

HUMAN-CENTRED WORKPLACES THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF GENDER AND DIVERSITY IN OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

1 Overview

Country: Austria

Name of the programme: MEGAP – Human-centred workplaces through the application of gender and diversity in occupational safety and health

Organisations in charge: Central Labour Inspectorate in cooperation with regional labour inspectorates

Years of implementation: 2016 to 2019

Type of programme: National

Reach: 249 labour inspectors and approximately 700 companies across Austria

Target groups: The primary target group of the programme is labour inspectors, who receive training and support to help companies improve their inclusion and protection of vulnerable groups. These groups include women, workers in male- or female-dominated sectors, older workers, workers with impairments or disabilities, migrant workers, workers with limited or no proficiency in German, part-time workers, temporary staff and external workers.

Interviews conducted: A total of five interviews were conducted; one with a representative from the Central Labour Inspectorate and three with representatives from Caritas Vienna, which features as the case study.

2 Context

Austria has long recognised the importance of protecting the health and safety of workers through a robust legislative framework. The Austrian Safety and Health at Work Act (Bundesgesetz über Sicherheit und Gesundheitsschutz bei der Arbeit – ArbeitnehmerInnenschutzgesetz, ASchG),¹ in place since 1995, provides a solid foundation by requiring employers to identify and assess workplace hazards, with particular attention to vulnerable workers and groups. It also stipulates that tasks must be assigned with careful consideration of each worker's health and safety needs, in light of factors such as physical condition, strength, age and qualifications.

This framework was strengthened in 2012 when the amendment to the Austrian Safety and Health at Work Act (BGBl I 118/201)² made it mandatory for employers to assess psychosocial risks (PSRs) in the workplace, with the aim of safeguarding the mental health of workers. By January 2013, the legal obligation to address PSRs highlighted the need for risk prevention measures that reflect the diverse circumstances and needs of all workers.

¹ Bundesgesetz über Sicherheit und Gesundheitsschutz bei der Arbeit (ArbeitnehmerInnenschutzgesetz – ASchG), BGBl. No 450/1994, as amended by BGBl. No 457/1995 (corrigendum) (NR: GP XVIII RV 1590 AB 1671 S. 166. BR: AB 4794 S. 587.), <https://ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10008910>

² Bundesgesetz, mit dem das ArbeitnehmerInnenschutzgesetz und das Arbeitsinspektionsgesetz 1993 geändert werden, BGBl. I 118/201, 2, https://360.lexisnexis.at/d/b_bgbl_2012_2012_I_118_2e213de371?origin=lk;https://360.lexisnexis.at/d/rechtsnorm-ris/118_bundesgesetz_mit_dem_das_arbeitnehmerinnenschu/b_bgbl_2012_2012_I_118_2e213de371

Since 2016, the Austrian Labour Inspectorate has emphasised the need for human-centred and inclusive safety and health protection to be systematically integrated into all core occupational safety and health (OSH) processes. According to the Labour Inspectorate, this commitment should be reflected in several key areas:³

- **Principles of risk prevention:** risks should be avoided wherever possible, and protective measures should be implemented according to the TOP principle (also known as hierarchy of prevention). This principle prioritises protective measures as follows: first, technical measures; second, organisational measures; and, finally, personal or individual measures.
- **Risk assessments:** assessments must be conducted at workplace and process levels, explicitly covering mental stress and the risk of violence, and must reflect the diverse experiences of workers.
- **Organisation of work:** this includes appointing safety representatives from varied backgrounds and ensuring that budgets for occupational safety and health measures are planned with gender and diversity in mind.
- **Instruction and communication:** health and safety information must be delivered in clear, understandable language to ensure that workers who do not speak German as their first language can fully grasp and follow safety procedures.
- **Workplace design:** facilities should guarantee barrier-free access and be adapted as necessary to meet the different needs of all workers.
- **Occupational health support:** workplace health promotion initiatives should be designed to take into account the diverse circumstances and well-being needs of the workforce.

Translating these legal principles into practice requires acknowledging that workers differ not only in their job roles and responsibilities, but also in areas such as gender, cultural background, disability and life circumstances. These differences can influence the types of risks individuals face and the barriers they may encounter in accessing essential information and support. If gender and diversity are overlooked, prevention measures can miss the mark, thereby leaving certain groups more exposed to risks or unintentionally reinforcing existing inequalities. Recognising and addressing these differences is a critical step towards fulfilling the responsibility of ensuring equitable protection and support for all workers.

Despite clear legal provisions and the evident need to consider gender and diversity in practice, labour inspections prior to 2016 had shown that these aspects were frequently overlooked.⁴ Labour inspectors had repeatedly identified shortcomings in PSR assessments and workplace practices. For example, migrant workers were found to be more vulnerable to accidents when safety instructions were provided in German only.⁵ Another concern was raised by a representative from the Labour Inspectorate, who noted that risk assessments often did not adequately reflect the diversity of worker groups. For instance, they failed to consider how identical tasks might have different physical consequences for men and women.

According to the Labour Inspectorate representative who was interviewed, many labour inspectors prior to 2016 lacked the necessary expertise to identify and address gender and diversity issues, often related to PSRs, within the scope of their occupational safety and health responsibilities. Although a gender and diversity network had already been established in each labour inspection office – with one designated contact person available to advise colleagues on related matters – engagement was limited. Approximately 20 inspectors voluntarily participated in seminars and exchanged information within this network. However, the majority of inspectors had not received formal education or training on gender and diversity, underscoring the need for targeted capacity-building measures.

