

EGGE – EC’s Expert Group on Gender and Employment

Supplementary information regarding policies to promote gender equality and employment

Sweden

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**Supplementary information regarding policies to promote gender
equality and employment: Sweden**

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**REPORT FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S GROUP
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1. Initiatives in the NAP 2001 in order to reduce gender segregation in Sweden

1.1 Background

The Lisbon targets are no problems from a Swedish perspective. Instead, problems remain with high levels of segregation and rare number of women in decision-making positions in Swedish business life. There is still a high level of vertical gender segregation in Sweden.

To come to terms with this problem, organisational changes for decreasing segregation have to be done on plant or organisational level. Due to the fact that processes on this level are hard to affect with political tools, active participation by social partners is imperative.

The NAP 2001 has integrated gender perspectives into pillar 1 and in the issues of education and training but it is still difficult to find in pillars 2 and 3. Despite the adoption of gender mainstreaming as a government policy, the lack of a gender perspective, as well as mainstreaming, is still very obvious in these pillars. A more egalitarian practice in regards to working conditions, and not only recruitment policies and wage settings, is also still missing.

2. Gender equality initiatives

The Swedish government has stated that its overall objective in regards to gender equality is a society in which women and men have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all areas of life.¹ Gender equality perspectives should permeate politics on all levels in society. Nevertheless, prioritised areas are *power and influence, power and financial independence, men and gender equality, freedom from gender-related violence, and development of methods for mainstreaming*. The overall goals for the Swedish gender equality policy are to make it easier to reconcile of work and parenthood, and to decrease the financial differences between families with and without children.

¹ www.naring.regeringen.se/fragor/jamstalldhet/

2.1 Institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming

According to the Swedish government, the purpose of mainstreaming as a strategy is to make different situations and conditions for men and women visible. This does not involve the exclusion of specific measures towards increased gender equality. Gender perspectives should be in the fore when assessing questions affecting single individuals and when analysing consequences of changes for women and men. In this way, traditional “male” arenas and policies have to take gender into consideration. Machinery for implementing mainstreaming has been developed and different ways of assessing effects of these measures have been proposed.

The mainstreaming approach has been developed on central, regional and local levels. Methods and approaches have been developed centrally but the different levels choose their way of appliance. There is therefore not one way of implementing the strategy of mainstreaming or gender assessment.

On the central level, the official committee’s proposals, which form the basis for government bills, are obliged to analyse their proposals from a gender equality perspective. The gender equality perspective is also included in the government’s management of public administration through the instructions or “appropriation directives”, which specify the priorities for the next 12-month period, that are given to the central agencies.²

On the regional level, Gender Equality Experts have been operating in each of Sweden’s 21 counties since 1995. They should act as a resource for the county administrative board executive when introducing gender equality perspectives.³

On the local level, the “JämKom” project is still active. The aim of the project is to generate new knowledge and develop new methods of integrating a gender perspective into local authority activities.⁴

On all levels, equal opportunities training programmes for civil servants and politicians have been set up.

² www.naring.regeringen.se/fragor/jamstalldhet/

³ www.naring.regeringen.se/fragor/jamstalldhet/

⁴ www.naring.regeringen.se/fragor/jamstalldhet/

The regional growth agreement must now take gender into consideration. Although, it seems very difficult to get social actors to do this when formulating agreements on working hours, work organisation and other aspects of working life.

The development of an equal opportunity index produced by Statistics Sweden is one of the latest advancement within the mainstreaming approach. The index is produced for every local municipality (280) and regional council (24) and consists of 15 variables including *postsecondary education, paid employment, unemployment, incomes, days with parental benefit, and incidence of ill health, gender segregation on the labour market, entrepreneurs, and the composition of the municipal executive committee*. The index is closely related to standard of living. It is not enough to have similar levels among women and men, the unemployment rate for example must also be low, to be rated as an equal county.

The index gives regional growth agreements and local activities a background for discussion and action. Centrally produced gender divided statistics, in different areas, is a prerequisite in order to fulfil gender assessments, follow-ups and implementation. Traditional “male” arenas like industrial policies have no reason for not using statistics produced by Statistics Sweden when they analyse labour market developments.

Furthermore, there is now an act of parliament, which requires all official individual-based statistics to be broken down by gender, with some exceptions.

