shifts in attitudes and practices. Participants often report increased confidence in discussing masculinities, sexuality, and sexual diversity, as well as improved capacity to design gender-transformative projects. Additionally, training enhances skills and self-assurance in working alongside women and supporting them throughout professional processes. This approach contributes to the emergence of "change agents", individuals committed to addressing the root causes of gender inequality (UN Women, 2016).

To maximize the effectiveness of training, it should be designed as a practical tool that directly benefits participants. Therefore, trainees should be actively consulted on the topics they find most relevant, ensuring that programs address existing barriers and do not unintentionally reinforce unequal power dynamics (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021).

For gender equality training to be effective, it must be delivered in multiple formats to accommodate diverse learning needs. However, research indicates that in-person training yields higher participation rates, particularly when incorporating real-life experiences. To ensure comprehensive coverage of key topics, supplementary materials should be provided, addressing areas such as leadership, various forms of discrimination, management strategies, and the integration of gender equality into daily professional practices.

Particular emphasis should be placed on engaging men by fostering safe learning environments, facilitated by external gender advisers who are experts in gender sensitivity. These advisers can guide critical reflection on gender dynamics, tailoring discussions to participants' existing knowledge levels and ensuring that the environment encourages open dialogue on masculinity without fear of negative repercussions. A notable example of this approach is the Barbershop Talks for Men, an annual peer-led vent where men engage in discussions about masculinity and strategies for advancing gender equality (OECD, 2022).

Training sessions should be held multiple times throughout the year, with each session complementing the others to provide cohesive learning experience. It is essential to have adequate funding. Fundamental gender equality principles should also be included as part of mandatory onboarding training for new employees, thereby reinforcing organizational gender policies (UN Women, 2016).

Despite these benefits, humanitarian gender experts have raised concerns regarding the limitations of many existing training programs. Most courses are criticized for being overly general, lacking practical guidance for volunteers, and failing to address the specific challenges they may encounter in different cultural contexts. Additionally, while some training programs mention intersectionality, they often do so in a limited manner, primarily focusing on gender, age, or general diversity policies while neglecting other protected characteristics, such as ethnicity. The same study underscores the necessity of making gender training mandatory for technical staff (Women's Refugee Commission, 2021).

Another common critique of current training initiatives is the lack of clear guidance on how to operationalize gender equality principles in practice. While training programs have demonstrated a generally positive impact, they are often insufficient at the operational level. That should address the lack of motivation among workers to attend gender-sensitive training. To address this gap, "on-the-job" training is recommended to facilitate ongoing discussions and real-time problem-solving in humanitarian settings by demonstrating what and how address gender inequalities, though this document lacks specific examples (Gupta et al., 2023).

Monitoring Gender Equality

Following implementation of policies, it is essential to establish robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation in order to assess the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives. It is essential to acknowledge that changes in gender relations are non-linear and unpredictable, highlighting that progress should be understood as a long-term, evolving process beyond project timelines (OECD, 2022).

Evaluations should determine whether programs address structural factors underlying gender inequality or merely focus on mitigating its consequences.

Project impacts should still be defined and assessed using flexible, learning-oriented evaluation frameworks (OECD, 2022). Moreover, the implementation and monitoring of gender policies should occur simultaneously, with predefined reporting cycles (annually or biannually) to assess progress and identify areas for modification. Continuous evaluation allows adjustments to minor issues, ensuring the success of the initiative (EIGE, 2024).

A gender-responsive evaluation framework offers a comprehensive and integrative approach by examining how all policies, programs, and institutional activities regardless of whether they are explicitly gender-focused contribute to or hinder progress toward gender equality. This framework evaluates both intended and unintended outcomes, as well as the extent to which an organization systematically pursues gender mainstreaming across its operations. Such evaluations assess changes in organizational values, power dynamics, workplace culture, and access to opportunities. In addition, they can identify where, when, and how the gender perspective may have been diluted, overlooked, or lost during the various stages of the policy and programmatic cycle. This diagnostic capacity distinguishes gender-responsive evaluation from traditional gender evaluation, which tends to focus exclusively on the performance of specific gender equality policies (EIGE, 2023).

A crucial aspect of gender-responsive evaluation is the financial commitment allocated to gender-related initiatives, as budgetary allocations serve as an indicator of the organization's prioritization of gender equality. While developing gender-related policies is essential, without adequate funding for their evaluation, these policies risk being ineffective. If an evaluation fails to produce precise and credible data, it may undermine the credibility of gender policies, particularly in the context of the growing backlash against gender equality in Europe (EIGE, 2023).

A useful example of a performance management system is Austria's strategic planning and evaluation framework. This approach integrates ex-ante strategic planning with ex-post internal evaluations. In this model, ministries define one to five medium-term goals, each with corresponding indicators linked to budget allocations. This system could be adapted by organizations such as the Red Cross Austria to ensure that gender equality objectives are consistently pursued (OECD, 2023).