In 2016, to address these shortcomings, the Central Labour Inspectorate launched a nationwide ‘focus action’ known as ‘Menschengerechte Arbeitsplätze durch Anwendung von Gender und Diversity im

³ Arbeitsinspektion, ‘Gender und Diversität’, 2025, https://www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at/Uebergreifendes/Gender_und_Diversity/Gender_Mainstreaming_im_Sicherheits-und_Gesundheitsschutz.html#heading_Zielgruppenwirksamer_Arbeitsschutz

⁴ Arbeitsinspektion, ‘MEGAP: Eine Schwerpunktaktion der Arbeitsinspektion von 2016-2019’, 2020, https://www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at/Zentrale_Dokumente/Uebergreifende_Themen/GMD/MEGAP_Abschlussbericht_2020.pdf

⁵ Sichere Arbeit, ‘Arbeitssicherheit bei Migrantinnen und Migranten’, 2021, <https://www.sicherearbeit.at/ausgaben/2020/ausgabe-2/arbeitssicherheit-bei-migrantinnen-und-migranten>

Arbeitsschutz' (Human-centred workplaces through the application of gender and diversity in occupational safety and health, hereinafter MEGAP). Each year, the Central Labour Inspectorate selects a specific thematic focus for its inspections, and MEGAP was chosen as the central theme in 2016.

The initiative had two main objectives: first, to integrate additional gender and diversity approaches into the Labour Inspectorate's work on relevant topics such as instruction, monotonous work processes, workplace design and manual handling and ergonomics; and, second, to promote non-discriminatory, equal-opportunity improvements in occupational safety and health. PSRs were covered within these topics where appropriate, particularly when looking at work processes in general and when targeting discrimination and (sexual) harassment. MEGAP specifically targeted workers with different languages and different cultural backgrounds, those with health impairments or disabilities, part-time or temporary workers, external workers, older workers, women, and staff in male- or female-dominated sectors.

3 Description of activities implemented at national level

3.1 Actors, roles and implemented activities

The focus action was launched in collaboration with all regional labour inspectorates across Austria. MEGAP ran for three years, following a structured, staged approach designed to build expertise, implement practical measures and integrate gender and diversity considerations into occupational safety and health practices.

The project was carried out in three stages:⁶

Stage 1: Project setup and initial implementation (2016-2017)

Project launch

To implement MEGAP effectively, an interdisciplinary project team was established, comprising representatives from the Central Labour Inspectorate, regional inspectorates, the medical labour inspection service, and the internal gender and diversity network of the inspectorate. The team was led by an occupational psychologist.

According to the Labour Inspectorate representative, the Ministry of Labour reinforced the initiative by issuing a decree instructing inspectors to actively engage in the project. All labour inspectorate offices were required to contribute, with the goal that at least 50% of all inspectors in each office would be involved by the end of the programme.

The project team conducted comprehensive desk research, drawing on insights from previous annual programmes of the Labour Inspectorate, findings from the Austrian National OSH Strategy, and relevant international literature on gender and diversity in occupational safety and health. This research culminated in the creation of an internal blog summarising key information on the topic for inspectors. The content was designed to be accessible and practical, thus enabling even labour inspectors less familiar with gender and diversity issues to address the topic during their inspections.

Building on this research, the project concept was developed as a foundational activity. It established the overall framework for MEGAP, detailed the implementation process, and introduced the first draft of the questionnaire to be used during company inspections. The concept document also included the initial training plan, which served as a roadmap for delivering inspector training throughout the programme.

From the outset, the project was accompanied by a formative evaluation using the 'Integrative Modular System' to assess the chain of effects across inputs, outputs, fidelity, target levels, outcomes and impact.^{7 8} Inputs came from the Central Labour Inspectorate and other inspectorates, while outputs included a project concept, a questionnaire, a webpage, an internal blog, inspector training and

⁶ Arbeitsinspektion, '2016-2019: MEGAP', 2024, <https://www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at/MEGAP>

⁷ Sichere Arbeit, 'Qualitative Methoden in der Evaluation', 2017, <https://www.sicherearbeit.at/ausgaben/2017/ausgabe-1-2017/qualitative-methoden-in-der-evaluation>

⁸ Spiel, G., Finsterwald, M., Popper, V. and Hesse, N., 'Darstellung des integrativen Baukastensystems für Evaluationen im Präventionsbereich der AUVA', report No 63, AUVA, 2013.

stakeholder engagement. Fidelity was assessed through key implementation activities, including the delivery of training, company inspections and participation in various activities. Target levels focused on measuring reactions, learning and reach among the intended groups. Specifically, reactions to the training sessions, learning outcomes for inspectors and the extent to which the programme reached its target audience of inspectors and other stakeholders were evaluated. Outcomes included increased awareness of gender and diversity issues, greater project acceptance, knowledge acquisition by inspectors and the adoption of good practices. The overall impact aimed to improve occupational safety for diverse worker groups, which was ultimately assessed through changes observed in the participating organisations and inspectors' practices.

While the full evaluation report was not published, an overview of the evaluation findings was included in the final report for the project. This summary provides insights into how the activities and outputs contributed to the overall success of the programme.

Training and capacity building

At the start of the project, each of the 20 inspectorate offices designated one main contact person and one deputy, resulting in a network of 40 labour inspectors trained to serve as local multipliers. Nearly all members of the gender and diversity network were also appointed as contact people for the programme. The role of these multipliers was to act as direct contacts for the project team, disseminate information to inspectors and provide feedback on data collected during inspections, such as completed questionnaires. They were also responsible for instructing other inspectors on how to apply the MEGAP principles during inspections.

To prepare these multipliers for their roles, dedicated instruction seminars were held at the outset of the programme. These sessions introduced the background and objectives of MEGAP and provided practical training on how to integrate gender and diversity considerations into inspection procedures.

In addition to the initial instruction seminars, more in-depth training was provided to the 40 designated multipliers, as well as other relevant inspectors. In total, over 60 inspectors received training on gender and diversity in OSH, thus equipping them to advise companies more effectively during inspections and support the project's objectives across Austria. The training sessions covered each dimension of diversity, use of the questionnaire and practical examples of how gender and diversity considerations should be integrated into occupational safety and health inspections. The sessions combined informational content with role-playing exercises.

Internal guidelines were developed by the project team, outlining key occupational safety and health modules, including:

- safety and health instructions,
- work processes (including physical aspects as well as PSRs),
- personal protective equipment,
- guidance on barrier-free workplace adjustments.

