

OSNABRÜCK
GENDER LENS
POLICY BRIEF

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Project Background

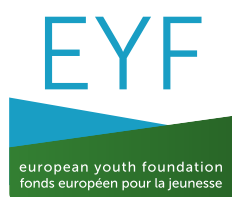
The Youth Gender Advocacy Fellowship (YGAF) is designed to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, and platforms needed to actively engage in both global and local gender equality advocacy. The fellowship will provide education on existing gender equality instruments, equip youth with practical advocacy tools and ensure that their perspectives are integrated into efforts to address gender inequality in their city, fostering a sense of agency and civic responsibility.

About BreachBuilders e.V.

BreachBuilders is a youth-led organisation dedicated to empowering young people to actively engage with and address the social, economic, and political issues that shape their lives. Rooted in the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we inspire and support youth-driven solutions to today's most pressing challenges.

Acknowledgement

We extend our sincere gratitude to the City Equal Opportunity Office and Anti-discrimination Office, whose valuable insights and collaboration greatly enriched the development of this policy brief. Their continued commitment to advancing gender equality and social inclusion in Osnabrück has been instrumental in shaping our analysis and recommendations.



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Introduction



We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back.

Malala Yousafzai

Following the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life (ECE), adopted in 2006, gender equality frameworks expanded from international to regional and local levels, adopting measures and approaches closer to the needs and realities of people at the municipal level. This localised charter translates to the same intention as the Istanbul Convention and the CEDAW, a willingness of all European Union (EU) member states to decentralise and devolve gender equality policies, with the ultimate aim of bringing them closer to the people at the local level and ensuring the development of adaptable and actionable measures. The city of Osnabrück ratified this convention in 2012, demonstrating its political willingness to make this growing migrant hub as inclusive as possible for men, minorities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, girls, and Women. Osnabrück adopted its first Equality Action Plan (OGEAP)¹ in 2014 for a period of four years from 2014-2017 (OGEAP, 2021, p. 3).

This first Action Plan, coordinated by Katja Weber-Khan, aimed not only to combat all forms of discrimination against women and girls but also to create an *“awareness and educational system where people should be aware and informed that every decision can affect gender equality”*

(Engagement Global, 2018, p. 11). At the end of the first plan, the municipality launched the second plan, 2021-2025, which is due to be completed this year. Built on the successes and challenges of the first plan, which was too compact due to its 49 individual measures (OGEAP, 2021, p.3) the second plan redefined approaches and actionable goals, based on six core policy fields, derived from the nine policy fields of the ECE.

Strong of this background, the municipality is accountable to the people regarding the effectiveness of its policies and measures. This research is grounded in Germany's long-standing efforts to combat all forms of discrimination and gender inequalities at all levels,. Therefore, this research poses the following research questions: How does the Equality Action Plan of Osnabrück reflect comprehensive gender dynamics? To what extent does the Equality Action Plan of Osnabrück contribute to reducing gender inequalities across municipal policy fields?

The paper posits that the Equality Action Plan of Osnabrück, by embedding gender-sensitive and intersectional measures across multiple municipal policies, contributes to the reducing gender inequalities in the city. However, there could be an assessment that the measures of the Osnabrück Equality Action Plan do not significantly affect the persistence of gender inequalities across intersectional groups and dimensions.

¹This abbreviation will be used throughout the document to refer, to the Osnabrück Equality Action Plan

1. The Osnabrück Equality Action Plan (2021-2025) through the lens of the Gender Migration Index

The Gender Migration Index (GMI) framework underscores the strengths of the Osnabrück Equality Action Plan by assessing the extent to which gender dynamics are recognised and addressed through gender-responsive approaches. This gender dynamic is examined across three key dimensions: content, engagement, and commitment (Golesorkhi, 2018, p. 13). The results of the GMI reveal that the OGEAP presents an overall strong moderate presence of gender dynamics across these three dimensions, although with specific policies requiring considerable attention.

This result further outlines the holistic approach and commitment of Osnabrück to ensuring gender equality at all levels, as illustrated by the mentoring program “Demokratie.Macht.Integration”, where the municipality opens doors for marginalised communities, such as migrant communities, to participate in local politics, as well as the “The girl can do it program”, designed for girls and young women with a migration background often affected by traditional roles” (Engagement Global, 2018, p. 11). This mentoring program represents a significant step forward for the municipality in effectively ensuring active local political participation and representation.

However, the GMI sectoral analysis reveals considerable fragmentation of gender dynamics, illustrated by the dominance of unidimensional analysis between men and women, where other social groups appear to be overlooked and less mentioned for example, migrant women, not explicitly mentioned, ‘but phrased as individual with migration background, only mention 4 times in the entire plan; people with disabilities, who are also only mentioned 2 times in the entire plan.

The measure of ensuring parity in the representation of women in podium or panel discussions, for instance, demonstrates a lack of intersectional approach, especially considering that, for instance, there is already a representation gap of migrant diaspora in general and Black/African diaspora in particular on traditional

German media (Sintia Kapleu, 2025), which by virtue of their background are already discriminated against. This unidimensional analysis is also present in the field of planning and sustainable development, where there are limited mentions and engagement of gender dynamics, with women only mentioned once, and people with disability or older people not mentioned at all. Although the “mobility Future” project stems from the disproportionate needs and usage patterns between men and women (OGEAP, p.13), rising from multiple factors, it failed to mention issues specific to women and men with disabilities, as well as migrant women, as highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (CEDAW, p.5).

The GMI analysis reveals that among the six policy fields in the OGEAP, three of them, namely, **policy 1: Political Role of the Municipality**, **policy 5: Planning and Sustainable Development**, and **policy 6: Town Twinning and Cooperation**, have limited mention of gender dynamics across the three dimensions of analysis, outlining a considerable lack of gender-responsive measures. However, the three other policies, namely, **Policy 2: General Framework for Equality**, **Policy 3: Municipality as an Employer**, and **Policy 4: Municipality as a Service Provider**, sufficiently mention these gender dynamics, reflecting a strong gender-responsive approach. The results of the GMI analysis remain mixed between a less gendered responsive approach and a sufficient one.

This discrepancy highlights the intersectional gap in the plan, which primarily considered intersectionality as a generalised solidarity, rather than designing a plan that considers intersectionality in terms of marginalised subjectivities (Nash, 2008, p. 5), to ensure that gender dynamics are fully considered and addressed. This dichotomous result of the GMI prompts a deeper assessment of the OGEAP and its effectiveness in reducing and combating gender inequality between men and women in Osnabrück.

2. Reducing Gender Inequality in Osnabrück with the Equality Action Plan.

“

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any

Alice Walker

The city of Osnabrück's gender equality strategy is grounded in the cross-cutting goal of *“Intergenerational Justice, Equal Opportunities, Integration, and Participation”* (OGEAP, 2021, p. 3).

Policy Fields

1.

The Political Role of the Municipality

General Framework for Equality

2.

3.

Municipality as an Employer

Municipality as a Service Provider

4.

5.

Planning and Sustainable Development

Town twinning and cooperation

6.

Policy Field 1: The Political Role of the Municipality

Women's political representation and participation at the local level remain a priority in Osnabrück. This policy field builds on the Ist-Analysis², highlighting a discriminatory pattern of women in politics, particularly in exercising their civic rights (OGEAP, 2021, p. 5). In the fight against women's discrimination in politics, the city participated in the mentoring program for the sixth consecutive time, Frau.Macht.Demokratie, to ensure that *“women of all ages gain insights into the daily work of local politicians”* (OGEAP, p. 5).