Another significant technique in addressing gender inequality is the gender audit, which assists organizations in identifying concealed gender patterns of inequality across various dimensions, including composition, structures, processes, and organizational culture. The audit should be done before launching a policy change. This method can be employed to establish a baseline for comparison in subsequent evaluations, thereby facilitating the identification of gender gaps that can be addressed as challenges. The audit may be conducted by either external advisors or internal personnel, depending on the objectives and available resources. It is crucial to adopt a participatory approach and to analyze both the benefits and risks for the company if the audit reveals that the organization's commitment to gender equality does not align with its public statements. Notably, the success of the audit is contingent upon the commitment of senior management (EIGE, 2019).

Newer evaluation techniques are emerging to support transformative change. Some of these methodologies include outcome mapping, which focuses on tracking initial contributions to long-term change; outcome harvesting, which collects evidence of results and works backward to identify contributing factors; and participatory visual storytelling, which engages participants in sharing their experiences through video or voice recordings. These innovative techniques provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of gender policies and allow for more inclusive evaluation processes (OECD, 2022). Outcome mapping was used by UN women in order to assess how their strategic partnership contributed to GEWE (global accountability framework on gender equality) results, the evaluation technique allowed the organization to develop a framework in order to identify the key changes along with continuum of expected results in the short, medium and long term (UN Women, 2020). Additionally, experts recommend conducting longitudinal studies to track changes in attitudes and behaviors over extended periods.

After selecting the ideal framework or technic to evaluate the project indicators should be selected. OECD suggests evaluating women's empowerment within organizations through various dimensions, including resource allocation, strategic planning, policies, organizational culture, human resources management, leadership, accountability, and performance monitoring (OECD, 2022).

A comprehensive set of indicators should include both quantitative and qualitative measures, analyzing not only sex-disaggregated data but also the lived experiences of male and female employees otherwise indicators could fail to capture deeper insights. Key evaluation criteria should encompass sustainability, impact, equity, empowerment, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence (EIGE, 2023).

Additionally, contextual indicators should be developed to assess shifts in power dynamics and attitudes. Application indicators can help identify disparities between the reference group (women) and the control population. Process indicators, which serve as a measure of management efficiency, should consider all actors and procedures involved in policy design and implementation, including budget allocations, the time gap between policy design and execution, and the effectiveness of policy content. Additionally, result indicators should evaluate the extent to which policies are utilized by employees, linking policy objectives to tangible outcomes and identifying patterns in women’s participation (Gender Monitoring, 2025).

Other indicators that can be used in the workplace to realize gender equality is the segregation and quality of work, meaning to know the quantity of women and men working in one division and their responsibilities, the duration of their working life in the company or the prospect of career advancement that implies asking the employers their perception on the topic and asking if they think that in the case of downgrading they will be fired or not (EIGE, 2024).

An educational institution has developed a successful and replicable monitoring system for gender equality, guided by specific indicators that can be adopted by other organizations.

Progress in gender equality is assessed particularly in terms of women's leadership and the establishment of professional networks, both of which are recognized as key drivers for advancing women's careers. Additionally, fostering open dialogue on various dimensions of gender equality is considered a meaningful indicator of progress, even when it does not result in immediate policy change. Other significant indicators include the involvement of gender advisors in the formulation of general policies. In the recruitment processes, candidates are questioned about their attitudes towards gender equality, ensuring that new employers align with institutional values. Crucially, gender equality advisors also contribute to the design and implementation of performance evaluation systems. The institution measures success by mapping and replicating best practices. These systems incorporate gender sensitivity as a criterion for promotion, ensuring a more holistic, transparent, and equitable approach to career advancement (CEU, 2022).

Furthermore, evaluate gender equality in terms of motherhood, the principals indicators are the length of the maternity leave, meaning in this case how many months are in leave men and women, perception on reconciliation of work and family life, proportion of employed working part-time in the company (UN, 2022).

Different indicators that can be used to track equality in terms of networking, one is the percentage of women participants in workshops, training events, seminars, conferences, and other events. The percentage of women contributing to institutional decision making and percentage of public sector staff who receive gender-sensitivity training could give an insight of the current situation of the institution (World Bank, 2021).

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Common pitfalls to avoid include vague monitoring mechanisms, insufficient budget allocations, and an overemphasis on input indicators rather than outcome indicators (OECD, 2023). Additionally, without proper communication policies risk remaining ineffective due to a lack of awareness among staff so it can be inferred that the lack of information is one of the principal barriers to success and cannot be ignored during evaluation (EIGE, 2024). The same report highlights the importance of identifying key success factors, recognizing challenges that hinder impact, and assessing missed opportunities. Thus, following the evaluation, gender experts should reflect on which measures should be maintained, which aspects of gender inequality were overlooked, and how intersectionality could be better integrated into future initiatives (EIGE, 2024).

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