These modules were tested for practical applicability in 40 companies, approximately two per inspectorate office. The pilot companies were located in five provinces of Austria (Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Vienna, Styria and Tyrol). Inspectors selected the companies based on predefined criteria: they had to be familiar with the company; risk assessments and safety instructions had to be completed; management needed to be present on site (excluding small chain store branches); and at least a third of the selected companies were required to have fewer than 25 workers.

To ensure that the initiative was grounded in real workplace contexts, workshops were organised with the multipliers from all regional labour inspectorates. These sessions aimed to gather practical insights from inspectors and foster collaboration for the later stages of the project. As part of the formative evaluation, the evaluator prepared the workshops by sending a set of guiding questions to the contact people, such as: 'Was it difficult to explain to companies why gender and diversity were being addressed?'; 'Is it better to inform companies in advance about inspections, or to conduct ad-hoc visits?'; and 'Are the questions in the questionnaire clear and understandable?'. The responses were aggregated and discussed during the workshops, leading to improvements in the questionnaire and other components of the programme.

Stage 2: First rollout (2017-2018)

This phase marked the transition from training to practical application. Inspectors began conducting workplace visits, during which they addressed a range of occupational safety and health topics, such as safety instructions, work processes (including manual handling, ergonomics and repetitive tasks), the use of personal protective equipment and workplace adjustments to ensure barrier-free environments. PSRs were addressed as part of the work process module. Inspectors had the flexibility to tailor their approach by selecting the most relevant topics for each company or covering multiple areas depending on the specific workplace context.

In this phase, 600 companies across a range of industries and sizes throughout Austria were visited. Notably, according to the labour inspectorate interviewed, a third of these companies were small firms with fewer than 25 workers, where occupational safety and health practices are often less developed than in larger companies.

During stage 2, the 40 local multipliers from the inspection offices participated in a workshop to reflect on the experiences from the first rollout. According to the labour inspectors interviewed, allowing inspectors to freely choose the occupational safety and health modules contributed to greater company acceptance with regard to addressing gender and diversity issues. This approach not only made inspections more relevant, but also reduced the perceived burden on companies, as the process was tailored to their specific context.

An anonymous online survey of inspectors conducted at the end of this phase helped identify practical challenges and gather valuable insights. The survey confirmed that giving inspectors the freedom to choose inspection topics based on their interactions with companies made it easier to tailor interventions and address gender and diversity issues effectively.

Stage 3: Second rollout and conclusion (2018-2019)

In the final phase, inspectors visited 103 companies of various sizes across different industries, using a more structured approach informed by the initial rollout. They followed interview guidelines that included three to six questions per inspection topic. The guidelines encouraged inspectors to assess whether companies had integrated gender and diversity measures into their occupational safety and health practices, with a particular focus on identifying strong examples of good practices. Inspectors found that 90 companies had already incorporated gender and diversity measures into their occupational safety and health practices and documented 60 examples of good practices.⁹ Approximately a third of these examples were linked to advice provided during previous labour inspectorate interventions. According to the MEGAP project manager, this stage fostered friendly competition among inspectors to identify strong examples, thus further boosting their genuine commitment to the topic.

Selection of good practice examples identified during MEGAP¹⁰

Good practice name	Description
Women's team in street cleaning	Women have historically been underrepresented in street cleaning. Following a risk assessment, several measures were implemented, including the establishment of separate sanitary facilities for women, adjustments to working hours (start and end times) and the introduction of personal protective equipment tailored to women's needs. A board resolution was passed to prohibit sexist and pornographic images in all work areas. Additionally, it was made explicit that sexualised language and any form of unacceptable behaviour would not be tolerated, with consequences ranging from discussions to dismissal in serious cases. A

⁹ Arbeitsinspektion, 2020.

¹⁰ Arbeitsinspektion, 'Good Practice – Gender & Diversity', 2022, https://www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at/Zentrale_Dokumente/Uebergreifende_Themen/Good-Best_Practice/Frauenteam_in_der_Strassenreinigung.pdf

strong stance against inappropriate behaviour among management was crucial to the success of these initiatives.

Addressing violence against healthcare personnel

In a forensic psychiatric ward, where most of the staff working with male psychiatric criminal patients were women, risk assessments revealed a high rate of incidents linked to patient aggression. Occupational health specialists analysed accidents and near misses to identify key triggers. As a result, several measures were implemented, including the installation of alarm buttons and mirrors to enhance corridor visibility, de-escalation training provided by internal staff, self-defence techniques taught by external experts (primarily from the police force) and a policy prohibiting staff from entering patients' rooms alone. These actions significantly improved safety and reduced stress among staff.

Inclusive safety measures for multilingual and multicultural workforces

Women from diverse cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds faced difficulties understanding standard safety instructions owing to language barriers, which led to conflicts and misunderstandings, particularly in following safety protocols and using protective equipment. To address this, an interpreter was engaged for safety briefings and the instructions were revised to include diagrams, pictograms and colour coding to enhance understanding. The revised materials were then incorporated into training sessions on the correct use of personal protective equipment and work equipment, tailored to meet the specific needs of the target group.

Adaptation of workplaces for workers with impaired mobility

Following a workplace accident, a workstation was adapted for a worker with paraplegia. In response, a newly constructed factory hall was designed to be fully accessible, with a focus on wheelchair-friendly entrances and sanitary facilities. To further enhance on-site safety, the worker was provided with a safety flag to improve visibility for forklift drivers, an additional measure recommended by the Labour Inspectorate. Furthermore, the Labour Inspectorate published informational materials on high-contrast designs to assist companies and occupational safety and health services in accommodating visually impaired workers. These design principles were also extended to support workers with hearing impairments, learning disabilities and cognitive impairments.

More good practice examples, published anonymously for data protection reasons, are available on the Central Labour Inspectorate's website.¹¹ This website also provides a practical self-check guide on underestimated risks in occupational safety, which incorporates gender and diversity aspects.¹² This guide was developed to provide companies with a clear framework for integrating gender and diversity into occupational safety and health measures and risk assessments. It continues to be used by inspectors as a reference tool during workplace inspections.