This program, supported by the State of Lower Saxony, has enabled over 390 mentees to complete the 2019-2021 mentoring program across the region. One plausible outcome of this latest mentoring program was that 89 mentees won seats at the city or municipal council (*Stadt-, Gemeinderat*), 43 mentees won seats at district council (*Ortsrat*), 11 mentees at the county council (*Kreistag*) and 2 were elected mayors (*Bürgermeisterin*), with mentees age ratio being 30 years (Nds.MS, 2022, pp. 14–15 & 21).

However, out of these 390 mentees, only 16 had a migration background, with 8 having at least one parent from Europe and 8 with at least one parent from outside Europe (Nds.MS, 2022, p. 21). This overall low representation of women with a migration background at the regional and local level, tends to be obstructed by a generalised solidarity of intersectionality, which although acknowledges that individuals, regardless of their social position, are shaped by the interplay of various identities, often overlook intersectional marginalised subjectivities, which potentially obscure the struggle of those at the intersections of multiple oppressions (Nash, p.5-8, 2008).

²Describes the current status quo of equality-relevant activities that are the result of the initiative of the Osnabrück City Administration or are supported by it financially or with personnel.

This situation leads to a sort of political invisibility, in which issues primarily affecting the lives of singular subordinate members, in this case, women, are more easily framed as issues affecting the group as a whole than issues affecting members with more intersecting subordinate identities, for example migrant women (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, pp. 385–386).

In response to the persistent underrepresentation of people with a migration background, the City of Osnabrück launched the mentoring program *Demokratie.Macht.Integration* in May 2025, with an official start date in September 2025 and an end date in June 2026. As the first initiative of its kind, the program aims to enhance political participation by reflecting the city's diversity, where 34.8% of residents have a migration background, with women accounting for 49.6% and men for 50.4% of this group (OS Stadt, 2024, p. 5).

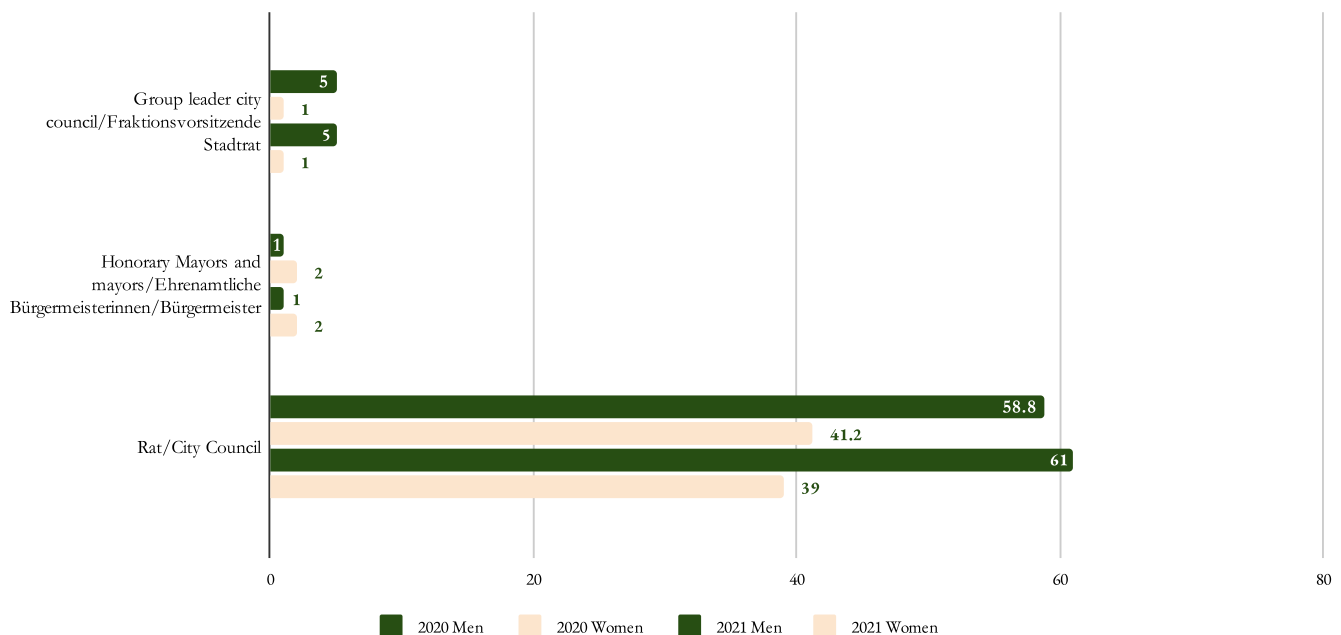
Building on this background, the 2020, 2021, and 2022 Gender Data Reports (GDR) present a snapshot of the gender political representation in Osnabrück,

highlighting a 2.2% decrease in 2022 of women in the city council, from 41.2% in 2020 to 39%, as presented in Figure 1 below.

This decrease is partly explained, on the one hand, by parental leaves being undervalued, and on the other, by standardised procedures that tend to privilege uninterrupted careers, leading to the exclusion of women with non-linear paths (Interview with the Equality Office, July 2025). This reality highlights the concern mentioned in the action plan, which aims to “enable elected representatives to balance their private life, work, and public duties, and combat stereotypical gender roles” (OGEAP, 2021, p. 5).

The gender gap is also significant when looking at the percentage of women and men in the Interest group (*Politische Interessenvertretung*³), where women occupy only 10% of the positions versus 90%. The youth parliament program also presents a considerable gender gap, with only 28% of girls for 72% of boys in the parliament.

Figure 1: Gender representation in Osnabrück



Source: Gender data report 2020 & 2021

³ Senior Citizens' Advisory Board, Disabled People's Forum, AK Education, Migration Advisory Board, Tenants' Association

Our Recommendations

01.

Maintain the mentoring program *Demokratie.Macht.Integration* as a long-term initiative to ensure ongoing political participation and representation of people with a migration background.

02.

Develop inclusive and comprehensive policies that encourage girls to participate in the youth parliament, ensuring demographic and equal representation in a way that their presence is not only symbolic but surely participatory.



There is no true social revolution without the liberation of women.

Thomas Sankara

“The general framework for gender equality is based on the recognition that, despite the prohibition of discrimination, many people face disadvantages based on characteristics such as gender, age, disability, origin, religion or belief, or sexual identity or orientation.” (OGEAP, 2021, p.6). The holistic approach of this policy is grounded in three-dimensional concepts: the structural dimension, the symbolic dimension, and the subject-related dimension (GDR, 2020-2023).

The Structural Dimension: defined as *“inequality through positions in the economy, politics and culture in which wealth, power and prestige are distributed”* (GDR, 2020, p.4). Structural inequality remain one of the critical challenges faced by the municipality and the city as a whole, especially when observing the unequal representation of women, especially in business, which became a core measure for the city, to “support and increase women active participative role in business”, through financial support and cooperation with organisation such as the *Koordinierungsstelle Frau und Betrieb e.V.*, regular awareness program with the *Infotag Wiedereinstieg* and targeted conference on *Frauen in Führung* (OGEAP, 2021, p.7). However, these measures fall short in supporting, but especially increasing, women in business leadership positions. The GDRs indicate a significant overall decrease in women in leadership positions, particularly in business.

This is particularly evident with the complete drop-off of women in top management positions, from 3.6% in 2020 to 0% in 2023.

