

Sustainable Government and Administrative Action Through Gender Equality

An interview with Dr. Gabriele Kämper and Dr. Sarah Vespermann, Berlin Senate Department for Health, Care and Gender Equality

Gender equality is one of the key challenges for our society, and crucial for living in a fair and sustainable manner. In this written interview, Dr. Gabriele Kämper and Dr. Sarah Vespermann from the Berlin Senate Department for Health, Care and Gender Equality explain the approaches, concepts and measures employed by the Berlin administration to facilitate equal opportunities amongst male and female citizens and employees.

Which approaches and basic principles define gender equality in administrative action and in socio-political life?

Gender equality is one of the key challenges for our society, and crucial for living in a fair and sustainable manner. This includes women and men being afforded the same opportunities – in terms of participation and gender equality in all areas of their lives. In essence, the objective is to create equal opportunities and to promote them in areas with a high prevalence of deficits. Gender equality is anchored in the constitution – yet, it has still not become reality in all areas of life to this day.

The instruments of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting play a pivotal role in promoting equality. The obligatory implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Berlin administration is based on binding resolutions passed since 2002. The objective is to create equal opportunities and gender equality, and that also involves such modern administration measures. Gender budgeting is part of this strategy. It is based on the assumption that gender-neutral budgetary policy does not exist. In this context, gender budgeting aims to ensure that women and men have the same access to public budgetary resources.

How do you realise gender equality in practice – and specifically in your senate department, seeing that it also focuses on gender equality as a department.

Given that equality is anchored in our constitution and in the State Equality Act (LGG), one might assume that equal treatment as we understand it is part of any social action. However, every single day, we see that the reality is different. At a time when countless opponents to equality raise their voices, it is even more important to deliver a strong message for gender equality.

Administrations and their actions also contribute to the realisation of gender equality. This is why women's policy has been a separate senate department since 1989, firmly anchored in the Berlin Senate. The Women and Equality Department (currently the Senate Department for Health, Care and Gender Equality) is the department where the different aspects come together. Moreover, the gender policy is implemented in all senate departments and in the districts as a cross-sectional task. The Gender Equality Framework Pro-

gramme 'GPR'¹ – which the state government has committed to implement and update – has given this significant visibility. This commitment to the advancement of gender policy progress in Berlin reflects the desire to achieve greater gender equality and equality of opportunities, as well as the significance gender policy has for administrative action. The Gender Equality Framework Programme 'GPR' documents each administration's initiatives, bundles them and makes them visible.

Why do 'gender equality' and good, modern administrative action belong together?

These measures under the Gender Equality Framework Programme focus on both, administration staff and the reality of those people's lives who the administration addresses – female and male citizens. Since gender equality issues ultimately affect all citizens, this is unequivocally linked with good, modern administrative action.

In order to facilitate better guidance for the employees of the Berlin administration, the mission statement 'Equality in the State of Berlin' was conceived in 2014 as part of the Gender Equality Framework Programme. It serves as a framework for the equality-based arrangement of the technical tasks of all senate and district administrations in Berlin and their subordinated institutions. The mission statements thus provides guidance for equality-based decisions. Here, the objective is to stimulate public discussion and debate in the administrations of equality-related requirements.²

The Berlin administration is not alone in considering gender policy a cross-sectional responsibility. It is also a general concern. In the current Gender Equality Framework Programme (GPR III) includes the motto 'Gender Equality: Progressive Thinking', which looks at contemporary concepts and approaches. What are the key measures?

The motto 'Gender Equality: Progressive Thinking' stands for the approach of continuously re-thinking which challenges we are currently facing. This is also part of the reason why a Gender Equality Framework Programme has already been developed in the third legislative period. 'Gender-equitable living in an eventful city' is the central idea of GPR III. The gender policy objectives and measures formulated there all reflect this recurring theme. In structuring the Gender Equality Framework Programme, the Berlin administrations also face the challenge of looking at their respective areas of responsibility from a gender equality perspective – whether they are dealing with health or urban development.

GPR III includes a large number of measures that, together, cover a broad range. These deal with today's key challenges as much as those of the coming years. Focal areas of the key measures include objectives in relation to participation, digitisation, care, homelessness, integration of female refugees, anti-violence work, support for single parents.

Your office has identified 5 priority action areas in which a particular focus is placed on gender equality. What are the core topics? Why are these key issues?

In order to advance gender equality in Berlin, the current need for action must be visible. This is a crucial foundation for gender policy measures and developments. The Gender Equality Framework Programme comprises five action areas: education, occupation that provides an adequate livelihood, demographic change, social justice and integration. These constitute the challenges and focal areas of the gender policy in Berlin. Thus, they are key topics which – as a whole – relate to the concept of looking at the course of life.

¹For more information, visit: <https://www.berlin.de/sen/frauen/gleichstellung/>

²For more information, visit: <https://www.berlin.de/sen/frauen/gleichstellung/leitbild/>

The action areas are directly related to the individual measures of the administrations. You could say that the measures are positioned within the action areas.

In which areas has gender equality made good progress? What are the textbook cases? What do you think is left to do on the gender equality agenda?

In Berlin, gender policy has come a long way in some areas: For instance, Berlin is a pioneer for the right to return to full-time employment after a period of part-time work. In 1991, the Berlin State Equality Act (LGG) was the first state act to formulate a legal right to part-time employment, as well as the right to return to full-time employment. Moreover, the proportion of women in management positions is comparatively high in the public sector – both within the administration and with state companies. We have fought hard for the target group of single parents in recent years. In Berlin, single parents account for a particularly high proportion of families with children. This is why Berlin strongly supported the maintenance advance reform process in the interest of single parents and their children with Federal Council initiative. These are just some success examples in Berlin.

While gender policy has enjoyed successes in the past, Berlin continues to face a great and diverse range of challenges in becoming gender-equitable. To name just a few topics that remain on the agenda: ensuring that women and men have equal opportunity to participation at *all* levels, parity in politics, good education opportunities for everyone, facilitating real work-life balance – which includes care options –, supporting integration, ensuring life in the is free from violence and safe. This also involves an increased focus on target groups that should be strengthened today and in the future – for example, single parents and female refugees. We want to make further progress in these areas in the coming years.

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