

Men for Equality?
A Legislative Theatre Event at University of Salzburg
Policy Report
Hörsaal Erika Weinzierl, Salzburg, 8th May 2026



Fotos (c) Hina Bashir

Legislative Theatre is an innovative, creative, and participatory way of making policies. On May 8th, 2026, this Legislative Theatre event was held at the University of Salzburg. As part of the course “Men for Equality? Legislative Theatre” (999.640) students developed a performance that aims at making barriers to an effective involvement of men in gender equality work at University of Salzburg visible. The course is co-led by Prof. Zoe Lefkofridi (University of Salzburg), Joschka Köck and Linda Raule (Theatre of the Oppressed Vienna, TdU Wien¹)

After an introduction and a warm-up, the following play with nine scenes in total was shown:

1. The play begins with many men walking on stage and freezing regularly. Each time they stop walking, one of them articulates a statement (e.g. “Men provide for women”, “Men suffer in silence”, “Men are the backbone of society”) while other men become statues embodying their feelings.
2. After the last statement is said, men stay on stage, standing shoulder to shoulder. The actors playing the PLUS rector and the head of PLUS Respect program come on stage in front of the men and, excited, introduce the PLUS Respect program. Noticeably, the rector speaks in English and the PLUS Respect representative speaks in German only. The men leave the stage one by one as they realise that this topic doesn’t concern them. The rector and PLUS Respect representative get interrupted by Paris Lodron, who is honoured that the PLUS Respect program is called after him, because, in his words, he himself is an advocate for women’s rights as he held two women captives in dungeons on different occasions. The university representatives try to subtly silence Paris Lodron. The rector proclaims, “PLUS Respect!” and all three leave the stage.
3. The stage is taken by the Introduction to Gender Studies Class: scene shows a few students, all female, wondering why men are not there. Professor explains that they men might not appreciate enough the competences gained by the course for the labor market and their careers. One student, Monica, is still hopeful and says she will try to convince her male friends to join the class.
4. Monica tries to convince their male friends to join the gender studies class; one, Jackson, is interested but the others, including a girl, mock him, projecting ideas that it’s a “rage bait class”, “they always blame men”, “it’s not masculine to attend such a course”.
5. On his way to a class, Jackson passes an ÖH FemRef Stall, where a woman gives out their flyers. Jackson takes a flyer, but when he realises it’s about Gender Equality, he says, “I’ll give it to my girlfriend” and promptly leaves to avoid further talk about the importance of the issue.
6. Jackson witnesses Monica being harassed by a male student. Jackson doesn’t really know how to react: he’s not sure if it is really harassment and feels powerless to make any change. Still, Jackson suggests to Monica to report the harassment – he knows where to do that because of the FemRef flyer he took earlier. They report the harassment formally.

¹ www.tdu-wien.at

7. Jackson meets his male peers and tries to convince them to join the Gender Equality course but faces strong resistance. Among other counterarguments, the topic of racism is brought up. Jackson's peer states that it doesn't make sense for a person of colour to get involved in topics like that because no one will treat their opinion seriously and equal to the opinion of white people. Jackson fails to convince his friends.
8. Scene of two men speaking, showing the informal "bro-networks": a male post doc wants to apply for an open vacancy at the department and the male permanent professor states that his chances are not high because his female colleague also applied for this position and since the university supports "gender equality stuff", the position will probably go to her. The post doc expresses concerns how such a serious position may not be suitable for a woman, and the professor says that he cannot do anything here, but as a man he of course understands him, and they can discuss this over a beer later. Right after that, the two male colleagues are approached by the gender studies professor and the PLUS Respect program head, who ask them to say a word about the PLUS Respect at their class, since this class involves a lot of men. The postdoc and male professor say they will of course gladly introduce the program to their students, because they find it very important.
9. The final scene takes place at the male professor's math class. The professor welcomes the students, highlighting that this semester his primarily male class is joined by two female students. In his speech and interactions with students, he is belittling the abilities of female students to take part in such a "complex" class and shows preferential treatment of male students. Jackson addresses this, and the professor gets annoyed, while male students try to silence Jackson. One of the female students says that she leaves the class because women are not treated equally there. One by one, students and the male professor freeze in different positions, expressing different concerns: being annoyed with talking about gender instead of studying math, being disrespectful to the professor, humiliating another female student, being frustrated with the situation. The scene ends with the PLUS Respect representative coming on stage and reading a paragraph from the Statut of Paris Lodron University of Salzburg that states that PLUS is committed to the promotion of gender equality (in German).