Factors contributing to this drop-off are multiple and are somehow explained by a strong stereotypical gender role, especially when it comes to the question of the care sector: *“Frauen nach wie vor stark daran gehindert sind, strukturell Führungsverantwortung zu übernehmen, wenn wir daran denken, zum einen, dass sie einfach viel mehr Aufgaben übernehmen. Im Care-bereich also wenn die häusliche Pflege von Kindern, aber auch von Angehörigen[...]*” (Interview with Equality Office, July 2025) enhanced by persistent biases in recruitment and selection, where men are automatically trusted with more responsibility than women: *“und zudem ist es auch sodass, wenn wir Gucken bei Auswahlgesprächen wie Vorurteile beispielsweise fungieren, dass Männern de facto per se mehr zutraut als Frauen, und dann kann es natürlich zu solchen Entwicklungen kommen, dass diese Zahlen auch wieder sinken.”* (Equality Office, July 2025).

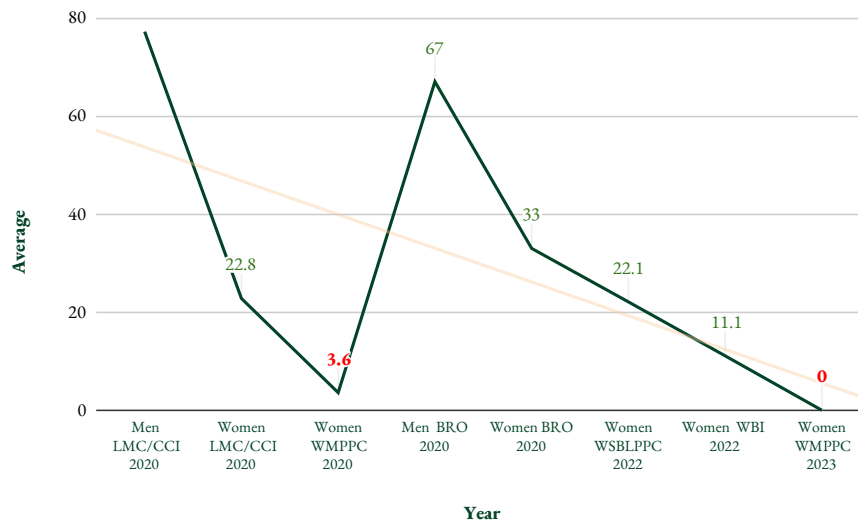
Despite supporting gender diversity in leadership positions, as a key measure developed by the city to address the structural gender inequalities faced by women in business and leadership roles, Osnabrück’s recent figures remain weak and worrisome compared to other cities and even the overall national trends. Women in leadership in IHK member companies sit at **22.8%** in Osnabrück (GDR, 2020, p.10), and women fall to **0%** in top management of large public/private companies by 2023, a statistic well below Germany’s 29% benchmarks for women in leadership overall⁴, compared to and Hannover, with over **21,3%** of women in leadership positions (Häfemeier, 2023, p. 5).

⁴ Frauen in Führungspositionen - Statistisches Bundesamt

The persistent decline in women's representation in business and leadership positions over the years, as illustrated by Figure 2 below, raises questions about the effectiveness of the measures developed in the OGEAP to improve and increase women's representation in business.

However, considering that the last GDR was conducted in 2023, it is challenging to say at this point whether there have been any improvements, stagnation, or even a further decline in women in business and leadership in Osnabrück.

Figure 2: Decrease in the number of women in leadership positions over time



Source: Gender Data Reports, 2020, 2021, 2023

Symbolic Dimension: defined as the “reproduction of structural inequality through gender-structured lifestyles and decisions, androcentrism and sexism as expressions of hierarchy” (GDR, p.4, 2020). The understanding of gender equality remains somewhat obstructed due to the widespread misconception of gender equality, which in the Osnabrück context is often understood as parity between men and women, as pointed out by the Equality Opportunity Office (EO): “Frauen haben de facto die gleichen Rechte”, and the impossibility of being discriminated against based on gender: “Es gibt diesen Rechtsanspruch, ja, niemand darf wegen seines Geschlechtes diskriminiert werden. Frauen können alles. Wir hatten eine Bundeskanzlerin. Wir haben jetzt eine Oberbürgermeisterin in der Stadt Osnabrück, und das lässt schnell den Trugschluss zu, dass Gleichstellung kein Thema mehr ist.” (Equality Office, July 2025).

The disparity in women's share of care work and even care responsibilities remains a key indicator, showing that

recognising gender equality as a driver of inclusion and integration does not necessarily result in gender justice, but reproduces structural inequality that prevents women from accessing leadership positions at an equal rate as men. The low presence of men in care work strongly signals the social challenge related to gender roles.

Subject-related Dimension: defined as the “production of Gender identity through everyday actions, norms and discourses (e.g. heteronormativity), and the derivation of specific personality traits from physical Reproductive functions” (GDR, 2020, p.4). The dualism of the “we” versus “they”, of different identities, reinforces the idea of “normativity” imposing the need to choose, and thus perpetuating gender inequality.

Promoting diversity is therefore a measure in line with the city's policy to directly address this dimension through the work of the Anti-Discrimination Office and the Equality Office, both of which function as institutional anchors for combating stereotyping, discrimination and ensuring diversity.

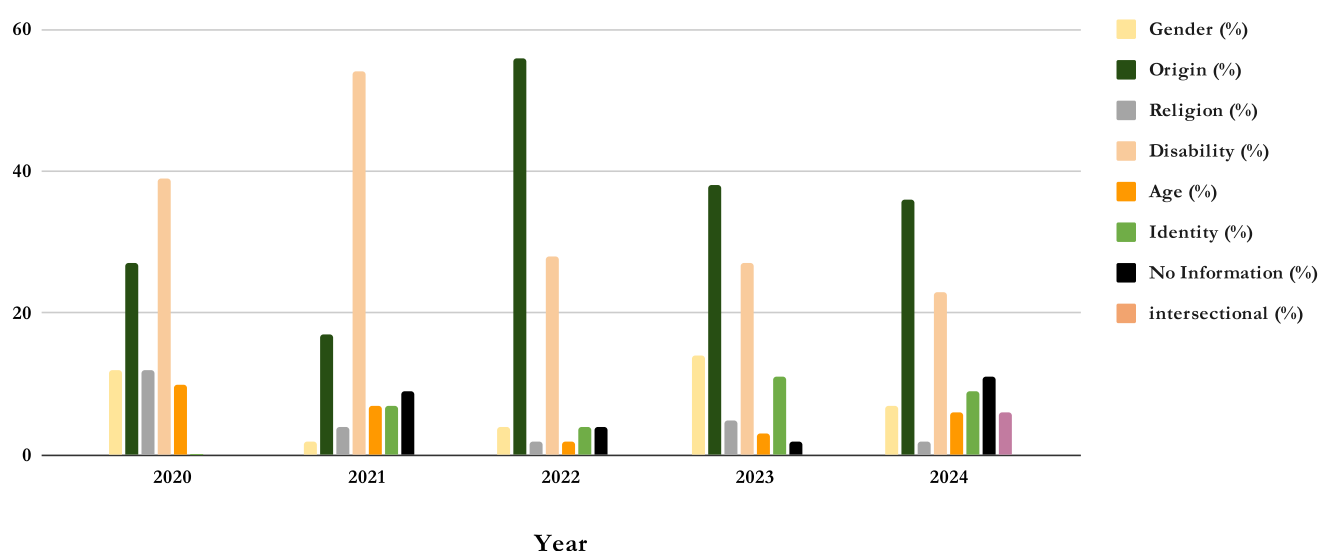
Promoting diversity in Osnabrück is more than a one-time measure: it represents a systemic and long-term policy approach, grounded in institutional practices, legal frameworks, and intersectional monitoring. However, the statistic remains concerning, and the effectiveness of the measure is questionable.