2.2 Gender budgeting

The budget is a policy statement as it reflects the social and economic priorities of a government and its political commitments to specific policies and programmes. Hence, gender budgeting provides an indicator of government commitment to gender equality. Through a transparent budget process, governments can be held accountable for its commitments to gender equality issues and ensure that public money is raised and spend in a more gender equitable way. In order to study the effects of gender budgeting, the household cannot be regarded as a single unit of analysis. Instead women and men’s situations must be examined differently, which requires gender-disaggregated statistics.

The Swedish government is currently considering how equality-related initiatives can be analysed and reported on as being part of the budget process. Gender budgeting can be seen as part of mainstreaming as a strategy on the central level. In this way, gender equality goals will be specified in the plans and budgets, which will also need procedures for follow ups and reports on outcomes. This will facilitate the evaluation of results and to see whether gender equality policy objectives have been realised. By integrating gender equality into the budget process, generalised wording of gender mainstreaming comes into force through concrete terms and procedures.

The Nordic Council initiated (decision Nordic Council, Ministers of Industry and Finance, June 1, 2001) a project for integrating a gender- and equal opportunities perspective within the government budget process. A Swedish governmental decision was taken in 2001 regarding integrating a gender perspective in the budget process and a project started during the fall of 2001. The project is a co-operation between several ministries in order to try out methods for integrating gender issues. The aim is to strengthen issues of equal opportunities and show how the measures in the budget affect women and men differently.

The city of Gothenburg is one example in Sweden where the budget process is being used as an instrument for the promotion of gender equality.⁵ New indicators were established that better reflected results from a gender perspective and gender specific indicators were introduced. Before the project, little information was gender specific. Gender equality issues were also integrated into each field of activity instead of under a separate heading. In this way, gender equality levels have been made more visible than before, specific goals for each area can be drawn up and evaluated in annual reports. The city's draft budget for 2002 contains gender equality goals and assignments for different fields.

2.3 Gender evaluations or monitoring of policies for/setting of gender targets

Every ministry is responsible for evaluation and gender assessments in its area of responsibility and the Division of Gender Equality under the Minister of Gender Equality Affairs has a special role as co-ordinator and advisor. The division of gender equality acts as the driving force for gender related issues within the government

⁵ *Just Progress! Applying gender mainstreaming in Sweden* (2001), Fritzes. P. 16-17.

offices. The government is reviewing actions taken in different ministries on gender assessment. It scrutinizes the wording of different government documents.

In mid 2001, a hand-book in methods was completed by a working group on the development of gender equality promotion methods, showing different methods for integration or mainstreaming used in business life.⁶ The conclusions made by the working group will provide ground for implementing gender equality issues in decision-making processes within the government.

The Council's recommendation regarding monitoring and assessing the current level of gender segregation in the labour market has resulted in a demand, presented in the NAP 2001, of a report from the Labour Market Board. The report shall present an action program in their policy area. The National Audit Board scrutinises how gender equality is manifested in the government's appropriation directions and the central agencies' reports on gender equality efforts. They found that the goals in the appropriation directives were unclear. The results are to be the basis for further mainstreaming.

The National Mediation Office has been instructed to produce gender specific pay statistics and to analyse development of gender pay differentials.⁷ This has resulted in a co-operation with Statistics Sweden. The Mediation Office provides and Statistics Sweden produces the official statistics. So far, gender specific pay differences are only included in the yearly reports, monthly reports are still gender neutral due to efficiency reasons.

The so-called R-3 method (*Representation, Resources and Realia*) was developed as part of the "JämKom" project. The method has been developed to facilitate evaluation of municipal activities from a gender perspective.⁸ It looks at the distribution of power, the role of gender in establishing structures and organisational solutions, and gender standardisation within different areas of activity.

⁶ See *Just Progress! Applying gender mainstreaming in Sweden* (2001), Fritzes.

⁷ www.naring.regeringen.se/fragor/jamstalldhet/

⁸ *Just Progress! Applying gender mainstreaming in Sweden* (2001), Fritzes.