While there is consensus about the importance of involving men in gender equality work, it is difficult to put these values into practice. What also seems to be lacking is active encouragement of men to get involved (from ÖH to structural university level).





Interactive Part: After the play, the audience was invited to identify barriers/problems that hindered involvement of men in gender equality. In groups of two or three, they came up with rules and/or resources that would be necessary to ensure an effective involvement. Some audience members then performed their ideas on stage. With each proposal (=intervention) we collected rules that would help this specific proposal to become reality. The discussion highlighted the need for talking about gender-based violence in general and about concrete actions we can take to tackle that at the University. Based on the discussion, audience members drafted their own policy proposals. A team of policy makers (see below in commitment section) sorted all these proposals and clustered them into four over-arching policy themes. After discussing changes that were still necessary to optimize these proposals and possible amendments we voted on: which among the policy themes should be prioritized. and/or voiced our dissent. Each policy maker made specific and measurable commitments for action on at least one of the proposals.

First Intervention: A woman is verbally and sexually harassed by a man. After the incident, an audience member approaches her, shows empathy, and offers to help her report the harassment. The audience identified the importance of being proactive and taking action by believing the victim and educating themselves on how to intervene in such situations. Safe spaces and accessible platforms for seeking help and support are needed to create lasting change.

Second Intervention: Audience members watched a scene depicting a Gender Studies lecture attended mostly by women. One participant proposed making the course mandatory for all students so that men would also be required to take it. The actors responded: "If it is mandatory, everybody is going to complain." The audience then suggested ways to address this issue, such as integrating gender-related topics into all courses, awarding more credits for Gender Studies courses, or renaming the course to avoid using the word "gender."

Third Intervention: In a lecture, a sexist professor belittles women taking his mathematics class and evaluates their answers more harshly than those of male students who give the same response. An audience member intervenes by calling out the professor's sexist behaviour. The professor reacts with confusion and continues the lesson. The audience identified that direct confrontation could cause irritation and resistance. As a result, they proposed creating a platform for anonymous complaints or providing access to external support services.

Proposals and Amendments

		Priority votes	Number of Dis-sents
Proposal 1 - Accountability	<u>Accountability has to be known</u> • a more accessible and well-known complaints process • much greater awareness (for example, reporting options for cases of gender-based violence should be as well-known and accessible as the “Mensa”) • greater respect for the victim’s perspective and experience <u>Amendments proposed by the audience:</u> • Bilingual information • Putting values into practice: people in positions of power should create space for emotions and personal experience • Signage for the “office” to increase visibility • External institution to support accountability processes • Greater online visibility • “Should be as known as the toilets” • Aftercare, management, and clear procedures to keep people informed about processes • Committee or task force for accountability • Give accountability initiatives prominent visibility <u>Difficulties to make this proposal real:</u> • Ensuring that terms like “+respect” become more than just words • There are already a lot of different units and bodies (AKG², FGDD³, etc.) • BUT: How do we get the information to people? → major challenge <u>What does it need to reach people?</u> • Teachers mentioning it in classes (mandatory) • Standard text included in all syllabi and/or on courses online platforms (Blackboard) • Visibility (e.g. posters in the toilets, Blackboard platform) Dissent (at the time of voting): 0	21	0

² AKG: Arbeitskreis für Gleichbehandlungsfragen (eng.: Working Group on Equal Treatment Issues)