Between 2020 and 2024, the anti-discrimination office received over 241 discrimination requests and conducted approximately 317 consultations (Bereich Antidiskriminierungsbericht 2020 bis 2024).

The main social areas of discrimination are the workplace, housing, education, immigration offices, police and justice, public spaces, and leisure, as illustrated by Figure 4.

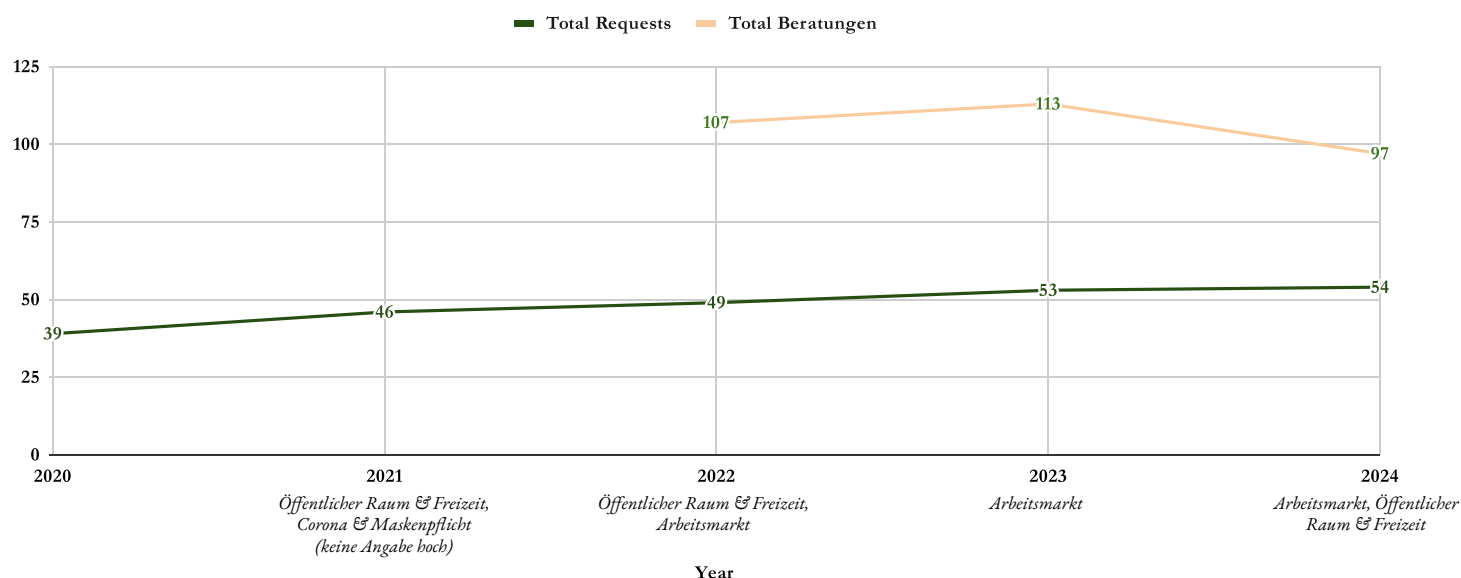
However, while, Figure 3 reveals patterns of discrimination based on demographic criteria, such as gender, origin, religion, disability and age, figure 6 shows specific social areas, such as the workplace, public spaces, and leisure, which are areas with a higher incidence of reported discrimination cases, primarily affecting women 60%, people with disabilities 30 % and individuals with a migration background 40%.

Figure 3: Patterns of Discrimination cases by demographic category



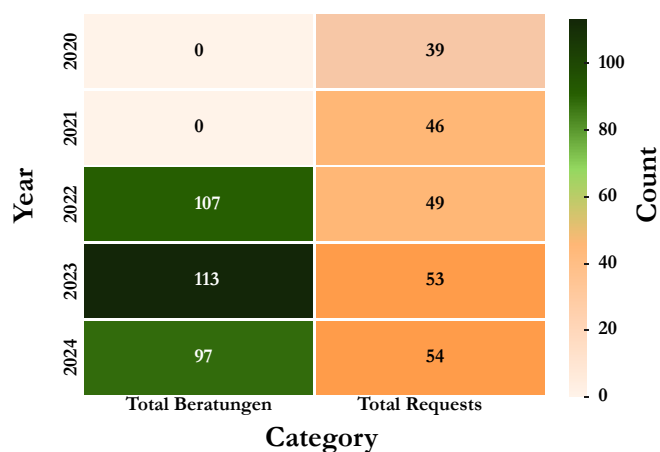
Source: Bereich Antidiskriminierungsbericht 2020 bis 2024

Figure 4: Statistics on the total number of requests at the anti-discrimination office over time



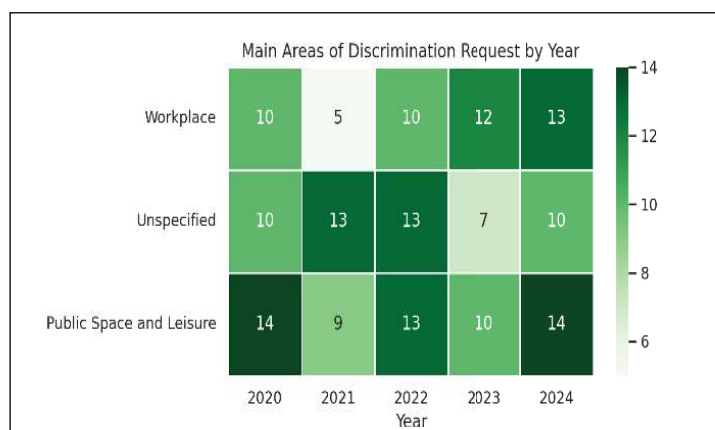
Source: Bereich Antidiskriminierungsbericht 2020 bis 2024