The final report on MEGAP was published in 2020, and its findings were presented at various conferences, including the annual meeting of occupational health doctors, AUVA (Austrian Workers' Compensation Board) conferences and social partner events.

The project concluded with the final report, but the supporting documents and the knowledge generated through the approach are still in use.

¹¹ Arbeitsinspektion, 'Good Practice', 2023, https://www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at/Uebergreifendes/Good_Practice/Good_Practice.html

¹² Arbeitsinspektion, 'Selbst-Check für Betriebe: Unterschätzte Risiken im Arbeitsschutz', 2019, https://www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at/Zentrale_Dokumente/Uebergreifende_Themen/Good-Best_Practice/selbst-check_fuer_betriebe_unterschaetzte_risiken_im_arbeits.pdf

3.2 Outputs and results

The MEGAP programme produced a range of key outputs that played a crucial role in promoting gender and diversity in occupational safety and health. These outputs were identified through the formal evaluation process, as well as supplementary sources, including the final project report and interviews with Labour Inspectorate representatives.

Formal evaluation outputs

The evaluation conducted during the project identified several key outputs:¹³

- Heightened awareness of gender and diversity among inspectors and companies, encapsulated by the concept of 'looking at occupational safety and health through gender and diversity glasses'.
- Acceptance of the project by both inspectors and companies.
- Acquisition of knowledge regarding where and how gender and diversity considerations can be integrated into various occupational safety and health modules, and how inspectors can incorporate these aspects into their inspection practices.
- Expanded contact networks within companies, reaching beyond traditional occupational safety and health contacts to include individuals responsible for gender, diversity, disability and related areas. Prior to MEGAP, inspectors typically engaged with employers, worker representatives and in-house occupational safety and health experts. With the programme's implementation, disability representatives, women team leaders and senior workers also became involved in inspections.
- Transformation of the inspection questionnaire into a practical checklist guide for identifying underestimated risks in occupational safety and health, with targeted questions addressing gender and diversity.
- Balanced gender representation in inspected workplaces, with a 50:50 distribution as required by the MEGAP project team.
- The development of good practice examples, which were published on the Labour Inspectorate's website.

Results based on the MEGAP final report and inspector feedback

According to the final report published as part of the MEGAP programme and interviews with Labour Inspectorate representatives, some of the most significant results are listed below.

Broad engagement of companies and labour inspectors

During project implementation (stages 1 and 2), approximately 700 companies across Austria, spanning various industries and sizes, were inspected and provided with guidance. A third of these companies employed fewer than 25 workers, demonstrating the programme's reach across small enterprises, which often have less-developed occupational safety and health systems.

By the end of the project, a total of 249 labour inspectors had been involved, representing approximately 80% of all inspectors in Austria.¹⁴ This high level of participation was achieved by strategically positioning trained inspectors as multipliers within the system. Additional inspectors were gradually integrated into the process, often by shadowing more experienced colleagues during on-site inspections.

Embedding gender and diversity in OSH modules

A key MEGAP output was the integration of gender and diversity considerations into existing occupational safety and health inspection modules. These modules, which were already in place before the project, included:

- safety and health instructions,
- work processes, including manual lifting, ergonomics and PSRs,

¹³ Arbeitsinspektion, 2020.

¹⁴ Arbeitsinspektion, 2020.

- personal protective equipment,
- a module focused on advising on barrier-free workplace adjustments.

PSRs were addressed within the work process module, where inspections uncovered overlooked risks linked to gendered work patterns. For instance, during an inspection of a manufacturing company's production floor, it was observed that women were assigned more monotonous and repetitive tasks than their male colleagues, resulting in increased fatigue. Inspectors reviewed the PSR assessment and found that this issue had not previously been considered. Consequently, they advised the company to revise its PSR approach and consider the identified issue accordingly. In another case, part-time roles in a health department, mostly filled by female nurses, were associated with frequent communication gaps because of missed information. This highlighted how gendered work organisation can contribute to psychosocial stress and underscored the importance of systematically considering this factor in occupational safety and health assessments.

This integration of gender and diversity ensured that the project's impact extended beyond individual inspections, embedding inclusive practices into the Labour Inspectorate's standard procedures. In recent years, the Labour Inspectorate has continued to apply this approach. One example, highlighted by the Labour Inspectorate representative interviewed, is the use of checklists and methods developed through the MEGAP approach to address priority topics such as workplace violence. This illustrates how gender and diversity perspectives have been effectively incorporated into routine inspection practices.

Sustained impact through published resources

Among the most relevant materials developed as part of the MEGAP project were the self-check guidelines for companies, titled 'Underestimated risks in occupational safety with key gender and diversity questions', published on the Labour Inspectorate's website.¹⁵ This tool continues to serve as a practical resource for both companies and inspectors, supporting the integration of gender and diversity considerations into occupational safety and health practices. Based on the inspection questionnaire used during MEGAP, the guidelines cover four occupational safety and health modules, including the assessment of PSRs within work processes. Although their use has not been formally monitored since the project's conclusion, interviewees mentioned that the guidelines continue to be actively applied. For example, in 2024, they formed the basis for approximately 800 inspections focused on workplace violence, demonstrating the enduring relevance and operational impact of the MEGAP approach. In addition, a collection of around 60 good practice examples, reflecting different sectors and target groups, was compiled and published, offering concrete illustrations of how gender and diversity considerations can be effectively integrated into occupational safety and health practices, including PSR prevention.¹⁶

Stakeholder exchange

Information and results were shared with key stakeholders, including the Austrian Workers' Compensation Board (AUVA), the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB), the Federation of Austrian Industries (IV), the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ), the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (BAK) and the Austrian Medical Association (ÖAK). Meetings were also held with preventive services and occupational safety committees from different companies, resulting in the production of joint materials such as brochures and leaflets to further disseminate the project's findings.