2.4 Attention to gender issues in the first Employability pillar

The council's recommendation of reducing the tax burden on labour, particularly for those with low take-home pay for work is well under way. The changes are now being implemented. There has been a second part of the tax reform for low and medium income earners, resulting in a reduction of those paying government tax and a green shift in taxes. Although, the consequences of these actions have not been analysed properly with a gender perspective. Instead, tax cuts are regarded as good for part-time working women without further discussion, since there is a much higher share of women than men working part-time (40.5% women and 9.3% men). The goals are to decrease marginal effects and increase incentives for moving from part-time to full-time work. The supply of labour is therefore expected to rise due to the reform.

Initiatives are also taken in order to reduce part-time unemployment since women are over-represented in this group. One initiative to get people to expand their working-hours is the "activity guarantee". The main purpose is to prevent people from going to unemployment benefits from different labour market measures.

The recommendation of adapting benefits and assistance schemes as to increase incentives to take up jobs has resulted in the appointment of a special committee for reviewing financial support to families. A new target of halving the number of people dependent on benefits, have been set. As a consequence, benefits and allowances are being assessed and changed.

Women along with immigrants and occupational disabled, have been prioritised in the "SwIT" training, an education program aimed at meeting the increased demand in the IT area. According to an evaluation of the program, 60 percent of the participants were employed within 6 months after participation in the program.

One of the basic tasks for the National Labour Market Board (AMS) is to end gender division in the employment sector. This work continues and the board has been instructed to show measures taken and strategies for future work in this area.

There is no specific gender dimension in response to the new active ageing guideline or atypical contracts.

2.5 Attention to gender issues in the second Entrepreneurship pillar

The Swedish government states that it wants more women to start and run business of their own. The NAP 2001 stresses the importance of gender aspects in the regional growth agreement. The agreement is a measure in order to enhance regional and local actions for employment. It states that equal opportunities should be brought to the fore in the regional agenda and that the government is stimulating equal opportunities in the business sector by highlighting it as a strategy for profitability and as a competitive asset. Nevertheless, uncertainties remain regarding the implementation of these equal opportunities.

It is difficult to follow women's representation in newly started businesses and thus makes it difficult to provide supportive measures to female entrepreneurship. The possibility of breaking down business statistics by gender and ethnic background is therefore to be evaluated by the Institute for Growth Policy Studies. This could facilitate follow-ups of women's participation in newly started businesses and inspire measures to enhance women's entrepreneurship.

There are plans to promote entrepreneurship among women and immigrants. Accordingly, 42 million SEK is made available over during three-year period 2001-2004 as an incentive to entrepreneurs. Experiences and opportunities of women and other special groups of small entrepreneurs, especially within the service sector, use of financial loan systems are to be evaluated in a report.

There has also been an introduction of yearly conferences with business life on equal opportunity.

2.6 Attention to gender issues in the third adaptability pillar

Gender issues related to flexibility measures are not really discussed in the NAP 2001. Assignments to evaluate labour legislation are also presented in a gender neutral way.

One explanation for the lack of gender perspectives is that this pillar and the process of adaptability cover areas that "belong" to social partners to regulate through collective agreements. They control much of the implementation of the employment strategy, the development of issues of working hours and working environment. It is a

“male” area where equal opportunities have been looked upon as different and irrelevant. It is still a far way to go to get gender integrated in the “normal” work. If the government takes measures in these areas, a gender perspective is rarely included.

One of the characteristic features of Swedish industrial relations has been the exclusion of the state from wage setting. Instead, collective agreements have been the dominant procedure though which changes on work place level has been implemented. Social actors have different traditions and policies. As a result, in the national action plan, different actors are involved. But wage-setting processes are changing form and supervision of wages and inflation has become very tight. Due to EU membership and the EMU convergence criteria on inflation, the relationships between partners on one side and social partners and state on the other, are being affected. This has called for a special mediation office, which is now in place.

Nevertheless, the NAP 2001 states that the knowledge and competence of the work force must be made use of regardless of gender, age, ethnic identity, sexual preference or any disability. According to the social partners, development of skills increases equal opportunities at the workplace. Wage setting and conditions of employment must therefore stimulate continual development of skills among the employees.

In order to come to terms with the increasing number of people, especially women, on long-term sick leave, the government proposes an action programme. The programme is aimed at developing a cohesive investment in improving working conditions and health in working life. Hence, the programme might also result in improved equal opportunities at the work place.