Figure 5: Total number of requests and counselling from 2020 to 2024

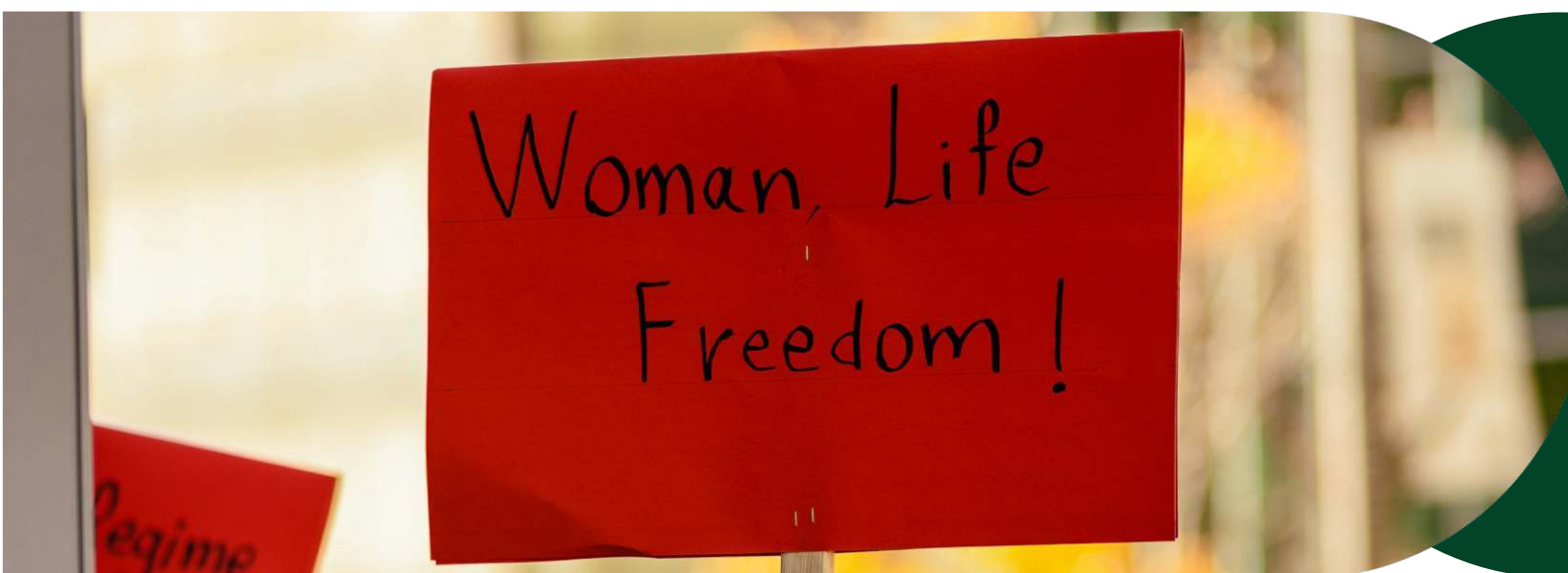


Source: Bereich Antidiskriminierungsbericht 2020 bis 2024

Figure 6: Overview of the main areas of discrimination requests from 2020 to 2024



Source: Bereich Antidiskriminierungsbericht 2020 bis 2024



These discrimination cases present a pattern not only linked to structural inequality but also to the limits of policy efficiency. A core challenge of the Anti-Discrimination Office lies in its human and material resources, as well as language barriers. With only one staff responsible for all discrimination cases, the city's demographic profile suggests a potential demand of around 417 consultations per working day for the entire population, or 167 per day from individuals with a migration background, to adequately cover the population. In stark contrast, the office handled a total of 317 consultations between 2022 and 2024, as displayed in Figure 5, averaging approximately 106 per year, which translates to only around 0.5 consultations per working day or two consultations per week (Bereich des Antidiskriminierungsbüros 2020–2024).

This mismatch highlights a significant loophole: many instances of discrimination remain unrecorded and unresolved simply because they cannot be processed. Moreover, if the sole staff falls sick or takes vacation, no consultations are possible at all, further deepening underreporting. Additionally, consultation is primarily offered in German and Arabic, leaving individuals speaking languages such as French, Spanish, or English underserved.

Build on this, the apparent “low” number of reported discrimination cases should not be interpreted as low prevalence, but rather as a symptom of inadequate structures and resources.

To close this gap, in addition to the CEDAW recommendation of the concluding observation of the ninth periodic report, to “*strengthen the mandate of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency and provide it with the authority necessary to file court cases, launch investigations and impose sanctions; ensure that it is provided with adequate human, technical and financial resources to implement its mandate effectively; and establish and sustain independent anti-discrimination offices in all federal States;*” (CEDAW, 2023, p.6); Osnabrück requires a bottom-up approach that empowers victims of discrimination to participate in mitigation processes, combined with sufficient staffing, mandatory training, binding structures, and transparent political backing (Interview with the Antidiscrimination Office, August 2025).



Our Recommendations

01.

The municipality should increase the number of staff with diverse expertise (e.g., linguistic, social, etc.), considering that a multidisciplinary team brings broader perspectives and innovative solutions, mainly to complex and intersectional challenges.

02.

The creation of paid internships and student assistant positions would not only provide much-needed support for ongoing activities but also foster youth engagement.

03.

Enhance financial resources to ensure long-term stability and the capacity to implement ambitious initiatives.

04.

Establish external consultation bodies. These bodies, acting as policy allies or gatekeepers of the city, would further ensure transparency and accountability, while also bringing in critical perspectives from outside the municipality.

05.

Improve the gender data collection system by aligning data with measures listed in the OGEAP, and systematically disaggregating data. By so doing, the city will be able to see cross-cutting cases of discrimination and define targeted measures which will serve as the foundation for evidence-based policies.

06.

Increase and support cooperation with CSOs, especially with migrant organisations.



“If we are going to see real development in the world, then our best investment is women”.

Desmond Tutu

In its role as an Employer, the municipality developed internal measures to ensure gender parity in all aspects of employment. In this effort, the municipality participated in creating and fostering a “*family-friendly working environment*,” aiming to ensure equitable work conditions and career development for all employees, regardless of gender. This effort led to the 2017 award to 41 companies in Osnabrück as best “family-service employer” (Geschäftsbericht, 2017, p.106).

The rationale behind this policy is rooted in the recognition that municipalities, as significant employers in the public sector, play a crucial role in establishing standards for gender-equal workplaces (Färber & Greiling, 2020). In Osnabrück’s case, this includes addressing persistent challenges such as gender pay gaps, unequal representation in leadership positions, occupational gender segregation, and insufficient work-life balance structures, issues that are common across the German public sector.

In a study in 2017, Willem Adema et al argued that Germany has solid foundational family-friendly measures; however, their implementation remains uneven across different regions and institutions, imprinted with a lack of capacity and willingness by local administrations to fully integrate work-life balance policies into their organisational culture (Willem Adema et al, 2017, p.42). In Osnabrück, the persistence of these challenges highlights a profound systemic and structural inequality.

However, when examining gender parity as a whole, although unevenly distributed across municipal services, notable advancements have been made in achieving gender parity in leadership roles within the municipality's companies.

According to the GDRs, the municipality, as an employer, has exceeded the parity threshold requirement of 45% for leadership positions (GDR, 2020). In 2021, women held 46.1% of department head positions, marking a seventeen-point increase from the previous year. However, there was a slight decline of two points in this percentage by 2022. This trend underscores both the progress made and the ongoing challenges in maintaining gender parity in municipal leadership positions.

This result suggests a consistent effort by the municipality to address vertical segregation in top municipal leadership. This effort is fueled by the national expansion of gender quotas in supervisory boards (FüPoG II, 2021), which indirectly influenced local administrations and municipal companies by raising awareness of women’s underrepresentation and providing orientation for improvements. However, when disaggregated by municipal services, a clear pattern of horizontal gender segregation emerges. Women remain concentrated in care and social sectors, which in turn exacerbates the gender pay gap, a pattern that Willem Adema et al. phrase as “*the main-earner model*” (Willem Adema et al., 2017, p. 36).

From an intersectional perspective, when looking at marginalised groups such as migrant women and individuals with disabilities, however, the data in Osnabrück are largely silent. This gap is particularly striking, given the national landscape, where the representation of people with a migration background in public-sector leadership is remarkably low, at 4.6% (Statista, 2025). Thus, while women’s overall participation in leadership is increasing, there is no publicly available data in Osnabrück disaggregating women’s leadership by migration background, nor do the GDRs provide such statistics (GDR, 2020-2023).