Beyond these direct exchanges, the outcomes of MEGAP also contributed to broader strategic discussions and awareness-raising efforts. According to the Labour Inspectorate representative interviewed, the project's findings informed debates within the Austrian National OSH Strategy, thus helping shape future policy directions. In addition, articles published in *Gesunde Arbeit*,¹⁷ the magazine of the Austrian Trade Union Federation and the Federal Chamber of Labour, supported wider dissemination by raising awareness among works councils and other workplace representatives, thereby strengthening commitment to gender- and diversity-sensitive OSH practices nationwide.

¹⁵ Arbeitsinspektion, 'Selbst-Check für Betriebe: Unterschätzte Risiken im Arbeitsschutz', 2019.

¹⁶ Arbeitsinspektion, 'Good Practice', 2023.

¹⁷ Gesunde Arbeit, 'Verständliche Unterweisung für alle', 2018, <https://www.gesundearbeit.at/arbeitnehmer-innenschutz/kernaufgaben/unterweisung/verstaendliche-unterweisung-fuer-alle>

Transforming labour inspections

Feedback gathered through an anonymous online survey of labour inspectors¹⁸ provided valuable insights into how MEGAP influenced perceptions and inspection practices. According to the Labour Inspectorate representative interviewed, 110 inspectors participated in the voluntary survey, representing approximately 44% of all those involved in the project. The majority rated the initiative as excellent or good, while 16% reported difficulties engaging with the concept, citing a lack of personal connection or resonance with its objectives. Notably, 31% of respondents stated that MEGAP had improved their understanding and appreciation of the importance of gender and diversity in OSH. Furthermore, 47% indicated that they had gained new insights into company practices that would not typically emerge during standard inspections.

In addition to the survey findings, the inspector interviewed highlighted that there was a shared perception among inspectors that having the freedom to select and adapt inspection modules according to each company's context made it easier to tailor their approach and address specific needs effectively. Furthermore, they recounted that inspectors were often pleasantly surprised by how openly companies accepted and engaged with the topic and how resistance was generally low when the topic was announced in advance. Although the inspections required more time than standard inspections, with many inspectors estimating that they required at least an extra two hours per visit, they described the additional effort as worthwhile.

Through dedicated seminars and practical experience gained during the rollout phase, inspectors strengthened their knowledge on how to recognise and address gender and diversity risks in different work contexts, including psychosocial aspects. This increased expertise made them more confident in advising companies and more comfortable using the guidelines and self-check tools developed through the project.¹⁹

Improvements in company practices

Importantly, the recommendations and support provided by labour inspectors during company visits and consultations led to tangible improvements within the participating companies. Approximately a third of the good practice examples that were later published stemmed directly from these interactions, underscoring the practical impact of the programme.

4 Success factors and barriers

The MEGAP programme led to substantial progress in embedding gender and diversity considerations into occupational safety and health inspections in Austria, including the assessment of PSRs. Its success was underpinned by a combination of strategic planning, targeted training and practical tools that enabled inspectors to integrate these dimensions into routine inspection practices.

One of the programme's most significant achievements was the strategic integration of gender and diversity considerations into existing occupational safety and health frameworks. Instead of introducing entirely new topics, MEGAP enhanced established occupational safety and health approaches by embedding gender and diversity dimensions into familiar inspection areas. This was achieved by applying a 'gender and diversity magnifying glass' to core modules such as safety instructions, ergonomics, work processes and other key aspects of workplace assessments.

A second important factor was the deliberate, systematic focus on specific target groups within companies. For the first time, inspections consciously considered the needs of different groups such as men, women, older and younger workers, temporary agency workers, workers with health restrictions, disabilities²⁰ or learning difficulties, and those with limited language skills or a migration background. This tailored approach was made possible through clear guidelines and targeted training, which equipped inspectors to identify diverse needs and address them appropriately during workplace visits.

The flexibility built into the project's modular approach was also widely regarded as a strength. Inspectors could choose from different thematic modules and apply the most relevant ones to a

¹⁸ Arbeitsinspektion, 'MEGAP: Eine Schwerpunktaktion der Arbeitsinspektion von 2016-2019', 2020, https://www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at/Zentrale_Dokumente/Uebergreifende_Themen/GMD/MEGAP_Abschlussbericht_2020.pdf

¹⁹ Arbeitsinspektion, 2020.

²⁰ Arbeitsinspektion, 'Good Practice – Gender & Diversity', 2022.

company's context, rather than being required to address all aspects at once. According to the inspector interviewed, this autonomy facilitated more effective communication with employers and increased acceptance of the inspections.

Empowering inspectors through comprehensive training and practical tools was another success factor. Providing training sessions and supporting materials before and during inspections helped shift mindsets, thereby enabling inspectors to recognise their own unconscious biases and gain confidence in discussing gender and diversity topics with employers.

Collaboration and exchange also played a crucial role. At both national and company levels, the project created opportunities for cooperation among different stakeholders, such as human resources (HR) staff, diversity managers, training coordinators, occupational safety and health specialists and worker representatives. This wider network strengthened the capacity for cooperation among the different stakeholders to embed gender and diversity measures sustainably.

Finally, sharing good practices during the second rollout phase helped sustain momentum, as inspectors actively engaged in identifying standout examples, fostering a sense of friendly competition and offering relatable models for others.

While MEGAP ultimately secured broad stakeholder support by the end of the implementation period, it also encountered notable barriers at the outset. A significant initial barrier was the hesitation and, in some cases, reluctance among some labour inspectors to fully engage with the programme. This was largely because of their limited knowledge and experience in relation to gender and diversity in occupational safety and health, especially with regard to PSRs and among inspectors with predominantly technical backgrounds, for whom these topics had not previously been a professional focus. However, by the end of the project, around 80% of inspectors were actively engaged, reflecting strong internal buy-in and commitment to the goals of MEGAP.