³ FGDD: Family, Gender, Disability & Diversity

Proposal 2 - Awareness for staff	<u>Implementation of obligatory trainings for university staff</u> • Training focused on awareness • Implement training courses for staff • Provide information and raise awareness <u>Amendments proposed by the audience:</u> • Strong monitoring mechanisms • In-person-training rather than online training • Involve co-creators with agency to take action and engage others • Frame the issue as unavoidable and pervasive to address the question of mandatory vs. voluntary courses <u>Difficulties to make this proposal real:</u> • Staff commitment (Will the effects be long-lasting?) • Online training can easily be overlooked or forgotten • Mandatory participation can cause a backlash → finding the right balance between mandatory trainings and staff members' intrinsic motivation Dissent (at the time of voting): 0	26	0
Proposal 3 - Curricula	<u>Gender studies courses</u> • Integrating gender-related topics into regular courses • Integrating gender-related topics in course evaluations • Reflection on situations that happened • Encouraging reflection through discussions that challenge and engage the perspectives of both students and teachers • Compulsory orientation course • Expanding the range of gender studies courses offered • Online courses on Blackboard • A dedicated gender studies module • Gender-related topics in STEM courses • Making gender studies more appealing to men <u>Amendments by the audience:</u> • Professors need external guidance (e.g. committee that supports the integration of gender-related topics into courses) • Increasing diversity among professorships • More funding for gender studies chair • Involving people in a sustainable way Dissent (at the time of voting): 0	9	0

Proposal 4 - Networks	<u>Sensibilisation and Information</u> • “Institutionalized” and strengthened networking with stakeholders in the field of gender equality • Joint events and workshops • Changing the university’s name and logo <u>Amendments by the audience:</u> • More support for victims in different ways (e.g. hotline, group groups) • More opportunities for awareness-raising and sensibilisation (e.g. actively distancing ourselves from “Paris Lodron”) → transparent steps • Free STD and STI tests <u>Difficulties to make this proposal real:</u> • Making information more accessible and invisible (e.g. ensuring that people are aware of existing support systems for victims) Dissent (at the time of voting): 0	6	0
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Commitments by the Policy Team

Prof. Dr. Jan Cemper-Kiesslich: Chair of the Works Council for Academic Staff	Voluntarily taking on another gender expression as a self-experiment (e.g. through cross-dressing) (until the end of the semester (at least))
Dr. Marianne Schulze: Chair of the University Council	Next board meeting (June): discussion on violence and intersectionality; proposal that the issue is discussed in every upcoming meeting (end of June)
Prof. Elias Felten: Vice Rector for Human Resources	- Invite PhD students to participate in awareness courses (Proposal 2; within 8 months) - Identify a person for awareness course (Proposal 2; this year)
Prof. Michaela Rückl: Vice Rector for Teaching and Learning	- Integrate gender-related topics into course evaluations. Reflection should also be encouraged during classes, not only at the end (Proposal 3; starting next year) - Discuss implementation with Quality Management (Proposal 3; next week) - Integrate gender studies in bachelor's programmes through complementary modules (Proposal 3; next semester)
Dr. Katharina Obenholzner, BA MA MA: Equal Opportunities Officer at AMS (Arbeitsmarktservice Salzburg)	- Networking and information exchange: Contact Ombud for Equal Treatment (Gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft) and the Anti-Discrimination Office (Antidiskriminierungsstelle) to discuss possibilities of support (Proposal 4; end of June/summer) - Networking with Family, Gender, Disability and Diversity (FGDD), Athena Centre and Prof. Lefkofridi (Proposal 4; next week)
Mag. Ines Grössenberger: Women's Council of Salzburg, Women's Policy Officer at Arbeiterkammer Salzburg	- Continue efforts to challenge gender stereotypes; promote the event on 21 May focusing on men in traditionally feminized professions (Proposal 4; information was sent to students on 12 May 2026) - Ongoing networking and dissemination of information
Marie Stenitzer, BA: Chair of the Austrian Students' Union (ÖH), University of Salzburg Krista Bolton, BA: Officer for Feminist Policy, Austrian Students' Union (ÖH), University of Salzburg	Increase awareness of existing reporting and support services (Anlaufstellen) through: accessible as well as bilingual ÖH-website and posters in every toilet on campus (Proposal 4; by end of the year; follow-up in 8 weeks: poster design completed)

Success

Salzburger Nachrichten: Uni Press

Article “Theater als Motor für mehr Gleichstellung” (eng. Using Theatre to Promote Gender Equality) by Manuel Gruber

AMS

Be the Man Who Makes a Difference!

Information Day on Nursing and Early Childhood Education at the AMS Career Information Center (BIZ) in Salzburg-Itzling

Men currently make up only 15–20% of the workforce in nursing professions and less than 10% in early childhood education. As the Public Employment Service (AMS), we are committed to increasing these numbers and demonstrating that nursing and early childhood education are professions for men as well. We aim to encourage more men to explore these rewarding career paths and to challenge traditional gender stereotypes in the workplace. (<https://www.biz-buchung.at/event/953>)



Students

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