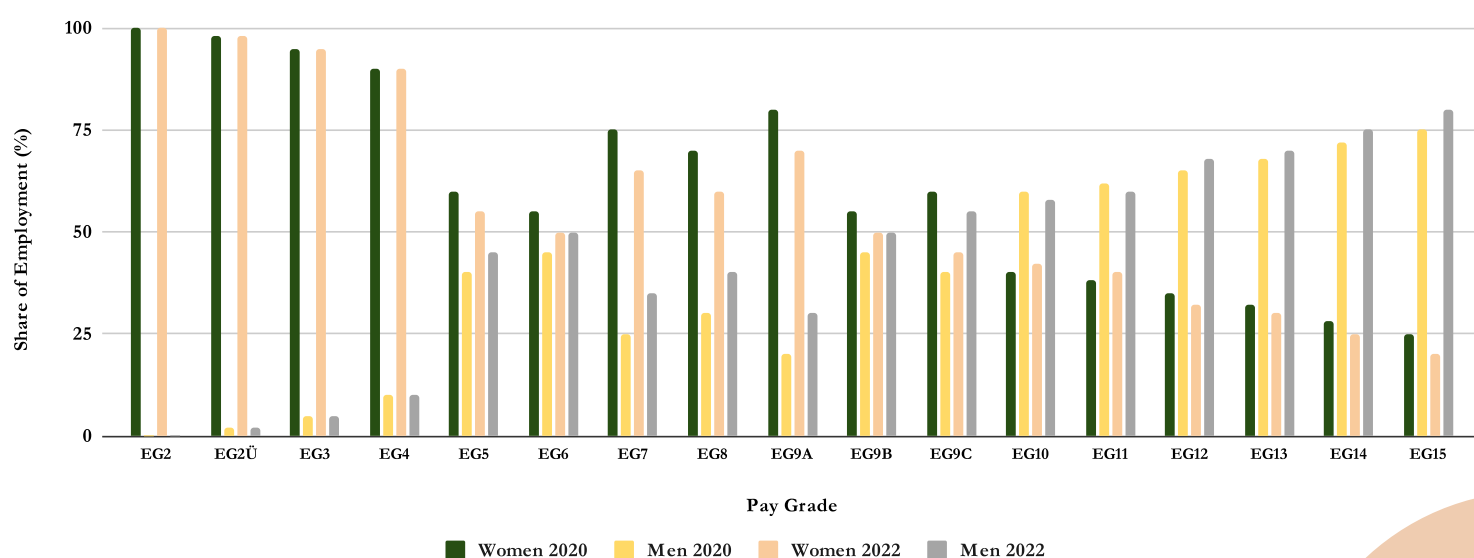
According to the 2020 gender report, women account for 64% of employees in the core administration of municipal services, excluding fire and social services, with a slight decrease of 2% in the number of female employees and an increase of 2% in the number of male employees in 2022. Yet, despite their numerical majority, an apparent pay disparity persists; men, who represent only 36% of employees in 2020 and 38% in 2022, are concentrated in the higher pay grades and therefore earn more on average than women.

This imbalance is clearly illustrated in the Figure 7 below. In Germany, the overall gender pay gap is 18%, and in Lower Saxony, it is 15% (Statista, 2025). However, obtaining an exact figure for the gender pay gap at the local level remains a challenge, since data are primarily collected at the national, regional and district levels.

The Statista 2025 report, which presents disaggregated gender pay gap clusters by district with the highest and lowest disparities, does not include Osnabrück. This absence can be read in two ways: on the one hand, it underscores the city's commitment and progressive efforts to ensure equal pay for work of equal value and to guarantee fair and transparent promotion and career opportunities; on the other hand, it also sends a mixed signal, as it may reflect stagnant efforts or a lack of measurable progress in addressing the gender pay gap locally.

At the same time, the Equality Office highlights gender pay disparity as a critical issue that must be addressed, a challenge made even more pressing by the lack of precise local data on the gender pay gap (Equality Office, July 2025).

Figure 7: Core Administration Employees by Pay Grades from 2020 to 2022



Source: Gender Data Reports 2020 & 2022

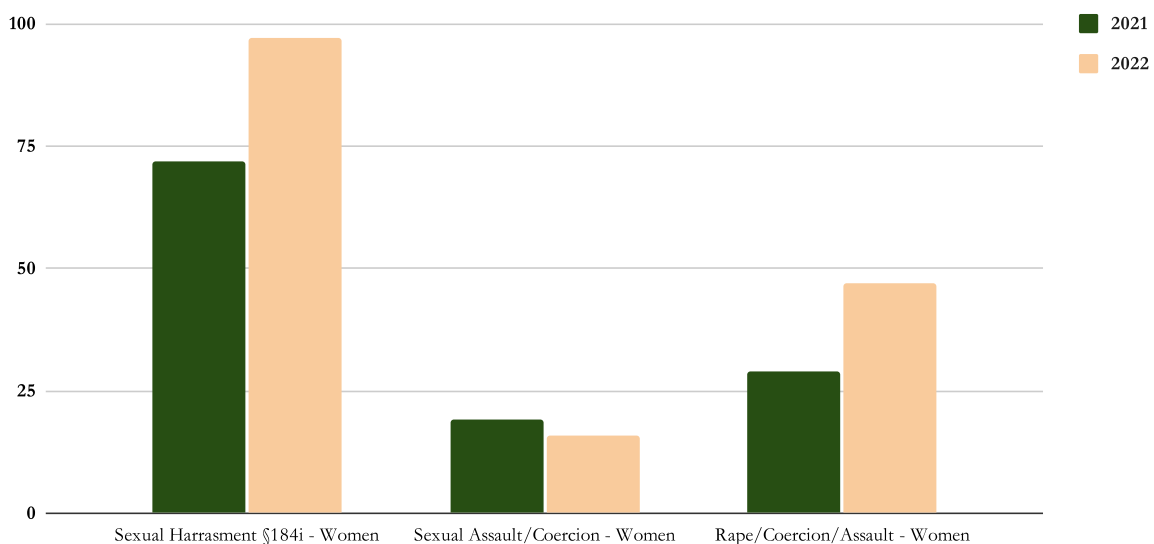
When addressing the question of sexual harassment, the city also developed measures to address sexual or sexualised harassment at the workplace. The gender data reports reveal contrasting dynamics in sexual violence patterns in Osnabrück, especially based on the German Criminal Code §184i, §177 and §178⁵. When looking at the sexual harassment figure of the §184i StGB (section 1), defined as: *“Whoever touches another person in a sexual manner, and thereby harasses that person, incurs a penalty of imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine, unless the offence is subject to a more severe penalty under other provisions of this Division.”*, harassment increased sharply, with the number of women victims rising from 72 women in 2021 to 92 in 2022 (GDR, p.9, 2023)

In contrast, sexual assault and coercion cases §177 (section 1) *“Whoever, against a person’s discernible will, performs sexual acts on that person or has that person perform sexual acts on them, or causes that person to perform or acquiesce to sexual acts being performed on or by a third person incurs a*

penalty of imprisonment for a term of between six months and five years.”, decrease slightly from 19 women victims of sexual assault and sexual coercion, to 16 women in 2022, suggesting a marginal decline in more severe coercive acts. In the case of rape, coercion, and sexual assault §178 *“If, by committing sexual assault, sexual coercion or rape (section 177), the offender causes the victim’s death at least recklessly, the penalty is imprisonment for life or imprisonment for a term of at least 10 years.”*, the number of women victims rose drastically from 29 in 2021 to 47 in 2022, which points to an escalation in the severity or reporting of these offences, as shown by figure 8 below.

These data illustrate a mixed picture in which, while some forms of sexual coercion appear to decrease, broader categories of rape and assault, and harassment continue to rise. This indicates that structural prevention efforts need to be emphasised.