5 Lessons learned

The MEGAP programme generated valuable lessons to offer practical guidance for future initiatives aimed at integrating gender and diversity into occupational safety and health. These insights reflected the experiences of the Central Labour Inspectorate and emerged through intensive dialogue with stakeholders, continuous feedback and practical experience during implementation.

According to the Labour Inspectorate representative interviewed, a core lesson was the value of learning through multiple pathways. Intensive discussions with stakeholders at both national and company levels, alongside regular exchanges with inspectors in the field, created a strong foundation for adapting and refining the project. The formative evaluation carried out by the external expert enabled continuous improvement through structured feedback. Additionally, appointing contact people within each inspectorate proved crucial, as they provided ongoing insights about barriers and successes, thereby informing practical adjustments throughout the project's lifespan. Sharing and documenting good practice examples also played an important role, as concrete cases made the topic more tangible and demonstrated the broad range of effective integration of gender and diversity into diverse workplaces, often touching on PSR aspects.

Careful strategic planning was another key factor in the programme's success. The project began with extensive desk research and a thorough review of the international literature, which provided a solid evidence base for the development of the project concept. The concept underpinned the entire programme, including its stages, the content of the questionnaire used during inspections, and the structure of the training sessions. A formative evaluation was also incorporated as part of the concept.

This preparatory work, particularly the analysis of data from previous inspections and the strategic decision to align the project with the Labour Inspectorate's annual inspection focus, ensured that the approach was grounded in established practices and tailored to the national context.

The importance of support throughout all phases of MEGAP cannot be overstated. Inspectors benefited greatly from ongoing guidance and the availability of designated contact people in the inspection offices, who acted as a bridge between the project team and those implementing the inspections in practice. Regular information updates and targeted training sessions equipped inspectors with the confidence and knowledge needed to tackle gender and diversity issues, especially as these topics were initially

unfamiliar to many of them. This supportive environment also encouraged participation, making it more feasible for inspectors to adapt their day-to-day work.

One particularly effective strategy was the integration of gender and diversity considerations into existing occupational safety and health topics, rather than introducing them as standalone modules. This approach facilitated the practical application of training, allowing inspectors to incorporate these dimensions seamlessly into familiar inspection areas. The knowledge gained through the project, as well as the guidelines, are still used by labour inspectors, even though the project has officially ended.

6 Implementation of the measures at establishment level

6.1. Establishment involved

One notable example of how MEGAP principles have been applied in practice is Caritas Erzdiözese Wien (Caritas Archdiocese of Vienna, commonly referred to as Caritas Wien).²¹ This large, non-profit organisation serves Vienna and the eastern part of Lower Austria, and has a long-standing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in both its services and its internal workplace practices.

In 2024, Caritas Wien employed more than 6,000 workers, nearly 4,500 of whom were women, and engaged over 15,600 volunteers across its extensive network of social, educational and care projects. The organisation operates across four main areas: care (including schools and training programmes), community work, assistance for individuals in need and support for people with disabilities.

Beyond these core functions, it offers counselling services and dedicated contact people for diverse areas such as work, education and training, housing, financial hardship, grief and hospice care, family and partnerships, asylum and migration, disability, mental health and addiction. These thematic services are supported by central units, including Human Relations, IT, Finance and Accounting, Innovation and the Health Service Centre.

Caritas Wien has actively strengthened its internal DEI efforts in recent years, driven by the increasing diversity of its staff and clients. These include individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, refugees, people with impairments, minors and older people, whom the organisation supports through a range of services such as advice, care and specialised assistance.

For example, an ability management programme for workers with disabilities was introduced in 2017 and continues to shape workplace adjustments and support. This programme is also designed to comply with legal requirements regarding the employment of a minimum percentage of individuals with disabilities to avoid compensation tax. Additionally, the organisation has implemented a DEI strategy, which explores how various dimensions of diversity, such as gender, cultural background, disability and age, interact and overlap in everyday working conditions. This approach is translated into specific goals, including fostering an inclusive environment by systematically assessing and improving working conditions for different groups, ensuring anti-discrimination and equal opportunities for all workers, and meeting legal obligations regarding the employment of people with disabilities.

Caritas has actively built on the foundations laid by the MEGAP programme to strengthen its occupational safety and health practices, with a strong emphasis on gender and diversity. The organisation has integrated the MEGAP-developed self-check guidelines on underestimated risks into its risk assessments and occupational safety and health planning across various departments. This approach ensures that psychosocial stress, workplace violence and other risks are addressed with sensitivity to the diverse needs of staff. The MEGAP principles also inform Caritas' training strategies, ergonomic improvements and inclusive workplace design, thereby leading to a safer, more equitable working environment for all workers, including those with linguistic diversity or physical restrictions.

By integrating this approach into routine processes, Caritas Wien ensures that gender and diversity aspects are consistently factored into workplace safety – not as an afterthought, but as a fundamental part of how risks are identified and managed.

²¹ Caritas Wien, <https://www.caritas-wien.at/>

6.2. Actions implemented at establishment level

Caritas Wien has embedded a comprehensive set of actions to translate its DEI strategy into daily practice, closely aligning it with the principles promoted by the MEGAP project. This integrated approach ensures that gender and diversity are treated not as stand-alone themes, but rather as cross-cutting priorities woven into organisational structures, processes and workplace culture.

For example, Caritas Wien assessed its organisational culture, structure and processes against age-adjusted standards established by the Ministry of Social Affairs, thereby successfully earning the NESTOR GOLD quality seal.²² This evaluation highlighted several ways in which age and diversity considerations are embedded in daily practice. The organisation actively recognises the expertise of older workers, engaging them in the development of new projects and programmes. Women's health issues, such as menopause, are addressed through dedicated seminars, while working hours are adapted to accommodate different life stages, thus promoting flexibility and inclusion. Furthermore, a staff member with a disability has been appointed to oversee integration and workplace adjustments for colleagues with disabilities, thereby ensuring that their needs are met with empathy and practical support.