A committee has been appointed by the government in order to evaluate the supply of study paths offered by upper secondary school. The aim is to see whether these correspond to the needs of society and the labour market, and to contribute to reducing social and gender-based recruitment distortions. There are also measures taken within higher education to reduce labour market gender segregation in the long run. Among other things, academic institutions are to report to the government on the measures taken to achieve a more even gender distribution in courses with an uneven distribution, and new goals for increasing the share of women among newly recruited professors are set.

The Labour Market Board continues to dedicate funds (Brytmedel) for equal opportunities projects in order to come to terms with gender segregation on the labour market.

2.7 Development of the fourth equal opportunities pillar

The Swedish Equal Opportunities Act requires employers to take active measures to promote gender equality. There have been some amendments to the Act in regards to desegregation/positive action and pay in order to find new ways of achieving gender equality in working life. Annual revisions of wage and other working conditions have become compulsory. This means that all employers must inspect and analyse wages and other terms of employment for comparable groups of women and men. If unjust wage differences are found, the employer has to make a plan for eliminating these wage gaps between women and men. The plan has to be fulfilled in a three-year time and the employers have to give the union information on all employees' wages. Reversed burden of proof has also been introduced into the Act. It is now the employer, who has to prove that no discrimination by gender has occurred. The Act states also a prohibition against gender discrimination throughout the whole process of employment.

The government continues to stimulate the work of equal opportunities within the business sector. Equal opportunities work is, among other things, highlighted as a strategy for profitability and a competitive asset.

A new initiative from the government in the work towards gender equality is the suggested use of "Equal Opportunities Branding", to make it possible for consumers to make deliberate choices to affect equal opportunities. A committee has been appointed in order to evaluate possibilities of introducing such voluntary branding of products and services.

Changes have been done to the parental benefit scheme in order to reconcile work and family life. There has been a parliamentary decision to extend parental leave by 30 days with 80 percent of the wage, starting January 2002, as well as extending "fathers month" to two months. The parental benefit then totals 480 days. The flexible arrangements in parental leave were increased and the guarantee level rose from SEK

60 to 120 per day in January 2002, which will necessitate a total investment of SEK 200 during the year. In January 2003 the guarantee level will be raised to SEK 150 and SEK 180 per day in 2004. The guarantee level is given to parents with no or low income, or are not eligible for parental insurance. This increase will benefit students and younger parents in particular. Child allowances increased with SEK 100 per month in January 2001, the allowance for large families and the study allowance for young people have been increased correspondingly.

A new benefit level has also been introduced to the parental benefit scheme in order to increase flexibility. It is now possible to take part of the benefit by one eighth or 12.5 percent. This makes it possible for parents to reduce time spent at work by one hour a day and get reimbursed through the parental benefit scheme.

In regards to care provision, government policy is focusing on reforms to facilitate for parents to reconcile professional work and family life. The Parliament has decided to expand pre-school activities. All 4 year olds are to be offered to take part 15 hours per week. It is free of charge and should be voluntarily for the children but compulsory for the municipalities to arrange by 2003. Children with unemployed parents should also have the right to pre-school activity in order to facilitate labour market entry. This right to childcare/preschool was extended by January 2002 to include children with parents on parental leave with siblings. The reform is expected to contribute to increase equal opportunities, since high marginal effects affect women and low-income earners in particular.

Finally, the municipalities who decide to introduce a ceiling on day care fees are to be compensated though benefits from the government. Over SEK 4,000 million is to be invested in this measure.

3. Conclusions

The Swedish government has been adopting the strategy of mainstreaming since the mid-1990s. Gender perspectives should therefore be in the fore when assessing questions affecting single individuals and efforts to achieve gender equality should be integrated into all government ministries and spheres. The development of an equal opportunity index is one of the latest advancement within the mainstreaming approach

and gives background for discussion and action towards work of equality opportunities.

A Swedish governmental decision was also taken in 2001 regarding integrating a gender perspective in the budget process and a project started during the fall of 2001. The project is a co-operation between several ministries in order to try out methods for integrating gender issues into the budget process.

The NAP 2001 has integrated a gender perspective into pillar 1 and in the issues of education and training while it remains more difficult to find measures taken in pillars 2 and 3 in relation to gender. The lack of an explicit gender perspective, as well as mainstreaming, is still very obvious in these pillars.

References

Sweden's Action Plan for Employment, May 2001, Ministry of Industry Employment and Communications, Sweden.

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Statistics Sweden: www.scb.se