Figure 8: Reported sexual Harassment and Abuse in Osnabrück 2021-2022



Source: Gender Data Report, 2023

⁵Translation provided by Prof. Dr Michael Bohlander. Translation completely revised and regularly updated by Ute Reusch. The translation includes the amendment(s) to the Act by Article 2 of the Act of 22 November 2021 (Federal Law Gazette I, p. 4906): German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch – StGB)

Our Recommendation



The municipality should develop a binding gender equality monitoring and data collection system across all pay grades and services, with annual reporting data on gender pay gaps, and defined targeted policies to efficiently reduce the gender pay gap in Osnabrück.





Some people ask: “Why the word feminist? Why not just say you are a believer in human rights, or something like that?” Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general, but to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded. It would be a way of denying that the problem of gender targets women.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

This policy field outlines seven areas in which the municipality addresses gender equality through different measures when providing services for its citizens. These areas include education, health, social welfare and social services, housing, family compatibility, care and profession, sports, leisure, culture, as well as gender-specific violence. While the variety of measures and issues considered in this policy field is commendable, there remains a lack of publicly available information on some of the measures mentioned in the report, with some remaining opaque in their definition and scope regarding gender equality.

When looking at the compatibility between family, care, and professional areas, the figures are mixed. The city has an entrenched need to deconstruct gender stereotypical roles, which will enable the reconsideration of care work not only as a female responsibility. A study conducted by Destatis, cited by Willem et al, outlined that women aged between 30 and 44 years spend an average of 4.73 hours per day on childcare and other unpaid work, than men, who spend an average of only 2.52 hours per day on these tasks (Willem Adema et al., 2017, p. 42). The 2022 GDR presents a pattern in which women remain heavily concentrated in care work, whether informal or formal.

Nationally, the gender care gap indicates that 43.4 % of women spend more time per day on unpaid care work than men. In Osnabrück, 88.5% of single parents are women, a proportion higher than the national average, indicating that care responsibilities fall disproportionately on them (GDR, 2022). Women constitute 83% of the care workforce, while men account for just 17%. A figure highlighting the marginal participation of men, reinforcing the perception of care as a female-dominated field.

Although there is a noticeable improvement in the coverage of children, especially those under 3, in 2021, the coverage rate of 62.2% still falls short of meeting the target of 70%, which continues to put pressure on women, who disproportionately must step in to fill the care gap. This discrepancy further confirms that, when considering the ratio of parental allowance, over 1493 women received basic parental allowance for every 748 men, with 860 women taking parental leave (12 months) for 476 men (2 months), reinforcing gender roles, cements women as primary caregivers and considerably affects women's career development negatively.

Therefore, women in Germany often fall into the part-time trap, as they frequently take longer career breaks and subsequently work part-time after returning to the labour market. The 2020 GDR shows that in Osnabrück, 78% of women dominate part-time work. Thus, the labour integration rate of men with children is almost 36% higher than that of women in the same type of benefit community (GDR, 2020, pp. 18-20), a figure further reinforcing the fact that Germany has one of the highest proportions of women working part-time in Europe at just under 50%.

When looking at the measure of gender specific violence, the trend seems to be nonlinear, with a spike in GBV in 2020, a period marked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To combat all forms of violence against women, the city is implementing a case management system for high-risk cases of domestic violence, to reduce serious excesses of violence and femicides (OGEAP, 2021, p.10), in collaboration with numerous internal services, such as the women's advice center, the autonomous women's shelter, among others.

However, Osnabrück presents a peculiar structural character of GBV mainly affecting women, girls and children. The gender data reports show a rise in sexual harassment against women from 72 in 2021 to 97 in 2022, with an overall increase in deaths of women being rape, sexually coerced and assaulted from 29 in 2021 to 47 in 2022, indicating not only an escalating harassment trend but also a shift towards more severe cases being reported or recorded.

While there has been a decrease in certain offences, such as sexual abuse of people under protection (from 3 to 1), child abuse (from 40 to 29), and digital abuse (from 4 to 3) in 2022 and 46 women have been rejected in 2022, by the Frauenberatungstelle, due to limited capacities (Frauenberatungstelle, 2022, p.6), highlight a persistent structural vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are primarily linked to resources, both human and material. This is particularly striking given that in 2020, Osnabrück recorded 86 high-risk cases of domestic violence, primarily perpetrated by intimate partners. Nationally, in 2023, 79.2% of the 155 women killed were murdered by a partner or ex-partner, while locally, 88 % of women in Osnabrück were directly affected by violence, an increase of 18% compared to 2021 (Frauenberatungstelle, p.9, 2023), which was perpetrated by intimate partners. Together, these figures underscore the urgent and ongoing need for comprehensive prevention and support measures against GBV.

However, the effectiveness of the municipality's services depends on numerous factors such as human and material resources, personal engagement and capacities. So far, noticeable challenges related to limited resources, language diversity, and data availability make it challenging for the municipality to deliver adequate services.

The Frauenberatungstelle 2023 report highlights that support services urgently need to be expanded in terms of personnel and accommodation to cope with the volume of counselling requests (Frauenberatungstelle, 2023, p. 18), which shortages jeopardise compliance with the Istanbul Convention standard, a recommendation stressed by the Committee of the Parties Council of Europe convention, on increasing the number of shelters with the aim of

obtaining an adequate geographical distribution(11), (IC-CP/Inf(2022)8, p.4).

Furthermore, services offered in multiple languages are, in many cases, only possible because social workers, counsellors, or administrative staff themselves speak different languages and can thereby offer their services in one or two languages different from German, or as they are willing to actively include translators in the service.

On another note, reports of long-term vacancies of strategic positions, such as in the gender equality office, and the Frauenberatungstelle coupled with unfilled positions, increase the lack of human resources and/or deepen the lack of appropriate and timely evaluations, consultations and assessments (Discher, 2024, n.p.; Frauenberatungstelle, 2023, pp. 6-7; see also Anti-discrimination office, August 2025). In consequence, some of the services offered remain limited in their scope, not least in reaching marginalised groups such as migrant women or women facing language barriers or who cannot be adequately evaluated.

However, one core lapse of this policy field is that it does not address one of the municipality's core service provisions, namely the immigration office, a service directly in contact with citizens in the area of administrative and bureaucratic matters. However, it is precisely here that citizens necessarily come into contact with the municipality, and where they may face discrimination, stereotypes, or disadvantages based on their gender, age, or language abilities, among other factors. Between 2021 and 2024, over 20 cases of discrimination were reported within this office, with origin being identified as one of the primary causes of discrimination (Bericht des Antidiskriminierungsbüros, 2025).

Although support for, for example, translation services in the municipality's bureaucratic apparatus exists, a report by the anti-discrimination office reveals that administrative staff members may be unaware of these options, may hesitate to make use of them due to financial or organisational concerns, or they themselves may have prejudices that are then directed towards citizens (Anti-discrimination office, August 2025).

Our Recommendation



The municipality should expand and stabilise GBV support infrastructure, aligning with Istanbul Convention standards (1 shelter place per 10,000 inhabitants).

By securing permanent funding for the Frauenberatungsstelle and Frauenhaus, chronic capacity shortages, both human and material, will be addressed.

“

I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I
am a free human being with an
independent will

Charlotte Brontë

This policy field aims to redesign urban planning and mobility to take into account the sociodemographic realities of men and women, who exhibit distinctive patterns in usage and mobility needs. One of the city's core priorities is to “develop a sustainable city logistics concept” (OGEAP, 2021, p. 13). The goal is to reduce the mobility and transport gender gap, which significantly affects women due to factors such as income, care responsibilities, and working hours.