At the core of Caritas Wien's DEI efforts is an intersectional approach that acknowledges how multiple dimensions of diversity, including gender, age, migration background and disability, interact and shape the working conditions and opportunities of workers. Since 2016, this focus has gained momentum with the reorganisation of Human Resources Management into Human Relations, whose scope was expanded to actively promote inclusive workplace relationships and drive cultural transformation.

Two major initiatives – Teamwork&You (Teamwork&Du) and Our Job&You (Unser Job&Du) – drive this approach by promoting inclusive, collaborative working methods and strengthening the appeal of Caritas as an employer committed to equal opportunities and modern work practices. With its strategic focus on Our Job&You, Caritas Wien is implementing measures to enhance its attractiveness as an employer. These include cultivating an appealing work environment with a strong emphasis on diversity, offering various social fringe benefits, providing comprehensive training opportunities, and fostering a welcoming culture for new workers.

Teamwork&You focuses on the 'how' of daily collaboration by offering methods, tools and inspiration to support workers, teams and volunteers in developing their potential through teamwork. This collaborative approach incorporates a range of formats, such as digital tools for teamwork (e.g. the 'Confluence' platform), moderated team workshops, sessions on 'Using Feedback in Teams', participatory decision-making processes (e.g. the consent method) and peer support systems.

One of the key tools developed is Cari-Check, the organisation's internal PSR assessment mechanism. Developed jointly by the company's Health Service Centre and Human Relations department, Cari-Check integrates gender and diversity dimensions, as recommended by the Labour Inspectorate. Conducted every four years, this survey provides insights into PSRs in the workplace and staff awareness of gender and diversity issues, as well as perceived social inequalities. PSR assessments at Caritas are always followed up with an action plan that prioritises measures according to the urgency and seriousness of the risks identified. The most recent survey was completed in spring 2025, with results due to be published and shared with workers later in the year.

Additionally, Caritas offers various channels for anonymous reporting and support in cases of observed discrimination or harassment, and has developed a code of conduct on violence at work.

Furthermore, to ensure that DEI remains a dynamic and evolving practice, Caritas has established the DEI Circle, a coordinating body comprising Human Relations, Diversity Management and Ability Management. This circle plans, aligns and monitors DEI measures across the organisation and maintains close links with the Health Service Centre, ensuring that occupational safety and health measures continue to reflect diverse needs. For 2025, the DEI Circle is defining key performance indicators (KPIs), such as workforce diversity ratios, pay equity ratios and promotion rates, to track progress and inform future actions.

In addition to structured planning, Caritas encourages active staff involvement through initiatives such as the diversity think tank, which is open to all workers who wish to contribute ideas, raise concerns or

help shape the DEI agenda. Annual feedback meetings provide further opportunities for staff to share their views on diversity-related developments, ensuring that new programmes and tools reflect workers' perspectives. For example, initiatives arising from staff contributions include examining the career paths of workers from diverse backgrounds and raising recruiters' awareness of unconscious bias in the hiring process. A dedicated diversity chat channel, an extensive intranet library with resources, training opportunities and practical guides help maintain ongoing exchanges and knowledge sharing across the workforce.

To strengthen community building within the workforce, Caritas has launched internal diversity networks that offer safe spaces for dialogue and peer support. Currently, two networks are active – a queer network and a POC (people of colour) network – each coordinated by staff members with dedicated time resources. These networks play an important role in highlighting topics that matter to workers and ensuring that diverse voices contribute to organisational development. They provide safe spaces that are coordinated by workers who have dedicated resources to build strong, supportive communities and contribute to organisational learning.

Awareness-raising and skill-building are central pillars of Caritas' approach. All works council representatives have received training on DEI awareness and intervention. There are mandatory courses for executives on preventing workplace violence, employing conflict de-escalation techniques and addressing unconscious bias, and there are plans to expand this training to all supervisors and to embed it in onboarding for new leaders. The Health Service Centre supports these efforts by developing gender- and diversity-sensitive working methods (e.g. including representatives of diverse workers in projects or creating tailored concepts for protection against violence) and offering services such as risk assessments, workshops, training and individual support.

In recent months, there has been a particular focus on strengthening protection against workplace violence, given that many workers engage directly with clients in challenging situations. By aligning preventive measures, such as providing information on organisational rules, obligations and consequences, offering awareness training and implementing safety procedures (during night shifts for example), with insights from Cari-Check and the practical experiences shared by staff, Caritas ensures that safety and inclusivity go hand in hand.

6.3. Actors involved

The wide range of measures and initiatives outlined above is made possible by strong cooperation and clearly defined roles within Caritas Wien and partnerships with external organisations. Caritas places particular emphasis on fostering synergies and embedding DEI across all aspects of organisational development.

Within Caritas, the key driving force is the abovementioned DEI Circle, which brings together internal expertise from Human Relations, Diversity Management (a dedicated role within Caritas) and Ability Management (which has long supported workers with disabilities). The circle leads the strategic development of DEI initiatives and ensures their alignment with the organisation's broader cultural and operational goals, such as those included within Teamwork&You and Our Job&You.

To embed DEI practices across Caritas Wien, each department and business unit has designated contact people who serve as local DEI champions. They exchange information with the DEI Circle and ensure that policies and tools are effectively applied in daily work.

The Health Service Centre is a key internal body responsible for integrating gender and diversity principles into occupational safety and health. Comprising 16 internal experts, supported by safety officers and external specialists, the centre coordinates strategic and operational occupational safety and health activities. It focuses on psychosocial risk assessment, workplace violence prevention and psychological support, especially for staff working with challenging clients. It also applies inclusive criteria – developed as part of the MEGAP programme – in its tools and training, addressing linguistic diversity, ergonomic improvements and accessibility for workers with health restrictions.

The works council and management teams are also actively engaged. They receive regular updates and expert guidance to ensure that workplace policies and decisions reflect the organisation's DEI objectives. In addition, the works council benefits from dedicated training on DEI awareness and practical interventions, thus enabling it to act as an informed partner in fostering a fair and respectful work environment

Workers themselves are at the heart of Caritas' DEI approach. They contribute to diversity development through the diversity think tank, annual feedback forums and participation in community networks.