Therefore, the city mobility design aims, on the one hand, to enhance cycling in terms of safety, attractiveness, and everyday commuting, and on the other, to implement e-cargo bikes as an environmentally friendly alternative to cars. On this note, the result of the Mobility in Cities studies shows a progressive move toward more eco-friendly mobility and transport means, with “88 % of Osnabrückers enjoy walking; 78 % enjoy cycling; 65 % enjoy driving; only 33 % enjoy using public transport. Pedestrian traffic rated best; only 44 % rate cycling conditions as satisfactory or better.” (Mobilität in Städten - SrV 2023, p.2, 2025).

This increase in cycling also results from the implementation of the “Protected Bike Lane”, which aims to “create a particularly safe and comfortable cycle path on streets heavily congested by car traffic.” When examining the usage pattern, the data reveal that men and women share more similar mobility patterns.

In Osnabrück, SrV 2023 data reveal that while 73% of men and 69% of women report car availability in their household, a relatively small gender gap. When disaggregated by employment and age, 83% of employed persons have access to a car, compared with only 44% of nonemployed individuals, indicating that labour market status significantly influences access to mobility resources (Mobilität in Städten - SrV 2023, p. 6, 2025).

Mobility purposes reinforce this divide: 23% of men's trips are work-related, compared to 18% of women's, reflecting men's stronger attachment to car-heavy commuting. Meanwhile, women record a slightly higher share of shopping trips (27% versus 25%). Overall, cars account for 28% of all trips, with men's mobility being more monomodal and car-centric, and women's mobility being more multimodal, drawing more heavily on public transportation and active modes.

This is also explained by the fact that women tend to make more short, multipurpose trips (e.g., errands, care, accompaniment) and fewer long, single-purpose commutes; hence, their route choices and modal mixes reflect both role expectations and mobility constraints (Anke Kläver, 2021). These patterns highlight that mobility inequalities are less about absolute car access and more about how employment status and gendered social roles structure everyday travel.

However, although there is a comprehensive study on mobility behaviour between men and women, data are yet to show the different mobility needs of women and marginalised groups, which are often not directly displayed in planning and design. In this sense, the increase in bike use may not be solely explained by the necessity of having an environmentally friendly policy, but also by the fact that women exhibit different mobility behaviours, which are more diverse, social, and non-linear (Anke Kläver, 2021).

Our Recommendation



Have available disaggregated data on mobility usage, not only for men and women, but also for minority groups, such as people with disabilities, migrants, and sociodemographic variables like employment status, marital status, age, etc. Disaggregated data reveals who is excluded, guides targeted fixes, and verifies that mobility measures benefit everyone, not just the average user.

Respect my existence
or EXPECT my resistance

WE are created EQUAL

NO means NO

A WOMAN'S place is in the REVOLUTION

Unite with love, resist with love

THE present is female

my BODY my choice

Women's rights are

HUMAN

rights



Having more feminists in government and public spaces would change thinking towards a better livelihood for all.

Asma'u Joda

Osnabrück present a distinctive figure when it comes to partnership and cooperation. Beyond the classical understanding of partnership and cooperation, Osnabrück, along with its European cities, has developed a form of cooperation known as town twinning. Osnabrück and its European twin cities are the only cities to have cultivated this intensive form of partnership through the “City Ambassadors” program since 1965.

These ambassadors, mainly aged between 18 and 30 years old, serve a one-year term in the Osnabrück city administration, with the primary tasks of representing their town, organising student exchanges, conferences, institutional visits, and public events. Osnabrück has therefore hosted over 200 young women and men over 60 years and is connected in a special way with eleven cities: Angers in France, Çanakkale in Turkey, Derby in England, Evansville in the US, Gmünd in Austria, Greifswald in Germany, Gwangmyeong South Korea, Haarlem in the Netherlands, Hefei in China, Tver in Russia, Vila Real in Portugal (OGEAP, 2021, p.14).

Through the “*Städtebotschafter 6*” program, these twin cities not only exchange official delegations but are also actively involved in cultural, educational, and social

projects, most importantly, promoting mutual learning processes that support and advance equality between women and men.

In Osnabrück, for example, city ambassadors organise workshops, film screenings, cooking events, and trips to bring the idea of partnership between people a reality. Despite these decades of exchange and collaboration, the main prospect of exchange, although reinforcing diplomatic and friendly relations, has shown less emphasis on specific gender related programs, but instead gravitates around sociocultural and institutional exchange, such as the Osnabrück City Festival week, where music groups and people from Angers, Çanakkale, and other cities visit the European village. Collaboration among the cities' officials, as well as the population, falls short in demonstrating how these partnerships have supported the advancement of gender equality between men and women.

When examining international partnerships, international awareness campaigns facilitate easy tracing through participation in initiatives such as the One Billion Rising campaign, International Women's Day, and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, in which Osnabrück regularly participates. These campaigns not only raise awareness about violence against women, but also display a strong signal of international solidarity in that sense. The One Billion Rising Campaign, for instance, emphasises global solidarity and collective strength (One Billion Rising, 2025). This is also an evident and mobilising initiative, but its concrete impact on victims' access to support services remains difficult to assess.

However, the overall observation of the policy does not present subsequent measures and information to clearly see how these partnerships foster gender equality in Osnabrück.

Our Recommendation



The city should develop a more comprehensive partnership manifesto on gender equality. This manifesto will serve as mutual guidelines for these twin cities to enhance their collaboration and learn best practices for reducing gender inequality and fostering gender justice.



Conclusion

The overall design of this analysis reveals that while the OGEAP contributes to the progressive reduction of gender inequality in Osnabrück, it also presents noticeable lapses that perpetuate gender inequality among men, women, and intersectional groups and dimensions. In this sense, the OGEAP is a cross-cutting principle that spans governance, education, labour, and care structures, echoing not only broader trends in Osnabrück but also in Niedersachsen as a whole. Measures such as the gender data reports enable the collection of gender data and the tracking of progress, particularly in terms of participation, representation, and visibility of women across different fields.

However, the persistent structural barriers remain; for example, women are still underrepresented in top management positions, 0% in Osnabrück public enterprises in 2023, and gender-based violence shows alarming trends of escalation. These reports, as an immediate window of observation, show that inequality is not only structural but also symbolic, marked by gender care gap, gender pay gap, vertical and horizontal segregations, and mobility usage disparities. Considering the sum of these factors, achieving equality requires more than single measures; it demands a culture shift in municipal policy design, with sufficient and available resources, and binding implementation.

While progress is visible in women's participation, in some areas of gender-based violence, groups facing multiple discrimination (migrant women, single parents, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ communities) still experience compounded disadvantages. It is therefore crucial for the municipality to develop gender equality measures beyond binary approach of men and women, and beyond considering intersectionality as a generalised solidarity, in this sense of considering women inequality in the city, as affecting all of them equally, instead by considering intersectionality as a marginalised subjectivities, which firstly acknowledge the presence of different groups but also how they are discriminated against due to their compounded intersectional identities.

Considering that gender equality is not a one-time plan, we recommend that the third Equality Action Plan consider intersectionality not as an auxiliary approach, but as the primary approach to ensure that all groups can relate to and identify with the different measures being defined and implemented. Furthermore, we encourage the annual reporting of the Gender Data Reports to ensure periodic evaluation of the plan.



In the place of gender equality, I prefer gender justice, because all human lives are equal, justice is the missing crown.

Author's Note

This analysis is primarily based on translated German texts into English. Although every effort has been made to maintain accuracy, some terms and concepts may not fully align with their original contextual meanings. Nuances embedded in the German administrative, legal, or cultural framework might therefore appear either slightly overgeneralized or understated in translation. Readers are encouraged to consult the original German documents for precise terminology and contextual meaning.

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