Beyond internal structures, Caritas collaborates actively with external partners to strengthen its DEI and OSH efforts. These include *Charta der Vielfalt* (Diversity Charter) run by the Chamber of Commerce;²³ Familie & Beruf Management GmbH,²⁴ the body behind the *Familie und Beruf* (Family and Career) quality seal; and the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs. As already mentioned, Caritas also holds the NESTOR GOLD seal for age-adjusted work and generational cooperation. Across these collaborations, aligning occupational safety and health standards with robust diversity criteria remains a shared priority.

Together, this network of internal and external actors ensures that Caritas Wien's commitment to DEI is not only strategic but firmly rooted in everyday practice, thereby reinforcing safe, fair and supportive working conditions for all workers.

6.4. Results and outcomes at establishment level

Caritas Wien's DEI efforts are beginning to yield tangible results across the organisation. A key milestone is the integration of gender and diversity aspects into the organisation's psychosocial risk assessment tool, Cari-Check. With a participation rate of 67% across the workforce, this survey now provides a solid, credible basis for identifying areas for improvement in working conditions and the groups that may require more targeted support.

One example of this is the insight gained into the needs of older workers in demanding roles, such as night shifts or jobs involving intensive physical and emotional engagement with people with disabilities. The survey revealed that many in this group seek alternative roles as their careers progress, highlighting the importance of facilitating internal job transitions.

The evaluation of the second survey, scheduled for 2025, is expected to show the first measurable impacts of the programme. While specific results were not yet available at the time this report was drafted, the broad participation of workers across the organisation, including migrant workers, younger staff and older staff, can already be considered an achievement. For the first time, the survey also included explanations in plain language to accommodate workers facing language barriers and to encourage broader participation.

Looking ahead, Caritas plans to use specific findings from Cari-Check as KPIs to monitor the progress of its DEI strategy. This means that Caritas will now be able to track whether actions have led to meaningful changes for different target groups, and adjust its strategies accordingly. The results will be shared with staff, and follow-up measures will be developed with opportunities for input from workers, thus ensuring that improvements are guided by those directly affected.

It is already apparent that the focus on DEI is shaping daily practices across the organisation. According to the deputy head of the Health Service Centre, more workers are now aware of DEI-related risks, such as those affecting workers with impairments or disabilities, and are reporting them more openly. This growing awareness is also reflected in practical adjustments across the organisation, such as safer arrangements for women working night shifts (for example, avoiding lone working and providing de-escalation training), targeted support for staff managing challenging client interactions, and barrier-free adaptations for workers with disabilities or health conditions, including accessible workspaces and adjustable desks.

The Health Service Centre has reported growing demand for advice and tailored risk assessments, indicating that teams are increasingly aware of, and proactive in addressing, the diverse needs of their colleagues. This does not mean that more incidents are being reported; rather, DEI-related topics are being raised more frequently in team meetings and supervisors are actively consulting Health Service Centre experts on matters such as how best to support a worker with a chronic condition.

According to the Human Relations Manager, HR processes at Caritas Wien now integrate DEI considerations more systematically. These are discussed during appraisals and feedback sessions, where staff are invited to share experiences of career development barriers or instances of

²³ WKO, 'Charta der Vielfalt', <https://www.wko.at/charta-der-vielfalt/start>

²⁴ Familie & Beruf, 'Wir vereinen Familie und Beruf', 2025, <https://www.familieundberuf.at/>

discrimination. This ensures that concerns around inclusion, fairness and equal opportunities are actively heard and documented as part of the routine HR dialogue.

The DEI toolbox available on the intranet has become a trusted resource to support day-to-day practices. It provides practical tips, training materials and points of contact for further support, including networks, quizzes, podcasts and articles. According to the Diversity Manager, download figures show that workers are increasingly turning to the toolbox for guidance on inclusive teamwork, respectful communication and adapting workplaces to diverse needs.

6.5. Success factors and barriers at establishment level

A decisive success factor is Caritas Wien's commitment to a holistic DEI concept, formally endorsed and structurally supported through the establishment of the DEI Circle. By embedding DEI into the wider organisational culture and aligning it closely with core functions, Caritas has laid the foundations for meaningful, long-term change rather than relying on isolated measures.

Another key success factor is the proactive role of the Health Service Centre in incorporating DEI principles into occupational safety. Since 2020, it has implemented the recommendations from the self-check guide on underestimated workplace risks, with a strong focus on gender and diversity. These have been integrated into occupational safety and health inspections, safety instructions, training and related activities, thereby contributing valuable input to the organisation's DEI strategy. The success of this approach is reflected in practices such as tailored safety training for diverse groups, ergonomic improvements in female-dominated roles, barrier-free workplace adaptations, reintegration support for workers with disabilities and strengthened collaboration among key safety and inclusion roles.

Another enabler of success is the organisation's focus on inclusive participation. Staff interviews highlighted that one of Caritas Wien's strengths is its encouragement of workers from all departments, roles and levels to contribute ideas, raise concerns and shape improvements. Structures such as the diversity think tank, annual feedback meetings and community networks support this approach and ensure that different perspectives are heard and taken into account.

A further factor is the clear intention to build leadership awareness and capability over time. Caritas aims to ensure that all executives complete DEI-relevant training within the next few years, which will equip managers to model inclusive behaviour and address issues effectively. While training has already begun, the scale of this effort is considerable, given the organisation's size and the diversity of its teams.

Looking ahead, Caritas is committed to fostering an inclusive culture that will continue to evolve and to removing barriers that limit equal opportunities in areas such as recruitment and career progression. Achieving a workplace where all groups feel equally valued and supported remains a guiding principle of its DEI work.

However, key challenges remain, including the practical challenge of consistently reaching all managers and workers and maintaining engagement when other priorities compete for attention. Moreover, ensuring that awareness translates into daily practice, particularly among leadership, will require continued support, systematic monitoring and follow-up actions.

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